PART 2: HOW MUCH DETAIL SHOULD BE ON WORK ORDERS?

Over the years, whether I am working with clients or teaching classes, one of the top questions is how much detail your average work order should include. As I ponder how to answer the question I get hundreds of flash backs through my career of many many maintenance employees, past engineers, and even family members. I ask them to perform a task and after the task is completed (in their mind) I often had to respond, “Well that’s not exactly what I had in mind.” Since I don’t directly manage maintenance employees any more I often use current life experiences to illustrate the problems of not having enough detail in tasks we assign employees and others under our supervision.

For over 35 years I have been the head cook at our local Methodist church men’s group where we cook breakfast for 15 to 25 men breakfast once a month. Some time back we got a new minister and he volunteered to assist me and my team in cooking breakfast on Sunday morning. We all arrived at 7am to begin the cooking process and this gentleman acknowledged he was a good cook and liked to cook pancakes. Perfect! In my mind I am thinking finally someone that doesn’t need to be trained on how to cook breakfast. I set him up with an apron, mixed batter, a griddle already up to temperature, and two different sizes of spatulas. This is looking great, what could go wrong? He picked up the container with the batter and proceeded to cover the entire 14”X24” griddle with pancake batter, it was one giant rectangular pancake! I looked at the griddle, looked at him, looked at my other volunteers who were smiling and look down at their tasks and I said “what is that?” He said, “That is how I cook them at home and when they are done I cut them in to squares.” Those of you who know me pretty well can imagine what my bra in and mouth were going through. I responded well “that’s not how we cook pancakes in Mike’s kitchen; we normally expect them to be round!” He stormed off and we never saw him again in the kitchen to help cook. Turns out he was one of those people who has a hard time dealing with criticism. All I instructed him to do in my kitchen example was to cook pancakes.

In the maintenance world I have often seen work requests that said “broke” in the work requested section and when the technician completes the work they write in the comments section “fixed” which is not much assistance when it comes time to analyze what the causes and effects of the work was. The point here, in a fun way, is how much detail and instruction should you have on work requests and work plans? Besides the description of the work requested there are several other important details we need to identify on our work requests.
Below is a list of other details which should be considered for all work requests:

- Date and time
- Location of the work
- Shift and crew performing the work
- Numerical priority
- Location or asset identifiers
- Craft or trade
- Description of problem or fault codes
- Work type – emergency, PM, project, safety, etc.
- Work status – waiting parts, waiting engineering, waiting down time, (waiting for cooking school!)
- List of parts and supplies used; this should include part numbers if applicable
- Comments describing exactly what was done to correct the problem
- Time to complete the work
- Names of who worked on the work request

How many times have you been disappointed in the results when you thought the expectation were crystal clear in the beginning?

So the answer is always more detail is better and always ensure the detail is enough to guarantee, (not hopefully) but guarantee success. And, that you have the appropriate detail to properly track your work history and the cost of the repairs or construction
Next time you cook pancakes, think of me!

See you next month!