Presenting to the “C” Suite

This month’s tip is a little different than most months. It deals with more basic management and leadership skills and technologies instead of the normal maintenance process discussions. It involves the fundamentals and basics of making a presentation to management or in this article the “C” Suite. Just to make sure we are all on the same page we need to define who the “C” Suite people are?

Some of you are chuckling right now, thinking everyone knows who the “C” Suite is! Well this engineer struggled for quite a while trying to understand the code. My good friend Paul Head, who has presented with me on several occasions, used the term in several presentations when I was in the audience. I would go back to my booth or my hotel and ask myself what the H…. is the “C” Suite. Remember I am an engineer and I was always looking for a common sense translation for the term. I never figured it out until I saw it in a related article and the author gave a definition. For those of you who are a little slow like I was, the definition is: “C” Suite is the leadership of an organization at the highest level who occupy the executive floor of your office building. They have titles like:

- CEO – Chief Executive Officer
- COO – Chief Operating Officer
- CFO – Chief Financial Officer
- CIO – Chief Information Officer

You get the drift by now I am sure.

The reason this is a stand-alone topic instead of a general discussion on making presentations is because the “C” Suite gang is special (lots of head nods here I am sure). Special is not necessarily a positive or negative thing, we well just call them “special.” They are typically very intense, very busy, they have many irons in the fire and they don’t have a lot of time for rambling unclear and confusing presentations.

The basic rule of thumb is to keep your presentations as short and concise as possible. All “C” Suite people are different so you need to understand them well and be better prepared to present to them than they are to receive the information.

Below are some basic guidelines when preparing a presentation for the big guys!

1. Know your audience
   a. How much detail are they normally used to or like to have?
   b. Ask your peers what their experience has been in previous presentations.
   c. Figure what turns them on in a business sense of the word.
2. Know your topic
   a. Know your topic like the back of your hand.
   b. Have answers to all of the possible questions, think out of the box.
   c. Anticipate the worse and all of the possible questions.

3. Practice on your peers
   a. Allow them to critique your presentation, be honest with them and they will be honest with you.
   b. If the presentation could affect our careers, practice hard.

4. Have the details of the presentation and back-up data assembled and packaged ready to be handed out if detailed questions stall the presentation.
   a. Don’t hand out the details ahead of the presentation; you will get hung-up in the details without presenting the program.
   b. Control what you want them to hear and see. Only get into the details if required.

5. Keep the presentation as short as possible
   a. 10 to 15 slides, if at all possible.
   b. Short and sweet!
   c. Again you have all of the detailed backup data ready and packaged if needed.

6. Presentation should over the following:
   a. Proposal or problem to be solved
   b. Why we need to do this or change in the first place
   c. The benefits to the organization
   d. Possible adverse consequences
   e. Potential alternatives
   f. Your recommendations
   g. The cost to the organization
   h. And lastly the time table to accomplish your recommendations

Good luck with you presentation and remember the Boy Scout Motto “Be Prepared!”