

The Leadership**Impact** Newsletter

Monthly Tips & Insights for Effective Leadership
www.leadershipimpact.com

February 2009

Volume 9, Issue 2

Preventive Maintenance (PM) for Leaders

Preventive Maintenance

(From Wikipedia)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preventive_maintenance

“Preventive maintenance (PM) has the following meanings:

The care and servicing by personnel for the purpose of maintaining equipment and facilities in satisfactory operating condition by providing for systematic inspection, detection, and correction of incipient failures either before they occur or before they develop into major defects.

Maintenance, including tests, measurements, adjustments, and parts replacement, performed specifically to prevent faults from occurring. ...

To make it simple:

• Preventive maintenance is conducted to keep equipment working and/or extend the life of the equipment.

• Corrective maintenance, sometimes called "repair", is conducted to get equipment working again.

The primary goal of maintenance is to avoid or mitigate the consequences of failure of equipment. ...

It is designed to preserve and restore equipment reliability by replacing worn components before they actually fail. Preventive maintenance activities include partial or complete overhauls at specified periods, oil changes, lubrication and so on. ...

The ideal preventive maintenance program would prevent all equipment failure before it occurs.”

Sometimes a good idea remains a good idea years later, even considering changing circumstances and the passage of time. I was reminded of this recently when a colleague talked with me about problems she has been observing recently at many companies. They are cutting back on good management practices, such as executive development, because of the extreme financial pressures they are facing now.

I quoted to her a concept I had first written about in a letter to the editor published in the Harvard Business Review 25 years ago (March/April 1984). I said, *“Although it sounds odd at first, I recommend that companies treat their managers as well as they treat their machines.”* I noted that for capital equipment companies have programs of routine maintenance. In addition, they spend the time, effort, and money necessary to troubleshoot when problems occur. Lack of preventive maintenance results in equipment failures, and the same is true with executive failures.

Here are some warning signs of executive failure due to lack of PM:

- Executives lose their sense of direction.
- Accountability suffers; commitments and deadlines are missed.
- Turf protection increases, and information is hoarded.
- Excuses are offered with increasing frequency.
- Inter-departmental demands escalate, while collaboration shrinks.
- Individual effort increases, but effective output decreases.
- Errors are more frequent, and quality problems grow.
- Hard feelings or personal conflicts surface among the leadership team.
- Decision-making stalls, or decisions get reversed more frequently.
- Employees become frustrated, confused, lose their way, question management, and feel powerless. "Equipment breakdown" trickles down.

If you recognize any of these in your organization, be alert to the implications. Take actions at least comparable to those you would take for a major equipment malfunction. In some cases, that means returning to the fundamentals of leadership you know but find it difficult to implement when financial stresses are great. In other cases, that means you must develop the good practices of leadership (preventive maintenance) that you may have neglected in a robust economy but cannot put off now when stress will uncover any leadership team weakness.

Be careful where you cut. If you consider the payroll costs of the senior management team (which is only a small fraction of the actual total investment), you will see an annual investment comparable to the most expensive pieces of capital equipment a typical organization purchases. Alternatively, if you calculate the lifetime employment costs of a single senior manager, you would immediately recognize selection and development as activities of enormous importance. Note that these figures omit the most significant implications: the costs and benefits of the actions and decisions by individual executives and the leadership team as a whole.

Protect your investment with preventive maintenance. See next page for how.

“The superior doctor prevents sickness; the mediocre doctor attends to impending sickness; the inferior doctor treats actual sickness.”

- Chinese Proverb

For more, see sidebar and next page.

Preventive Maintenance (PM) for Leaders – Continued

I first went into consulting almost 30 years ago. A very experienced and distinguished senior manager in the firm, Dr. David Merrill, interviewed me for the position. When he offered me the job, I thanked him but confessed I was surprised. I was young, and I was green.

I asked him why he thought a CEO would look for advice from a relative kid like me, who had good training and experience as a psychologist, but very little business knowledge then. Dave said, “They don’t need your help with business; they need your help with senior management issues. They have lots of business experts, but the people issues are the ones that perplex and hamper them and that they need to solve. You can help them do that.”

He was right. I worked with CEOs in businesses ranging in size from a few million dollars to Fortune 500 companies with 10’s of thousands of employees. I partnered with them on selection and development, senior management conflict and communications, organizational structure, team building, and planning. When we got the people issues right and when leaders were given straight and honest feedback, good things happened because their talents were able to be used to best effect.

Conversely, when organizations stumble, it is often because their leaders lack interpersonal skills, don’t perform effectively as teams, have difficulty managing conflict and making decisions, don’t align themselves with each other and with the organization’s priorities, and are not held accountable for results.

Therefore, when I work with companies now (now that I am neither young nor green), I begin the same way I did then – with in-depth interviews with each of the members of the senior team. I listen to their individual stories, and I also seek their views on the organization.

This allows me to get a good sense of what the organization looks like from the inside while also offering my perspectives as a knowledgeable outsider.

I usually produce a simple matrix for discussion with the CEO that covers his or her own skills and developmental needs along with the same for each direct report and other key executives. I combine this with a summary of observations on organizational issues, particularly related to mission, strategy, structure, and systems. My

focus is on alignment. Other participants get comparable individual feedback for themselves. Typically, organizational results and implications are also shared with the team as a whole.

This is the starting point for preventive maintenance for leaders. We work together to customize learning and other developmental opportunities for each executive and for the team as a whole. In addition, the process lends itself to creating trust between each executive and me.

That opens the doors to candid dialogues around personal and organizational aspirations, concerns, and plans. These conversations allow executives to try out ideas, reflect on their own views of successes and failures, and get feedback from a knowledgeable but confidential partner.

A natural consequence of this is the joint consideration of how to work better with specific colleagues where differences in style or perspective have created barriers or conflicts in the past. Team building can take place in group meetings and retreats, but it often occurs best by modifying individual behaviors and attitudes to ones that convey greater interest and respect.

Preventive maintenance for management is about measuring performance, aligning vision and behavior, clarifying roles and accountability, improving decision-making, building relationships, and increasing self-awareness and insight into others. It is not just a feel-good exercise. It is an important way to protect your investment and get better results even when times are hard. It helps prevent derailment.

“There is little consensus in the psychological literature regarding the characteristics of good managers. In contrast, however, the psychological research on bad managers does converge. Across studies with different methodologies and in different organizations and national cultures, and across organizational level, the data show that failed managers have bad judgment, can’t build teams, have troubled relationships, and can’t manage themselves or learn from their mistakes.”
– Joyce Hogan, Robert Hogan, and Robert Kaiser “Management Derailment”

“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime.”

– Babe Ruth

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