Letter about PM

For Joel,
I read your post today in the Maintenance Tips you can use letter, and I am prompted to ask your thoughts on "running to failure." I am in a situation where my staff is not up to speed, I have lost several core individuals recently, I have several new folks, and more PM than they can perform correctly.

I am being advised to limit PM to areas specifically causing down time, while ignoring or performing minimal PM on the rest of the machines, and basically let them run to failure. I do not support this approach, and I am having a difficult time coming up with an argument to support my position, (other than the argument that the concept of letting anything go to failure is not a good solution). Any thoughts? Patrick N.

By Joel Levitt

Patrick,
I share your pain and hear your frustration! What I am about to tell you might not be what you want to hear from me.

I want to recast the conversation from a moral imperative to do PM to one where PM is a business decision. If you listen to maintenance folks as much as I do you hear that PM is something like an article of faith, the moral thing to do. I hear that not doing PM is WRONG.

We are running businesses. If better long term profit was the result of equipment abuse and lack of maintenance then that is what we should be perfecting. We are in a pitched battle for survival and profit not a battle so that our equipment gets the best price at the bankruptcy auction.

You don't mention the nature of your business but look deeply into how your company makes money and see if they can afford more, better or greater maintenance. There is no dishonor in running a breakdown environment. Of course it will be harder on you, but I think you'll agree that that has never stopped a corporation from doing it.

The only argument that will hold water is one based on first economics and second on safety and quality. Is this new approach cheaper (or more costly) when downtime is factored in? Does it negatively impact safety or product quality?

If I wanted to return to more effective PM, I would build case studies that show explicitly how the current method will lead to higher costs, disrupted shipments, decreased safety or reduced

quality. I would collect cost data and production data and build charts proving the point that PM is better, cheaper, and will provide a more robust asset base to serve the customers.

I assume you are having trouble building this case. It could be that the reason why you can't find an argument is because there isn't one! It could be that the old way of PMing everything was wasteful of scarce resources. The real answer is buried in your data.

I would suggest starting digging. BUT if you do not find compelling evidence then it is time to design the best damn system for delivering uptime, reliability quality and safety given your current realities.

Have fun and hopefully I'll see you at IMC in December and we can finish the conversation. Best regards Joel

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