PART 1: HOW MUCH DETAIL IS IN THE DETAIL

Our goal was to create a topic so we can talk details and how important details are in the maintenance world. All of us have had the lack of details come back and bite us many times in our careers. I know personally my list is pretty long.

I have heard the phrase “the devil is in the details” my whole life and I have tried to look up the origin of this statement. Some say it was from a German Architect and the original phrase was “God is in the details.” But, no one is sure how it became what it is today. One definition I saw for the phrase was “the details of a plan, while seeming insignificant, may contain hidden problems that threaten its overall feasibility.” That’s a lot of words for saying the same thing with the 6 Ps: Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance.

When the definition says hidden problems will threaten the plan, I like to ask the question: Were the problems really hidden or did you not look in the first place? Most of the time, it’s the later, because we never tried to find those hidden problems or details in the first place.

So how much detail is in the details? The simple wise guy answer is: Enough to ensure the job goes smoothly. That’s real helpful I am sure. When I am trying to determine how much detail is enough, I begin by asking myself, what are the consequences of failure? In other words, what will it cost me if I can’t complete the task:

- Properly
- In a timely fashion, and
- Safely

Think of the detail that goes into astronauts performing a spacewalk or a surgeon performing open heart surgery. They go through hundreds of details because the consequences of failure are unacceptable and because it more than likely could result in death.

Just the other day I was installing a new rain gauge in the backyard. The 2X2 post from the old gauge was still there so that was done. The gauge was lying on the back deck so I just needed tools and screws. My shop is 500 ft. from my house so off I go. I got my cordless screw driver, screws (with a couple extra in case I lost one), and the proper bit for the screw heads. I got down to the post with
everything I needed and the rain gauge screw hole pattern was wider than the width of the 2X2 post! Details, Details. So off I go back to the shop for the cordless drill and a bit so I can change the hole pattern to fit the post. The consequences weren’t too bad; a little lost time is all. But think of your $35/hour technician walking or riding around with their partner (maybe another tip of the month, I despise 2 person crews) just to get a drill, screws, or whatever! The good thing in my case is that walking helped me reach my smart watch walking goal for the day!
So a few tips to help get the details right:

- Develop a professional planner position if your organization is large enough
- Make notes before you start a job if you don’t have a planner
- Support a part time planner for the tough or complex tasks and jobs
- Save your notes and task lists for the future
- Develop tasks list for jobs that you repeat on a regular basis like preventive maintenance
- Take lots of pictures
- Or, talk your spouse into buying a golf cart so you can travel faster to retrieve those missing details

“The difference between something good and something great is attention to detail”
Charles R. Swandoll

Next month will be Part 2 which will drill down to the finer points around details and work orders.

See you next month!