**Transition from fire fighting to proactive maintenance**

How do you transition to proactive maintenance? This is one of the most frequently asked questions by maintenance managers worldwide. Most of them have an existing culture of reactive maintenance and want (in some cases desperately) to become less reactive (or what is called proactive). As mentioned in the PM section, the underlying problem is that wealth has been removed from the machines without maintenance resources being returned. The asset has been allowed to deteriorate. To change to proactive maintenance, two hurdles have to be attacked and overcome.

The first hurdle is that you may not have the resources to go through all the equipment (or even a majority of the equipment) and fix the deterioration to return the asset to ‘like new’ condition. The second hurdle is that your culture, incentive system, and business processes is probably designed to reliably create and support the reactive environment.

Paradoxically the first step to surmounting these obstacles is to discuss the preceding section with your team and discipline yourselves to be better and more intentional about fighting fires and dealing with the reactive environment. This gets at the back door of the culture by building discipline and by improving intentionality. Be sure that the operations folks play key roles in this process. One important part of this is improving your work order data. The importance of keeping accurate and complete data can be sold to the crews as the way to get better at fighting the fires.

The second step is to look at your breakdowns over the last year. Find the most costly or common breakdowns and sort them into some kind of priority order (actually the order itself is not that important). Pull together ad hoc teams to do a (RCA) Root Cause Analysis for one item per team. Work to fix the item permanently or to reduce the probability of occurrence as close to zero as possible. If you succeed, take the opportunity also to upgrade the machine to as close to ‘like new’ as you can.

You can work this way for six months to a year. Resources will be gradually freed up and the environment will start to shift. You will find proactive maintenance ideas coming naturally out of the discussions with the teams. You will find the culture slowly shifting without extra effort. In fact you might just find that the environment is changing and pulling you along! The main step to take explicitly is to look at the business processes and incentives and see how they have to be modified to support a more proactive approach.