Communicating and Dispatching Work Requests -
Are You Being Effective?

Those of you who have known me for a long time know I am a hawk on preventive and predictive maintenance as well as planning and scheduling... all work which is not deemed to be an emergency or reactive work which needs to be completed within 24-48 hours. But let's not forget that even in 'Mikes World', "Stuff Happens!" So depending on your industry and business 10-30% of your weekly work will be reactive or emergency requests and will need to be dispatched to your technicians in a timely and effective method. In the last couple years the most common method of dispatching work is to have a clerk, or sometimes even the customer, directly assign the work to a technician which places it in their queue. This assignment goes to their desktop in the shop or to their smart phone. The technician then decides when and how they will decide to tackle the work. The supervisor is totally out of the decision making process unless they see the assignment and decide to intervene in the process.

Self-directing your own work only works with the best-of-the-best employees who understand the big picture and are self-starters. We would all like to have more of those employees. Most technicians, who are allowed to self-direct their work assignments, struggle with adjusting priorities and tend to take the easy way out and react to the most current work assignment often leaving the last job before it was properly completed. This leads to higher inefficiencies, lower work quality, lower safety performance, lower customer satisfaction, and higher overall costs.

So let's figure out how to make the most inefficient work you will ever perform more effective. There are three (3) key things to consider:

1. **Establish an Equipment and Work Priority System** - Priority Systems, if developed well and used with discipline allows everyone to quickly know what jobs to work on next. This single work management tool can do wonders for all maintenance organizations. It will eliminate or reduce much of the day to day chaos and confusion created by emergency or reactive work. The priority system needs to be developed with your customers input to ensure maintenance and customer expectations and priorities match.

2. **Determine Who Will Control and Assign All Reactive Work** - Work Assignments – there is no question if one person is responsible for assigning all reactive work technicians, the process will be more effective and will run much smoother. Even if the person dispatching has limited maintenance experience the process will still be more effective in the long-run. The dispatching process is best handled by a trained dispatcher, supervisor, foreman or lead technician. Workers only receive new work assignments when they report that they have completed the previous assignment and are ready for the next. Some will say that this will slow the process down but in fact it will speed the process up and improve performance and customer satisfaction. Those of you who are racing fans know on tracks that are more technical, going slower will ultimately allow you to go faster.
3. **Determine the Best Method to Communicate the Requested Work to the Technician** - I don’t get too hung up on actual communication methods as long as it is effective. However there is still no good replacement for the hand-held two-way radio communications. There is nothing available currently that works any better for emergency and reactive work.

**Remember:** There is a reason police, fire, EMS, and yes even racing teams use two-way voice communications. It works! When your house is on fire or you are having chest pains I don’t think you want the dispatcher sending your ambulance an email!

Reactive work will always exist, it will always be more expensive, and it will always cause chaos in your daily life. We can make it a little better and easier to deal with if we implement some of the items mention in this tip.