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Do You Fit the Bill?



Crucial Skills Maintenance Managers Must Have

by Jeff O'Brien

As a maintenance reliability professional, you have technical training of some kind, basic knowledge of asset management principles, technical knowledge of the equipment you manage and practical experience from years working in the field. These are the hard skills needed to perform your job. However, technical education, training and knowledge will not give you the skills you need to effectively manage a team of maintenance professionals. Along with hard skills, you need a very particular set of soft skills to excel in your role. These skills will lead to greater productivity and efficiency across the maintenance team. More importantly, they will lead to less stress, greater job satisfaction and on-going career achievement for you.

These soft skills are:

1

Excellent Interpersonal Skills

One of the most important life skills is the ability to communicate clearly and concisely with those around you. Employers tend to promote employees with good interpersonal skills as they can communicate effectively and maintain good relations with internal and external customers. Having excellent interpersonal skills will help you maximize the value of each interaction you have to everyone's benefit. Maintenance managers negotiate daily with subordinates, management, suppliers, contractors, machine operators and project managers, so effective and excellent interpersonal skills are crucial to their day-to-day jobs. Others perceive people with good interpersonal skills as calm and assertive. Moreover, listening is not the same as hearing. When you communicate, 45 percent of the time is spent listening, so take time to hear other people's point of view. Good interpersonal skills can be the foundation on which other life skills are built so they must be continually improved and refined.

2

Leadership Skills

To be a successful maintenance manager, you need to demonstrate leadership ability. You must be self-motivated, organized, trustworthy, empathetic and optimistic. It is necessary to have a clear vision of where you want the maintenance team to get to and set a positive example that encourages others to follow. Your motivation and confidence will rub off on the team and create a healthy and productive work environment.

In addition, leadership is about getting the job done properly through others. Delegating work to subordinates is an important function of management, otherwise nothing gets done. It frees up precious time so the manager can focus on high-level, high value activities. Great leaders get things done by inspiring and empowering others to do great work for them. They foster motivation by giving subordinates autonomy to do the job by creating a supportive environment around them and giving recognition when the job is done well. Follow this simple process to ensure the job gets done correctly:

- Set the policies and ground rules, such as the level of quality expected.
- Select the best person for the task, not necessarily the superstar on the team, but the person with the right skills for the job.
- Agree on what needs to get done.
- Agree on timelines to get the job done.
- Provide the resources needed to ensure the team is successful and remove any roadblocks along the way.
- Follow up at regular intervals to ensure everyone is on schedule.
- Recognize employees when the work is done well.

3

Problem-Solving Skills / Critical Thinking

In his 1995 book, *Critical Thinking*, author Barry K. Beyer defines critical thinking as making clear, reasoned judgments. Good critical thinkers can think clearly and rationally, solve problems systematically and make the right decisions quickly. Today's asset managers need to be adept critical thinkers and problem solvers. They have to deal with a multitude of responsibilities, including managing the maintenance budget, supervising a team of technicians, prioritizing work based on need, managing maintenance metrics and staying abreast of the latest technologies. Accordingly, they need to be able to process information quickly and make fast and effective decisions. The most skilled critical thinkers will look at all the evidence, interpret the data, evaluate all the alternatives, prioritize and form a judgment that delivers the most effective solution in the quickest time possible.

4

Ability to Develop People

In any business, one of the biggest challenges is finding, developing and deploying the right talent to achieve business goals. Many organizations are great at hiring and deploying people, but they forget the developing part. Change is inevitable, so your team members need ongoing training and development so they can learn new skills and take on bigger and more complex challenges. Work with subordinates to identify their areas for improvement and provide the training and development they need. Some people may want to further their skills through training and education, while others may simply want more responsibility. Hold regular knowledge transfers so the team can share knowledge, ideas and experiences. Plan your work orders so experienced team members can mentor the less experienced. In addition, if you have well trained, capable people, you will be able to quickly promote from within when more senior positions open up. Identify potential leaders in the group and reward them with promotion opportunities when you can.

Having the ability to develop people is an important skill for a maintenance manager to master because it creates a culture of continuous learning and incessant betterment. Make the long-term career development of your staff one of your top priorities as it leads to a high performing, productive and motivated maintenance team.

5

Time Management Skills

Time management is the process of organizing and planning how much of your time you spend on each activity to provide the greatest value for the organization. As maintenance managers, you are constantly interrupted and pulled in different directions by conflicting demands, so it can be difficult to plan your time. However, you need to avoid running around trying to get everything done in the order they come in. This is inefficient and leads to more stress, missed deadlines and poor quality of work. Don't confuse activity with achievement. Good time management requires a shift in thinking from getting stuff done to achieving results. It's about working smarter, not harder. Spend 15 minutes each morning planning your day, stick to meeting schedules and ensure all meetings end on time. You can use your computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) to help plan your and your maintenance teams' day by prioritizing and scheduling the work. Insist that all work requests are submitted through the guest request portal so your phone is not constantly ringing and you can get things done. You can schedule time in your day to review the work request queue. Reserve the phone for issues that could be critical to the business. The most effective maintenance managers have excellent time management skills and get more done in the same time. It's a valuable skill that can be learned easily and then honed over time.

6

Promote Teamwork and Collaboration

Teamwork is viewed as the most efficient way to get things done in an organization. The results achieved by the entire team are greater than the sum of the results achieved by the individuals. When individuals work together as teams, they can bounce ideas off each other and arrive at the best solution quicker. Teamwork can lead to better decisions, products, or services.¹ In your role as a maintenance supervisor, you need to promote behaviors that lead to effective teamwork. You need to recognize the different strengths in the team and combine them in a way to gain the maximum amount of value and meet or exceed the department's goals. Having the ability to get the most out of the team through teamwork and collaboration is a crucial skill to have and will take you a long way in your career.

8

Ability to Handle Stress

Stress can affect your productivity, emotions, quality of work and mental health. If stress is allowed to build up over time, it can consume you. As a maintenance manager, having the ability to handle stress may not be a skill in the strictest sense, but it can mean the difference between success and failure. Managing stress doesn't mean taking a deep breath and just getting on with it. Rather, it means controlling the things around you that can lead to stress. When you control the controllable, you reduce your chances of suffering from stress. If you possess the aforementioned soft skills, you probably handle very little stress on a day-to-day basis. Having the skill to control stress will keep you in good spirits and positively affect those around you.

If your goal is to lead a team of maintenance engineers, then master these skills and you are sure to succeed. If you are already in a position of management, developing and refining these skills will help you get the most out of your team, help you gain greater respect from company executives and give you more opportunities for career advancement.

Many of these skills intersect, so improving one will have a big impact on others. Some of these skills will come naturally to you, but they all require additional effort to perfect. They will help you create a healthy work environment where employees look forward to coming to work and taking on more responsibility and exciting new challenges.



Jeff O'Brien is a product specialist, CMMS evangelist and industry blogger at Maintenance Assistant™, which develops and delivers maintenance software solutions that are used by thousands of asset-intensive businesses around the world to transform their maintenance operations, eliminate waste and costly downtime, and manage risk. www.maintenanceassistant.com/cmms/

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Adaptability

In today's fast-paced world, you cannot be set in your ways or you will get left behind. As mentioned earlier, change is inevitable. Equipment and systems are getting more complex, health and safety are now the highest priorities, carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions are influencing how goods are manufactured and mobile apps are used for everything. The modern maintenance manager must have the ability to adapt quickly in response to changing circumstances and environments. The most adaptable individuals respond positively when their routine changes. You must be willing to embrace new ideas, new ways of working and new technologies. You must thrive on change and uncertainty.

Reference

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teamwork>



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