Are You a Reactive or Proactive Manager?  
or (Are Your Managers Reactive or Pro-Active?)

As I was preparing to write this month's TOM I was making some notes and bullet points which served as the outline for this month’s article. As I started putting my thoughts on paper I realized that this topic may be one of the most important topics in the facility and equipment maintenance business.

Think about it for a minute; is your life proactive or reactive? I never took the time to think about it in detail myself but it may be the most critical fundamental core leadership beliefs. It is the foundation for all of your other leadership components. In other words, do you look to the future or do you wait for the future to happen and have it surprise you?

Do you manage your personal and work life or does your personal and work life manage you? Many would say the latter is much simpler and easier because you never have to think about what is coming down the train track you just have to react to it when it gets here. The problem with this approach is if you blink it actually may run over you!

If you stop and think about it a little you will see that a reactive life style leads to chaos, chaos leads to confusion, and confusion leads to low efficiencies and quality, low efficiencies and quality lead to higher costs and lower customer satisfaction. This all can lead to tough days at work, night phone calls, weekend work, painful visits to your bosses office and, if you're not careful, ...unemployment.

So as most of you know I always like to help provide a solution after preaching about a problem with maintenance leadership, cultures, and activities. So:

- How do you know if you (and your team) are reactive?
- Is there a way to measure it? And lastly,
- How do we fix it or change the culture?

Most managers are stuck in a reactive culture, but they think it is the norm and don't understand the cost ramifications of always being in a state of chaos. When you work in a reactive fashion your cost to maintain your buildings and equipment will be 4 - 6 times more than if you operate in a more organized and proactive manor. The following phrases will help you define what reactive leadership and maintenance looks like:

- If one of your performance measures is how fast you complete and close work requests
- If you measure how fast you respond to calls
- If your employees say, "our customers expect us to respond right away"
- No weekly meetings exist to discuss past, current, and future work
Everyone has a purchasing credit card
Each maintenance employee decides what to do, how to do it, and when to do it without any discussion or management input
No preventive maintenance program exists
If you, as a leader, never know where your employees are

If you are doing any, or heaven forbid, all of the above you are deeply stuck in the reactive maintenance world and it is costing you a tremendous amount of time, effort, and money.

To get started down the path of changing your culture you will need to accurately measure what "types" of work you are being asked to complete. The best way is to code all completed work into two categories, (1) reactive and (2) proactive. A simple way to define reactive work in the beginning is the amount of work that must be completed in the next two of three days. All other work can be deferred to a later date which will allow for some level of planning and scheduling. This process can be assisted with the addition of a numerical work priority system. Each incoming work request gets a value from 1-10 or even better 1-25. This system will assist you and your customers in deciding which requests get worked on first. At the same time, start having a simple and short meeting each week with your team and possibly some of your customers to discuss completed work, current week's work requests, and work requests or needs for the upcoming weeks.

Just that little bit of communication and priority assignment will go a long way to lower the levels of chaos and confusion.

One more comment, and a few more toes to step on, keep in mind I used to be a maintenance technician and leader of the pack of reactive employees. Many times we settle into the reactive world because it is easier on us as the leader. We don't have to plan, we don't have to schedule, we don't have to communicate we just have to spring into action when the bell rings. So what I am saying is we cause most of our own reactive maintenance problems, not our customers. Learn to say "NO" in a nice way.

Final thought to put on a sign so your customers can see it when they enter the shop.

"Bad Planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part"

See You Next Month!