



Not Enough People DEFINE WORK ORDER PRIORITY SYSTEM

This is the fourth follow-up article to July's 2004 article, "Not Enough People". The first three "forces" discussed in these articles representing a battle plan against the self-fulfilling prophesy of "Not Enough People" were (1) to educate your maintenance/operations staff and skilled crafts about the practices and benefits of Reliability Excellence, (2) to establish the appropriate performance metrics in order to ensure that you are focusing your efforts as a change agent, (3) to IMMEDIATELY reduce a percentage of your existing emergency work orders by clearly defining the criteria for an emergency work order and applying the discipline to break the schedule when ONLY 'true' emergencies occur.

If you have applied these three 'forces' you should have already begun to chip away at the level of firefighting required within your organization, thereby providing your organization with some additional resources. Applying these resources to planned and/or proactive activities will begin to reduce the inefficiency effects of reactive maintenance work. For most organizations, this is the single most destructive 'force' acting on your labor efficiency since it forces you into what is often called 'planning on the run'. And 'planning on the run' results in not only the less efficient use of resources, but also a higher risk of a safety or environmental incident. This month's article addresses another 'force' that is available to assist in the battle against 'needing more people'. An often-overlooked 'force' in the battle to break the spiraling chain of reactive work is proper prioritization of your work orders.

Most maintenance departments employ a simple Priority 1,2, 3, etc. or A, B, C, etc. criteria with the highest level requiring action within 24 hours, the 2nd highest requiring work within 3 days or a week, and the 3rd highest criteria requiring work within a week or several weeks and so forth. Some use special priorities for shutdown work or safety work. What you use as your priority code or time reference is not as important as making sure that everyone is using those codes appropriately. You must define your priority system and the criteria for each priority letter or number used, and then insist upon proper use of these criteria. Allowing the use of safety to inaccurately drive work to the top of the priority list or allowing the all too frequent production supervisor's desire to assign "every work order in my area of responsibility" at the highest priority level is not acceptable!

If some personnel follow the priorities while others play games with these codes you CANNOT ensure that your limited resources are almost always applied to the most important work on a daily, weekly, monthly, or even annual basis. Some also use a RIME index, which includes equipment criticality to farther enhance your capability to "zero in" on the work with the "biggest bang for the buck". The purpose of this article can be accomplished without a detailed RIME index discussion, which will be discussed in a later article.

Once again this “force” does not come from RCM, RCFA, or PM/PdM activities. Instead it is created by simply establishing the appropriate criteria for your prioritization system AND by having the discipline to follow these priorities. And just like proper use of EWOs, this force will not require months before you reap the benefits. After all, when work orders are turned in with inaccurate priority codes or the infamous “safety” work order status is incorrectly used you are faced with the often-daunting task of sorting through hundreds of Priority 1 or A work orders. How do you know which one to do first?

You know by making sure that there is a common goal and purpose driven into the culture of the organization so that “silo maintenance” mentalities don’t destroy your ability to plan and schedule TRUE high priority work FIRST. Because when you perform work that wasn’t actually the highest priority work, even if it was planned, you have used your resources ineffectively. And even worse you may miss the opportunity to complete a TRUE Priority 1 or A job before it becomes an EWO and potentially causes you equipment downtime, reduced OEE, or increased labor and material costs. And since it is not uncommon for Priority 1 or A work orders to become EWOs, the improper use of priority codes can have a significant impact on your labor efficiency and your “need for more people”.

Therefore, it is extremely important that everyone in the organization understands the definitions for each level in your priority code system. And just as importantly, everyone in the organization MUST honor these definitions so that abuses do not occur. It is difficult for some in operations to “get it”, but the abuse of priority codes will result in the WRONG work being performed FIRST. This can also result in LESS work being performed at the end of the day, week, month, and year just as the inappropriate use of EWO does. And if the wrong work is performed first, then some of the work that should be performed first will not get done AT ALL!

So it is in everyone’s interest to follow the priority codes and to use specific requirements that have to be satisfied when applying the appropriate code. Some like to develop a simple decision tree to make that an easy “visual” decision. Others simply document the criteria and post it for everyone to review on a daily basis. Either way, these criteria usually involve an objective analysis regarding the true need for the work requested. If you want to continue chipping away at the problem of “not enough people”, define your priority system criteria within the realities of your business and enforce the proper behavior of using the correct codes. This WILL continue leading your organization toward a more PROACTIVE STATE!

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***Please visit our website www.LCE.com and click on Maintenance Excellence News Archives in order to view the ‘Not Enough People’ series since July.