SURVIVAL CAN REQUIRE TOUGH CHOICES IN YOUR MAINTENANCE STRUCTURE

The title for this month’s tip came from several different directions and areas of the maintenance business. Many organizations from time to time are faced with the painful directive from upper management to reduce maintenance staff and, at the same time, reduce dramatically the amount of money spent to perform the traditional maintenance function. This type of reduction hits all organizations whether you work in the manufacturing world or in the facilities world. In the manufacturing world it can be fairly cut and dry when it comes to downsizing. You simply reduce the head count by whatever percentage the leadership team demands and ultimately the company survives which means you were probably over staffed. Or the manufacturing and production output suffers and the company normally folds. Or the maintenance personal are reinstated and the company survives after suffering severe setbacks in profit.

The situation is a little different if you have a large facility operation with a large campus environment like military bases and large colleges or universities. In a case like this the organization is typically very convoluted with many maintenance and building services organizations performing the same basic maintenance, housekeeping, food service, fleet management, and even landscaping services, on the same piece of property; sometimes within a mile radius of each other. When the cost to maintain these properties begin to climb to the point where action has to be taken or the revenue from the facility side begins to drop something has to change, it may be time for a complete maintenance restructuring. The difficult part about the decisions that will ultimately have to be made could actually make your organization stronger and more efficient in the long run.

One of the first things to begin thinking about is Why do I have so many different groups of employees performing the same tasks in different parts of the campus? Why do I have so many silos? If you haven’t the term silos, it means building a team to perform a task or tasks and then building a silo around the team which will not let anyone out to do other things. And, it also won’t let anyone inside the silo to assist you when you need assistance. This is a very inefficient management practice and very costly to the organization.

A great example of this is colleges and universities. Very often you see one maintenance organization for utilities, landscaping, custodial for office buildings, roads and streets, and sidewalks. At the same time you will see different maintenance and custodial teams for kitchen
services, residencies, and class room spaces. So why you have different groups with the same technological and craft skills working for different management teams which don’t even report up through the same technical organization trees? They typically never communicate to each other and often make repairs in one section of the campus which interferes with a task or operation that one of the other maintenance silos was currently working on or has plans to work on in the near future. I have seen this many times in universities, military basis, and large corporate business campuses.

So when times get bad financially you may be forced to look at what is considered a difficult and unpopular restructuring. Ultimately you may find that the forced restructuring will make the organization more efficient, more cost effective, and the same amount of work completed historically may be completed now with less manpower.

Other unseen benefits can also be the reduction in support equipment like trucks, man lifts, generators, and other portable equipment. And the consolidation of services like training, HR, payroll, and support systems like CMMS products, and call centers.

So when you are faced with some painful decisions don’t panic until you step back and take a hard look at how you are structured and ask yourself some questions just like you would when you are troubleshooting a major failure or outage with a piece of equipment using RCFA (Root Cause Failure analysis). The trick to RCFA is to ask a very simple question five (5) times “Why?” This seems too simple but it works.

1. Why are we organized this way,
2. Why do we have four (4) different maintenance and custodial teams working for different lines of business within a half of a mile from each other,
3. Why,
4. Why.....
5. Why?

Try it some time, you might be amazed at what happens when tough choices are made during the survival process that end up being fantastic in the long run.