

What do I mean by Maintenance-Centric ?

Let's start with 3 words; Centric, Maintenance and Focus

The definition of **CENTRIC**: in or at the center; central. We are forming an opinion or evaluation originating from a specified (centric) viewpoint.

The definition of **MAINTENANCE**: the process of maintaining or preserving someone or something. In our case, most of our time is spent doing maintenance of our machinery

The definition of **FOCUS**: the center of interest or activity, pay particular attention to. As a provider of automation equipment, there are certain areas we must focus upon.

When we use these 3 words together, that statement defines our approach to everything we do.

The USA represents about 5% of the world's population. Our American lifestyle includes the consumption of about 25% of the world's resources. Some refer to this as a "throw away" lifestyle. But is that who we really are? It has never been a part of my life or anyone I know. But I do see a lot of trash blowing around the streets here in California.

One group has never adopted this "throw away culture". They are the Maintenance Department. The maintenance staffer should never be one to throw away anything carelessly. In fact our entire existence (yes I am a part of this group) in the workforce is because of our ability to salvage production from machinery in spite of the machine itself.

What do I mean by that? If you are a maintenance staffer, you already know. But for the rest of you, I will explain with an example I have used many times before. It goes something like this:

You are on duty as the resident maintenance person. An employee calls you and tells you the machine is not working. You grab your tools and determine a motor contactor has failed. The coil is bad. You do not have another one. It is an Italian contactor and they are asleep right now. You are thinking, "Today I can order it, when they wake up, they will process my order. In 2 days they will tell me they can ship one. In 5 days I might have one. This is not good."

OK, what are my alternatives? I have an old contactor, but it is burned up. Maybe the coil is good. You teach yourself how to take it apart very carefully. You retrieve the coil from the old one and put it in the new one. You test it and it works. You install it and your boss is really happy. **YOU are the man!**

Did you ever ask yourself why you kept that piece of junk? The reason is simple and it has a word to describe it although you will not find that word in the Merriam Webster. Yet we have been doing it for thousands of years.

To some degree, all of us are "Maintenance-Centric". My definition of Maintenance-Centric: Maintaining and preserving someone or something is the central focus. But being maintenance-centric has its problems.

Consequences of being Maintenance-Centric:

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- You are at risk of being called a hoarder. The Mayo clinic says it is a disease
- You are at risk of divorce because your garage is full of “Junk” as your wife says
- Your home will have a “Junk Drawer” in the kitchen or cluttered shelves in the garage or your shop.
- Your home or workplace will grow continuously because you will not throw things away
- You risk being viewed as a pessimist with all those spare parts. People ask “Why?”

Benefits of being Maintenance-Centric:

- As I have proven above, you will quickly get a reputation as “The Man”
- Employers will fight one another to make you their employee
- Your “Junk Drawer” may quite possibly save the world some day
- If your wife divorces you, the next one will “love how you can do man stuff”.
- You are very self-confident and have done everything in your power to prepare for any complex problem. You are an Optimist! You are a Leader.

So there are Pros and Cons for being maintenance-centric. I have found these people are not only confident; they are interesting and fun to be around. They have many friends and a messy (at least to non-believers) space.

What are some examples of being maintenance-centric?

- You keep many items around that seem like they are old and useless but in reality could be used to solve a problem in the future
- You prefer to purchase items that have spare parts readily available
- You have tools and oil cans and you keep all of your equipment manuals
- When you build something, you use the best parts you can afford. Parts that make sense.
- You read constantly about new technology, techniques and tips on maintenance
- Metaphorically speaking, you do not start painting from the edges and work your way to the center. You start at the center so you are not trapped by your own paint job.

At my company, we are maintenance-centric. Everything we do must revolve around that central focus. Are we prepared when something goes wrong? It did go wrong just this week.

Many months ago a customer’s machine broke down. While I was repairing it, I noticed an European part that is hard to find around here. I decided to buy several of them. On Friday of last week, I needed one of those parts and I had it in stock. I paid around \$5.00 for it. But it took me a week to get it last year. I had the part because I am maintenance-centric.

I regularly build machines for other people. There is a constant ringing of the phone and a line of sales guys in here to show me what I should be using. In the end, I pick the parts that are in stock. Machines break and you all know it. Being maintenance-centric means I buy parts and motors from the local stocking company who happens to be in Indiana or closer. I do not buy motors from Europe or Asia no matter how much better they seem to be.

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If I save \$100 because I bought a fancy imported part, I know I can lose thousands of dollars when I wait for that part to arrive. That never makes sense to someone who is maintenance-centric. The power of the ideology is in the pure common sense of the actions. I know many great pieces of equipment come from Europe and Asia. But today's lean manufacturing environment relies on cost saving ideas. If I can afford to be down for 24 hours, I can have it shipped overnight. That is far less expensive than the alternative of stocking expensive spare parts you may never use.

Another example of being maintenance-centric occurred when a customer's machine broke down because a motor failed. They found someone to rewind it. But there was a subtle difference in the European design of the motor. When the American motor shop rewound the motor, it became violently hot. The motor never pulled high amperage but the rotor became blazing hot.

I later found out the stator coil pattern was wrong when the motor shop rewound the motor. They assumed the motor was like any other but it was not. We all know better now and as a company, this event sticks out in my mind because it cost my customer thousands of dollars in lost productivity. Now my customer has a spare motor in stock which is the expensive consequences of purchasing European equipment and installing it in America.

Which part of that event was maintenance-centric? Buying a spare motor for thousands of dollars? When they bought the machine was that motor on the list of spare parts? It was not. Is 60hz power in America better than 50hz European electricity on a motor like that (dual voltage and Hz and an odd metric output shaft)? A maintenance-centric approach to the purchase of this machine would have identified all these problems before anything happened.

In conclusion, being maintenance-centric is a lot of things. It can be as simple as keeping a supply of extended grease-zerk fittings or saving batteries that are not quite dead. It can be as complex as identifying hard to get motors and having a failure plan for every single part on a machine.

But being maintenance-centric is really just about thinking ahead. I interact with many of my customer's maintenance staff and the number one problem I see in today's maintenance departments is the lack of foresight or in other words, not being maintenance-centric. In most cases, if they were, I would not be there. These guys have the skills but are not clear on how to create a maintenance-centric system for themselves.

I don't know exactly how to solve this dilemma. Apprentice programs are a great way to train people but they are in short supply and low in relevant content. I think it really requires a change in the attitude of the people who train the next generation of maintenance staff. We must make them realize they are already maintenance-centric and show them what that means. And we must hope the training turns on that special switch leading to superior work results.