



Five career building strategies plant managers should follow

Azima DLI

Career development is about continuously improving your skill set and evolving your leadership philosophy. Plant managers, seasoned staff and new maintenance personnel must work collectively to build a consistently competitive and effective program. These five strategies will help maintenance professionals to successfully further their careers.

Avoid the 'check box' mentality

Plant programs can be extremely complex and require a wide range of personnel to achieve optimum uptime. Oftentimes, this can result in executives handing down a punch list of "must-have" capabilities to various departments. Plant managers often devote resources to familiar programs while making minimal investments in updated but unknown technologies. However, lower-grade or outdated tools simply cannot detect problems as quickly as updated, quality solutions, causing critical maintenance shortfalls.

Rather than supporting a "check box" mentality, view punch lists as opportunities to improve your work processes. Delivering value with new or unfamiliar technologies not only provides significant benefits to your department but allows plant employees an opportunity to justify recommendations to upper management. This equates to an easy way to be noticed — a key step to career advancement.

Teach your employees to fish

Busy plant managers often forego training junior employees in favor of swift task completion. This is shortsighted, as junior staff never expand their skill sets, as plant managers assign their time to low-level tasks. Smart plant managers think about the career benefits of developing quality talent for their company.

Work diligently with younger employees so they not only understand how to complete a task but also why they are doing it. In turn, junior staff will make better, more informed decisions when senior managers are unavailable.

Committing to staff training also contributes to a greater variety of on-site skills. It is not uncommon for plants to employ individuals with a single expertise area. But what if your vibration expert is honeymooning? What if your oil analysis professional was in an accident and can't come in for months? Putting your mainte-

nance eggs in one basket rarely works in the long run.

Transparency is your friend, not the enemy

Cloud computing is fundamentally changing the way plants are run. Newly transparent operations offering real-time maintenance information are easily accessible by upper management. Executives now have a clear view into the efficacy of a plant's maintenance department and can compare its performance to similar programs in other locations.

This new, inevitable business model is actually an excellent opportunity for professional differentiation. Transparency breeds a true meritocracy. Plant managers are empowered to prove the value of their department — and therefore their leadership — to the company's executive team. Rather than viewing transparency as "big brother" oversight, consider the greater rewards when the executive team has proof of your staff's performance.

As with any career, sharing best practices, properly training junior staff and delivering great results are surefire stepping stones to plant managers' career success. Those confident and committed to staff development will quickly ascend the corporate ladder.

Find your mentor

One of the best career decisions for any professional is to find a mentor to collaborate with and learn from. Though it's easy to feel overtaken just staying ahead of day-to-day requirements, it is imperative we never stop seeking out new and better ways of working. It is easy to push new staff to do what has always been done and, unquestionably, legacy knowledge is invaluable. To better your plant programs, junior staff should be encouraged to expand upon lessons and advice of their mentors by investigating and offering suggestions for new technology, techniques and initiatives.

Play well with others

Finally, it may seem like a no-brainer, but approach each day with open ears, humility and willingness to help others. Too often, people succumb to fear or jealousy to try and "protect" themselves or their jobs and end up sabotaging both.

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