How to Change a Negative Perception of the Maintenance Organization

One thing that really hurts a maintenance organization’s success and performance is the negative perception it has from its internal and external customers. Many organizations wonder why this happens and often tend to disregard the negative comments and customer satisfaction ratings. They often blame the customer for not understanding their world or the equipment and systems the customers are constantly screwing up. One of the hard lessons I learned many years ago is that any perception of your organization good or bad, no matter what your business type, is deserved and as the old saying goes, is real. So what do you do now? Your customers dislike you, think you are underworked, overpaid, never complete jobs on time, never show up on time, and always have to come back a second time to fix the original problem. It is safe to say you have big problems but how do we fix it?

Well we first have to admit we have a problem and begin to analyze why and how this perception evolve in the first place. How it evolved is probably a very long answer that took many years to nurture and grow. Needless to say it is here and you need to focus on how to turn the perception around and develop a maintenance organization where your customers believe you are part of the solution and not part of the problem. Or in other words, is part of the profit picture for the organization or part of the cost picture.

The first thing to begin to change is the amount and level of communication you have with your customers. All problems are worse when you don’t talk about them with your direct customers. I would suggest you begin a very disciplined weekly communication meeting with your customers. The time and location of the meeting should never change. It must be adhered to without exception.

If you do this consistently you will begin to develop the perception of consistency and responsibility. In others words, you demonstrate the meeting is important and you care about what is on their minds. As a result of these meetings you will begin to commit to performing work on a scheduled basis which aligns with what your customers want and need. As this process grows and matures the perception will change to one of “these maintenance guys really care about what they do and what I need as a customer”. Remember, the communication meetings must be consistent, on time, always attended by key personnel, and follow a written agenda.

The second thing I would do is get my supervisors and lead personnel out of their offices and on the floor or in the field at least 50% of the day. This adds to the communication component mentioned above. Now you have members of your management out in the work environment leading, guiding, and directing the activities and performance of your maintenance personnel. This is critical to show and prove to your customers we really do care about what they need and are thinking…We are really here to serve you!

The last thing I would begin to do is change the culture and performance of your maintenance organization by moving from a ‘reactive’ organization to one that is primarily a ‘proactive’ maintenance team. If your maintenance team is constantly moving from one emergency to the next you are a reactive organization and my slogan for that is… “if it ain’t smoking, it ain’t broken.” The reason this develops,
and has a very negative customer perception, is you are *always* reacting to calls from the customer that something is broken. This culture costs 5-6 times as much as a proactive culture and creates the lowest customer satisfaction ratings because things are always broken and ugly. To transform your organization from the reactive you must develop a robust preventive maintenance program. This may sound like a daunting task but it can actually be developed easily. The key is to begin very simple by developing relatively easy equipment check sheets starting with you most critical pieces of equipment. Just have a technician do a walk by: stop, look, listen, touch, review performance. Nothing too complicated in the beginning just take time to give the asset a little TLC (tender loving care).

One key thing to remember is don’t let perfection stand in the way of progress, do something. There is no such thing as a bad preventive maintenance inspection. There are only better ones.

Communicate; get your management out in the field, and begin to develop a preventive maintenance program and you will be surprised how your perception will begin to make the turn from negative to positive.