# Maintain to Improve

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Continuous improvement begins with understanding and maintaining the capabilities of what we have.

Deciding what to do as a business manager is a high-risk, low-reward activity. We lack certainty about the future, and our future needs, we are faced with ambiguity at every turn, and the penalties for a poor decision can be substantial or even career-ending. "Maintain to improve" is an idea to help you maintain the foundation of your business while you continuously improve despite the lack of certainty about the challenges you face.
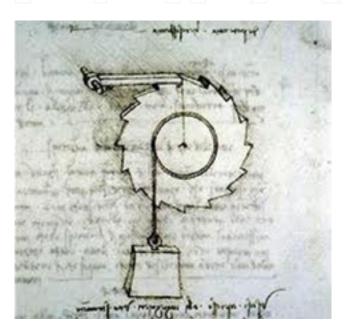
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Continuous improvement is incorporated into all of our companies' mission or vision statements, explicitly, or implicitly. The idea of improvement is cultural, progress is the American dream. So how can shifting gears in our shop to "maintain" instead of "improve" be appropriate or recommended? Our job as managers is to help our companies "intelligently manage risk." In an abundance of risk, uncertainty and volatility, should we be out there thrashing and kicking? Or should we have a plan to marshal our resources, pick our spots, and in the end say, "do no harm?"



**Now is the time to maintain what you have.** Intelligently managing risk doesn't necessarily mean taking risks. It can also mean minimizing your losses, loss of capability, capacity or talent for example. How can you improve if you are declining in capabilities or capacity? Or if you are losing talent?

Maintaining just might be the best approach to the uncertainty and volatility we face today. Here are some ideas for maintaining capability:

**Document what you have.** Yes, you know that you have X number of machines and X number of accessories and employees and … and … but how does your company use that information? How many spindles are turning right now? This moment? How many should be? Why aren't they? It is one thing to know intellectually what you have. It is quite another to deploy that knowledge to assure greatest returns. What is your capacity? What is your capability? Are you running jobs requiring that? How is your equipment being utilized? How do you know?

**Assess and address performance to nameplate and records.** Each machine, each employee was brought on board based on a stated capability or capacity. At what percentage of that capacity or capability are these performing now? If you are not using your people and

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

## Maintain to Improve

process equipment at their highest and best use, you are losing, not maintaining, your shop's capacity. Are you running the right jobs on the right machines? Do you have the right people in the right jobs? Why or why not? Highest and best use of your assets, whether equipment, human or capital, is the optimum way to maximize your return. How many of your machines are running below 50 percent of their capacity or capability? Why? Now is the perfect time to address these deficiencies.

**Train to maintain.** In the military, training is constant. Because memory can fade, skills can become unpracticed and people can become over-confident. "Practice makes perfect," my drum teacher used to say. Our customers get "perfect" from ordinary suppliers these days so practice, and its industrial counterpart "training," are essential to maintain the skills and performance of our valued team members.

**Maintain to improve.** Frankly, many of us have taken for granted a lot of the things we ought to have been actively maintaining. Making an effort to maintain is therefore the first step in our continuous-improvement journey. Improvement means building on a solid foundation. Maintaining that foundation is the first step.

Maintaining requires little additional capital and improves the yield of your invested capital. Maintaining by training assures the highest and best use of the human talent in your organization. We may not see clearly what lies ahead, but we can have a solid understanding of what we currently have if we make the effort. Why not maintain to improve our commercial standing and ability to say "Yes!" when the next inquiry comes along? Maintain is to improvement like the pawl is to a ratchet, it prevents us from going backwards.

## COME VISIT!

Columbus, OH

PMPA's booth, #1230, at the Precision Machining Technology Show.
April 16-18, 2013

# More Than a "Band-Aid" Approach

Brought to you from Federated Insurance

An effective first aid program is good business. If an employee or a customer is injured on the job... are your employees properly trained to respond to a medical emergency? Are you?

Besides helping fulfill OSHA requirements, an effective first aid program can help reduce workers' compensation costs by:

- Minimizing employee lost work time.
- Improving safety-awareness of employees, especially those with first aid training.
- Reducing possible lawsuits alleging failure to properly respond to an emergency.

Setting up a first aid program is easy to do! Most first aid programs include:

- **Formal first aid training.** Typically available through your local ambulance or EMT groups, local fire departments, community colleges and the American Red Cross.
- **Written procedures.** Your local physician can often provide steps for administering basic first aid.
- **Adequate facilities.** Maintain a centrally located room or area containing first aid supplies.
- **Proper records.** Include instructions on properly recording injuries to identify causes or trends so preventive steps can be taken.
- **Effective communication.** All employees should be aware of your commitment and understand how and where first aid is available.

Encourage your employees to participate in a first aid program and update your supplies and equipment if needed. An effective first aid program is good business!