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MARCH 2025

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THOMAS WILK
From the Editor

TARIFFS AND CHANGE

It is early February as I write this, with the first weeks of the second Trump administration under way, and change is in the air.

The new administration inherits an economy that is firing on many cylinders. The United States added 256,000 jobs in December, surprising many analysts and pushing an already low unemployment rate a bit lower to 4.1%. Combined with an inflation rate of 2.9%, this is essentially the post-COVID "soft landing" scenario that was the goal of the Biden administration.

However, this publication is focused primarily on the U.S. manufacturing sector, which has not experienced the same gains as other sectors. Manufacturing has lost jobs in four of the last five months, ending the year down 87,000 jobs. As NBC News observed, despite the infusion of cash made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act, the U.S. manufacturing sector is essentially the same size it was (12.9 million workers) at the outset of the COVID pandemic.

Now changes in economic policy by the second Trump administration are taking shape. In the manufacturing sector all eyes are on the scope and type of tariffs that were central to Donald Trump's campaign platform. The first of these are planned 25% tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico (although implementation of both are currently delayed) and an additional 10% tariff just implemented on imports from China.

It's too soon to say to what degree Trump's tariffs are a bargaining position designed to extract other policy concessions. But manufacturers are not waiting to plan out their 2025 supply chain strategies. In December, Endeavor Business Intelligence polled 100 industry professionals to assess how vertical market leaders are preparing for potential changes in U.S. economic policy, with a focus on possible changes in tariffs.

Nearly half of respondents are bracing for significant operational cost increases, with 22% of respondents expecting increases above 20%, and almost 70% of respondents said they expect to quickly implement significant strategic adjustments. Manufacturers still seem cautious about growing production in the U.S., as 71% of respondents said they would implement price adjustment strategies, but only 45% would explore domestic manufacturing or sourcing alternatives.

You can read the full report at *https://intelligence.endeavorb2b.com/pulse-report-business-implications-of-tariff-changes* to get a sense of where your company falls in relation to others. Δ

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JOE KUHN
Leadership in Action

HOW 'TIME SPAN OF CONTROL' REDUCES EMERGENCY WORK

Over the last 20 years there has been a massive increase in the real-time accessibility of key performance indicators (KPIs). Production rates, unplanned downtime, and quality performance can instantaneously appear on everyone's smart phone dashboard. Further, the metric is highlighted red or green, depending on missing or meeting the standard. This is accessible to everyone, I mean the production worker, the mechanic, the plant manager, vice president, and CEO.

The same is true for reliability and maintenance metrics. With just a few clicks, everyone can know downtime percentages, preventative maintenance compliance, and percent planned work, to name just a few. Sounds great, right? It can be, but most of the time I believe a plant's performance suffers greatly from this free flowing of information. I know you're thinking, "What? You need to get into the 21st century, Joe." Before you decide, let's see how this plays out on the shop floor.

THE PROBLEM

Everyone having access to real-time information means everyone now has the nudge, expectation, and right to step in to give advice, share experiences, coach, and ask for an update every four hours. Additionally, no manager wants to say, "I don't know," to their boss when asked about a metric. As a result, the crew leader is being "helped" by three or four management layers in the organization.

For a mental image, think of one man with a shovel digging a hole while five others tell him what he is doing wrong. The crew leader that knows the problem intimately, must respond and inform up the organization taking him off value-add actions and problem solving. Often the crew leader will hesitate to attempt to fix a problem on his own without top management buy-in to prevent being second guessed and dealing with harsh judgment when a solution did not work. It is better the top manager to own the solution than take personal risk. Consequently, time, ownership, people development, and money are lost.

Another major influence is the fact that many managers greatly enjoyed and excelled at problem solving and the "hands on" work of past job assignments. Presently, they are trapped in meetings and under piles of paperwork. The chance to get their hands dirty and "make things happen" on the shop floor is very enticing and rewarding. It is also a chance to share "war stories" from the past.

The result is worse than just handicapping the organization's ability to solve imminent problems itself; perhaps more damaging is the fact that higher levels of management are distracted from their accountabilities. Question: If everyone is focused on the emergency of today, who is working on improvements in the next 30 days, six months, or two years? Unplanned work draws in managers, engineers, technicians, planners, and technicians like moths to a flame. Consequently, business results and KPIs continue to get worse, the organization is discouraged, and top management increases its already stifling oversight.

THE SOLUTION: TIME SPAN OF CONTROL DISCIPLINE

This is a new topic for most of you. Think of time span as the hours, days, weeks, months, and years in which employees are accountable to drive results. Examples:

- **Crew Leader: accountable for this shift, this week, and this month's performance.**
- **Production Manager: accountable for this month, this quarter, and this year's results.**
- **Plant Manager: accountable for this quarter, this year, and the next five year's results.**
- **Vice-President: accountable for this year and the next five years and beyond results.**

Note the overlap in accountability of each group. I recommend each layer in

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the organization employ the 80/20 rule for their time: 80% in your time span of control, and 20% auditing the other time zones lower in the organization. I said "auditing" not "doing the work of others." Auditing will often lead to training and development opportunities. Leaders must trust their team members to make the best decisions in their time span of control.

Another linked change I employed with great results is to make it acceptable to say, "I don't know," when a request comes in for information outside one's time span of control. Personal case study: My boss Ed called me one afternoon asking why the hot mill has been down for two hours. I replied, "I don't know." He was stunned. The phone was silent for an awkward 10 seconds. Ed then asked, "Well, don't you think you should?" I replied, "No, I trust my production crew leader, maintenance crew leader, production manager, maintenance manager, and process engineer to do their jobs. If they need me, they will call. I would just get in their way." Ed went silent again obviously thinking about my comments. He then stated, "You are right Joe. Thank you. I need you to help me with this way of thinking. It is not natural for me." This event is exactly how cultures change – one experience at a time.

By letting everyone do their job, great wastes and inefficiencies are eliminated – at zero cost! At the same time, the future becomes more secure and profitable. It is tempting to say that a top manager can solve a problem faster than a junior crew leader; perhaps. But at what opportunity costs? Did the crew leader get a chance to own the problem and learn from failure? What long-term improvements have been delayed or lost due to the entire management structure overseeing today's emergency?

WHAT CAN YOU DO ON MONDAY?

1. Introduce to your management team the concept of time span of control. This could be as simple as sharing this article. 2. Ask for a 30-day experiment using the concept of time span of control. This must be agreed upon from all levels of the organization. 3. Challenge the plant manager to conduct a 30-day experiment where it is okay in your organization to say, "I don't know," when questioned about performance outside their time span of control. Δ

DOC PALMER

Palmer's Planning Corner

WHAT IS A PLANNER WORTH DOLLAR-WISE?

We ought to know the value of planning before we create a planning program. We must not simply fill a planning position with some vague idea that "planning is a best practice." Only then can we imagine how to fill that position.

Let's look at the value dollar-wise today. We will consider that a planner helps make an existing workforce more productive in order to do more proactive maintenance tasks. We will look at our existing labor cost, how much planning could increase our labor productivity, and the value of that extra productivity itself.

Let's look first at our labor cost. ZipRecruiter says that the United States national average annual salary for a journeyman mechanic is $62,671 ($30.13 per hour). And Neo Huang provides a web labor calculator with an example using 50% of the base labor rate to create a "loaded labor rate." Huang uses 30% for benefits that "typically include health insurance, retirement contributions, paid time off, and other employee perks." Huang uses 20% for overhead that "includes indirect costs such as administrative expenses, utilities, and rent that support the employee's work but are not directly tied to their hourly rate."

Thus, our loaded rate for the journeyman mechanic would be $94,000 per year ($45 per hour). For a workforce of 20 persons, our annual labor cost would be $1,880,000. We have to use a loaded labor rate to know what we are really paying for an hour of maintenance labor, not just what we pay the mechanic. Your accounting department can tell you what the loaded labor rate is at your company. (A rate of $30 per hour straight, $45 loaded, seems really low compared to some heavy industries I have seen.)

Let's consider next that planning (with scheduling) boosts wrench time. Wrench time is that portion of available shift time the mechanic spends on "direct work." Visualize turning a wrench. "Indirect work" includes necessary activities such as travel, receiving assignments, gathering parts and tools, and taking breaks, all part of the workday. Typical average wrench time for a maintenance force is 35%. Proper planning and scheduling boost that wrench time to 55%. Other things aside, moving from 35% to 55% wrench time is a 57% improvement (55/35=1.57) and translates to a 20-person workforce completing as many work orders as a 31-person workforce (20 × 1.57 = 31). The planning program has provided $1 million of extra labor for free (11 persons × $94,000/yr).

And better yet, the economic impact is ten times the extra labor cost. Our financial gain does not stop with the labor – all of the extra 11 persons focus on proactive work to keep things from breaking. Around the world, management generally does not replace attrition until breakdowns get out of control. The resulting 20-person workforce is "just the right size" (visualize Goldilocks and the Three Bears) to keep up with the breakdowns. So, by definition, any extra labor is free to take care of the little drips and activities to head off breakdowns in the first place.

Such work to head off reactive work is "proactive" work, and the industry 1:10 rule means that every $1 spent on proactive work is worth $10 on our bottom line. Every extra $1 we spend properly lubricating a bearing saves $10 that we would have had to spend replacing the bearing, collateral damage, and loss of product. Thus, the extra $1 million of labor gained by making our 20-person workforce as productive as 31 persons gives us a gain of $10 million on our bottom line from the extra proactive work we complete.

Let's do a bit of sensitivity analysis for state, wrench time, and industry. ZipRecruiter says average mechanic salary in the top state, Washington, is $70, 981, 13% higher than the national average. And the lowest state, Florida, pays only an average of $46,834, 25% less than the national average. Depending on state, our bottom-line gain might be between $11.3 million

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> A planner properly planning helps deliver a company extra profit of $5 million for ten mechanics, $10 million for twenty mechanics, and $15 million for thirty mechanics. And yet the benefits do not stop with the company profits.

and $7.5 million. And instead of 55% wrench time, let's consider we only get to 45%, which would be a 29% improvement in productivity (45/35 = 1.29). The wrench time bump is halved (29%/57%), so instead of a $10 million boost to our bottom line, we only get $5 million (or $5.6 million in Washington and $3.7 million in Florida).

Finally note, again, that these state averages are for all industries and work environments. Your accounting department can tell you what the loaded labor rate is at your company for craftspersons. Nonetheless, we see proper planning and scheduling programs typically delivering 55% wrench time, and we easily expect a gain in the neighborhood of $10 million for a 20-person workforce. Let's say for every ten mechanics, we gain $5 million in bottom line profits.

What is the proper ratio of planners to crafts? Very generally, we say that one planner can plan for 20 to 30 craftspersons, but it does depend on other factors such as geographical spread and multi-craft crew composition. A planner properly planning helps deliver a company extra profit of $5 million for ten mechanics, $10 million for twenty mechanics, and $15 million for thirty mechanics.

And yet the benefits do not stop with the company profits. Planners tremendously help us achieve better plant safety. Planners facilitate the execution of more proactive work, which reduces the incidence of reactive work. Reactive by its nature is dangerous. The reactive work might not be able to wait until daylight or calm weather. The reactive work is frequently unplanned and involves more guess work and using sub-optimum parts or tools. A proper planning program significantly improves plant safety.

Understand the great value of planning for your workforce. Spend the time to craft a great program with a great planner. Don't settle for good. Be great! Δ

JEFF SHIVER

From the Plant Floor

ART & OBSERVATION ON THE PLANT FLOOR

When you walk the plant floor, can you truly see what's occurring around you just by looking?

I recently read about Harvard Art History professor Jennifer L. Roberts's required paper on a single artwork of her student's choosing. The students must physically visit the artwork in a museum and spend three hours observing it before a single paragraph can be written. The professor herself did this with John Singleton Copley's painting, Boy with a Squirrel. She took 9 minutes to see that the shape of the boy's ear matched the ruff of the squirrel's belly. In 45 minutes, she determined the folds and wrinkles in the background curtain perfectly matched the shapes of the boy's ear and eye.

Taiichi Ohno, a driver of the Toyota Production System, deemed his method for focused time on the plant floor as the "Chalk Circle." In a plant area of interest, out of the workers' physical way, a circle would be drawn on the floor using chalk. An assigned individual would be required to stand in the circle for several hours to observe the nearby activities.

Having taken this approach myself, I've found what you can discover and rectify amazing:

- **In a bottling plant, I observed a cartoner that was out of time, drifting off the zero baseline settings. The operator fought the machine, and production suffered. A review of the PM provided an opportunity to make changes to the maintenance process. Within weeks, the machine's efficiency went from 65% to 93% consistently.**
- **Standing near the operator interface for a process line, I observed a relief operator change the process parameters when the primary operator went on break. In that process, it would take 45 minutes before the change impacts were seen in the packaging room. Meanwhile, the primary operator would return after 20 minutes and reset the process parameters back to the original settings. The packaging room would have to adjust the machines to stabilize the room output on both sides of the change. When questioned, each operator had their own approach to running the line, where "it felt good" to them. The fix was enforcing standard recipes with set process parameters, thereby creating the "one right way" for team members to run the process.**
- **In an aluminum smelting operation, I watched a production operator struggle to meet the numbers. Maintenance added a safety interlock that forced the operator to move outside the normal work envelope to keep the equipment running. At the time, the operators did not feel empowered and dealt with it. Simply relocating the interlock mechanism alleviated the issue and still addressed the safety requirements.**

Many organizations perform Gemba walks, where people walk a prescribed plant floor route individually or in groups, making casual observations for improvements. However, those simple viewings will miss the findings that come from the more detailed chalk circle exercises.

Early in my career, a plant manager taught me that as a manager, it is imperative to schedule time on the plant floor—not just walking the same path from the office to the maintenance shop for the morning meeting but hitting the floor from different doors, alternative routes, across shifts, and with varying people.

Have the patience to stand in a chalk circle for an extended period, observe what occurs on the plant floor, and observe the interactions, processes, and communications. Your findings will likely surprise you. Δ

Jeff Shiver, CMRP, is a founder and managing principal at People and Processes, Inc. Jeff guides people to achieve success in maintenance and reliability practices using common sense approaches. Visit *www.PeopleandProcesses.com* or email *JShiver@PeopleandProcesses.com*.

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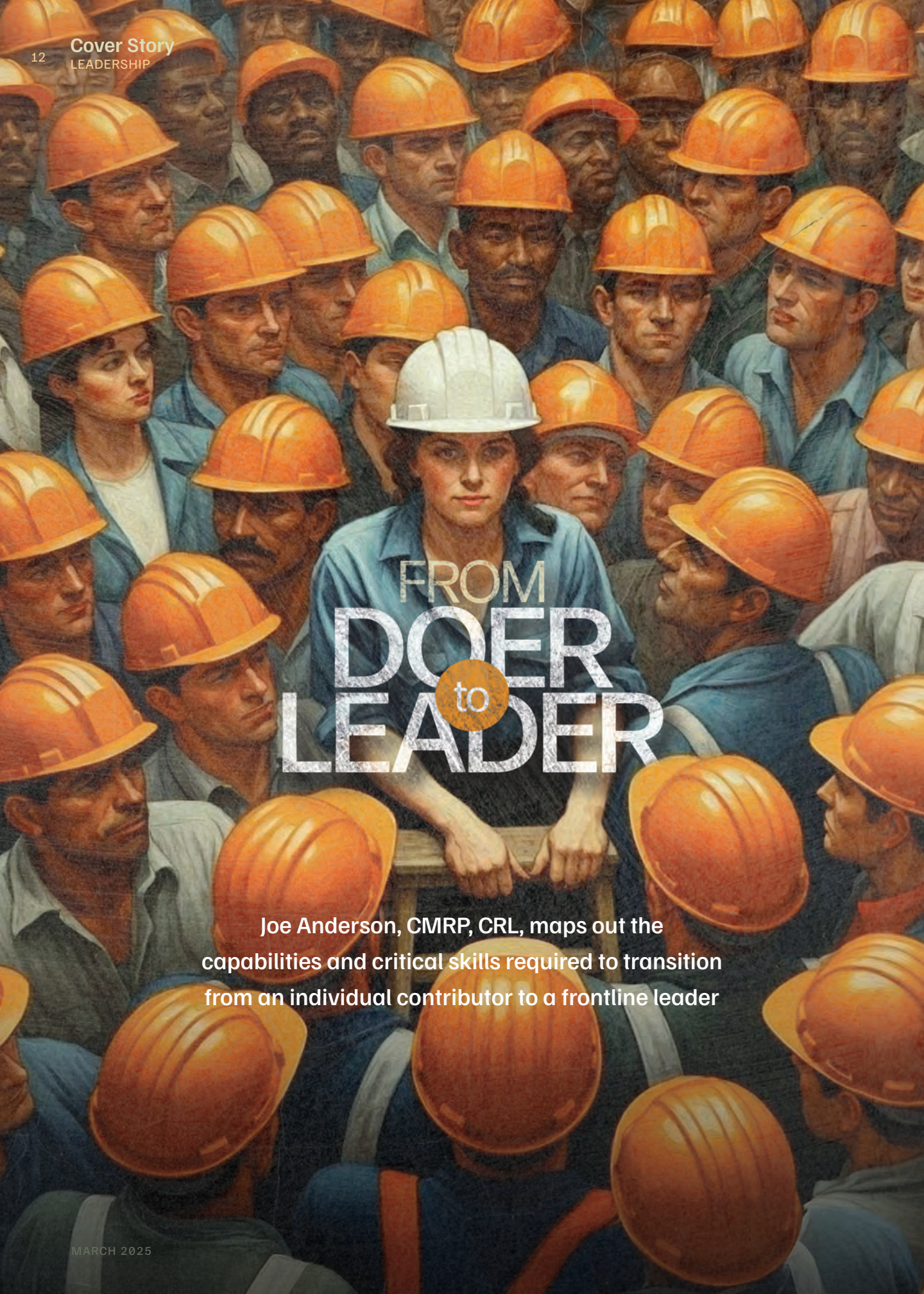

FROM DOER to LEADER

Joe Anderson, CMRP, CRL, maps out the capabilities and critical skills required to transition from an individual contributor to a frontline leader

Frontline supervisors typically rise through the ranks, promoted from roles focused on a single, specialized task that gets them rightly deserved recognition for doing their job well. But the leap from individual contributor to supervisor requires a transformation that is necessary, but often an unknown to them.

No longer measured solely by their own output, new supervisors must now navigate the complex dynamics of managing and motivating a team. Suddenly, the stakes are higher, and the challenges multiply.

How do you make quick, effective decisions under pressure? How do you address conflicts involving your staff, suppliers, or contractors? And how do you coach your direct reports—some of whom were once your peers, and perhaps even close friends—to achieve higher standards of quality and efficiency?

This is the reality of frontline supervision, an essential but often underestimated role that serves as the bridge between strategic goals and day-to-day operations. The transition from "doer" to "leader" requires a new skill set, one that few are fully prepared for. You're no longer just ensuring your own work meets expectations; you're responsible for aligning an entire team with the organization's goals. And whether you find yourself in a unionized manufacturing environment, a fast-paced tech company, or the world of retail, the challenges you'll face are remarkably similar.

Stepping into frontline leadership is both exciting and challenging. This article will delve into the three core capabilities that every frontline leader must develop to succeed, along with six critical skills that will elevate your ability to lead effectively.

PART I: THE THREE CAPABILITIES OF EFFECTIVE FRONTLINE LEADERS

Frontline leaders are the bedrock of any organization, acting as the essential link between strategic objectives and day-to-day operations. They set the tone, drive performance, and foster an environment where team members feel motivated and supported. Yet, this role isn't about merely ensuring that tasks get done. It's about coaching, leading with authenticity, and cultivating the skills needed to handle challenges with foresight and insight.

1. Developing Others Through Coaching and Feedback

The best leaders know that the growth of their team is a direct reflection of their own success. Developing others is about more than just assigning tasks or reviewing work; it's about genuinely investing in your team's development. This requires you to coach with purpose, regularly providing feedback that builds on strengths and helps overcome challenges.

Coaching doesn't mean giving answers; it means guiding your team to find solutions on their own. This approach fosters critical thinking, boosts confidence, and encourages continuous learning. To become an effective coach, take time to understand each team member's strengths, goals, and areas for improvement. Providing feedback isn't always easy, especially when it involves areas of growth, but done with empathy and constructiveness, feedback can become a powerful tool for individual and collective success.

Best practices for developing others:

- **Set aside regular time for one-on-one check-ins.**
- **Use active listening to understand concerns and aspirations.**
- **Provide feedback that is both specific and actionable.**
- **Acknowledge achievements to build confidence and motivation.**

2. Leading Teams That Deliver: Focusing on Problem Solving and Defect Elimination

Effective frontline leaders understand that problem-solving and defect elimination are at the core of achieving consistent results. In an environment where operational efficiency is paramount, the ability to identify and address issues swiftly is invaluable. Leading a team to deliver means focusing on results without sacrificing quality, safety, or morale.

As a leader, one of your primary responsibilities is to empower your team to solve problems proactively. Cultivate a culture where every team member feels comfortable identifying and addressing issues, even if they seem small. Encourage a mindset that views defects as opportunities for improvement rather than setbacks. A team focused on defect elimination is more resilient, adaptable, and capable of consistently meeting performance targets.

Best practices for leading teams that deliver:

- **Foster open communication to ensure all issues are reported and addressed.**
- **Involve team members in the problem-solving process.**
- **Set clear goals and standards that prioritize quality and efficiency.**

- **Recognize and celebrate small improvements to maintain motivation.**

3. Leading Authentically: Building Trust Through Consistency and Transparency

Authenticity is the foundation of strong leadership. Leading authentically means staying true to your values and principles and demonstrating integrity in all situations. Authentic leaders earn trust by showing empathy, practicing self-awareness, and acknowledging mistakes.

Trust-building is a continuous process that requires consistency in words and actions. When team members know that they can rely on you to make fair decisions and provide honest communication, they are more likely to feel secure and motivated. Authentic leaders also recognize that they're not infallible; they show courage by admitting mistakes and taking accountability.

Best practices for leading authentically:

- **Be open about your expectations and decisions.**
- **Show empathy in your interactions and remain approachable.**
- **Own your mistakes and be transparent about lessons learned.**
- **Make decisions that reflect your values and prioritize the team's welfare.**

PART II: SIX ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR FRONTLINE LEADERS

To lead effectively, frontline leaders must cultivate a variety of skills. While core capabilities provide the foundation, the following six skills will ensure that you are equipped to face diverse challenges and opportunities.

1. Big Picture Thinking

As a frontline leader, it's easy to get lost in the details of day-to-day tasks. However, the ability to think big picture allows you to make better decisions that align with the organization's goals.

"Big picture thinking" means understanding how individual tasks contribute to broader objectives, and helps you to prioritize initiatives that have the most impact. For instance, understanding how daily practices impact Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) is a clear demonstration of big picture thinking, as it directly supports organizational goals in cost management.

Let's break it down: Suppose our precision maintenance practices are lacking. By improving these practices—such as properly aligning equipment, using torque wrenches and screwdrivers correctly, and ensuring proper bearing installation—we can extend the useful life of our equipment and minimize breakdowns. This leads to reduced downtime and increased uptime, allowing us to produce more within the same timeframe.

As OEE improves, so does our EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) or profitability. These seemingly minor adjustments can have a profound impact on achieving organizational objectives, showcasing the value of focusing on the big picture.

2. Team Building and Leading

Effective leadership is impossible without the ability to build and lead cohesive teams. Team building goes beyond assembling a group of people; it's about creating an environment where everyone feels valued, empowered, and committed to common goals.

An effective approach is implementing Daily Management Process Ownership—the foundational processes that form the backbone of a strong maintenance system. Key examples in maintenance include: Lubrication Management, Precision Maintenance, Predictive Maintenance, Failure Analysis, and 5S for the Shop.

Assign one of your mechanics as the owner of each process. The goal is to develop a subject matter expert in each process area. Support the growth of these mechanics through targeted training, removing obstacles, and giving them the freedom to refine and improve the process and practices for the entire team to adopt. As their knowledge and skills expand, their confidence and contributions will grow significantly.

3. Organizational Savvy

Understanding the nuances of your organization's structure, politics, and culture is essential for navigating challenges and securing resources for your team. Organizational savvy enables you to work effectively within the system, leveraging relationships and insights to overcome obstacles.

A great example of the use of organizational savvy is navigating conflicting priorities, which is a very common problem in many organizations. I faced these situations often when I was a frontline leader overseeing a maintenance team in a manufacturing facility. For instance, one time we worked with the plant manager and introduced a new initiative focused on reducing downtime, requiring maintenance to prioritize preventive and precision tasks.

However, at the same time, the production manager was pressuring our team to get the machine up and running as quickly as possible to meet daily output targets. The production priority was counter to the maintenance priority of taking our time to do precision tasks and do the job right.

In this case, we followed key steps to demonstrate organizational savvy and resolve the conflict:

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- **Understanding Priorities:** We understood that the plant manager's initiative aligned with long-term organizational goals, while the production manager's concerns addressed short-term operational needs. We also recognized the importance of balancing these competing priorities to maintain relationships and deliver results.
- **Building Alliances:** We scheduled a brief meeting with both the plant and production managers to discuss the conflicting priorities. We diplomatically highlighted how focusing solely on reactive maintenance would undermine long-term goals but acknowledged the production manager's concerns about hitting daily targets.
- **Proposing Solutions:** We proposed a compromise: our team would allocate specific hours during non-peak production times for preventive maintenance while maintaining a small on-call crew to address critical failures. This solution ensured that both goals were supported without overloading the maintenance team. We also got the production team to agree that doing the job right and with precision, to ensure the problem does not come back, was a benefit to everyone.
- **Communicating Effectively:** We provided clear updates on the team's progress, including metrics on downtime reduction and responsiveness to equipment failures. We demonstrated that the compromise was working, gaining buy-in from both managers.
- **Leveraging Influence:** We also used our influence within the organization to secure additional training for our team on predictive maintenance techniques (we already had the tools), which will further reduce future conflicts between reactive and preventive maintenance demands.

The result was that our organizational savvy allowed us to navigate competing priorities, preserve relationships with key stakeholders, and build credibility for our team. By understanding the dynamics of the organization, aligning actions with both short- and long-term goals, and effectively communicating our team's value, we strengthened the impact of our leadership.

4. Leadership Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a cornerstone of effective leadership. It involves understanding your strengths, weaknesses, biases, and impact on others. Leaders who lack self-awareness may struggle to connect with their teams or may inadvertently create friction, which is something that I came to realize about myself: my ability to overwhelm a situation.

One day I noticed my team hesitated to share feedback during meetings. Reflecting on my own behavior, I realized I would often dominate discussions, unintentionally discouraging input. Acknowledging this, I addressed the team, apologizing for not creating enough space for their voices and I committed to change.

In future meetings, I would actively listen, asked open-ended questions, and would pause to ensure that everyone had a chance to contribute. By demonstrating self-awareness and adjusting my approach, I saw a substantial improvement in team engagement and collaboration while also setting an example of humility and adaptability.

5. Communication

Clear, consistent communication is vital for building trust, ensuring understanding, and fostering collaboration. Effective leaders are adept at conveying information, giving instructions, and listening actively to their team members' concerns and ideas.

As a maintenance leader, I understood the power of clear communication to build trust and alignment within my team. I would develop a departmental plan and then gather my department for a meeting to unveil the new maintenance vision, goals, and objectives that would guide the team over the next year to 5 years.

Standing in front of the group, I began by sharing the vision: "In 5 years, we will develop and become a best-in-class maintenance organization. We will develop a reliability culture which WILL achieve our business priorities, understanding that RELIABILITY is the input to accomplish the desired outputs of Safety, Quality, Growth, Cost, Service, and Culture." I emphasized the importance of this vision, connecting it to the team's work and the broader success of the organization.

Next, I outlined the specific goals: having a world class lubrication management program, having a world class predictive maintenance program, etc. I didn't just dictate these goals; I explained how they were determined, using input from team members and data from the previous year's performance. This demonstrated that their voices and efforts were valued in shaping the department's direction.

Finally, I broke the goals into actionable objectives, such as implementing a new lubrication management system and holding weekly training sessions on precision maintenance practices. I assigned ownership to various team members, empowering them to take the lead in specific initiatives while

committing to support them through resources and guidance.

Throughout the discussion, I invited feedback and encouraged questions, showing a willingness to adjust plans where necessary. My transparency in laying out the department's roadmap—and my emphasis on collaboration—helped foster a sense of shared purpose. The team left the meeting not only clear on the path forward but also confident that I, as their leader, had their best interests at heart. By aligning the department with a clear vision and involving them in its execution, I cultivated trust and inspired action.

6. The Ability to Coach Others

Coaching is at the heart of developing a high-performing team. Effective coaches inspire growth, empower individuals, and foster a learning culture.

A good coach doesn't simply instruct; they ask questions that prompt reflection and discovery. For example, as a maintenance leader, let's say you notice a mechanic rushing through tasks, resulting in recurring equipment issues. Instead of reprimanding them, you can pull them aside for a coaching session.

"You're a skilled mechanic," you begin, "but I've noticed some repairs are breaking down sooner than expected. Let's talk about what's causing that." Together, you identify shortcuts in bearing installations.

You demonstrate proper techniques, explaining how alignment and torque specs extend equipment life. Then, you encourage them to apply these practices, emphasizing their role in preventing breakdowns. By fostering growth through constructive feedback and support, you reinforce both skills and confidence.

IN CONCLUSION

Mastering the three capabilities—developing others, leading teams to deliver, and leading authentically—combined with the six essential skills, forms the foundation for effective frontline leadership. These qualities empower new leaders to inspire their teams, drive results, and foster a culture of trust and growth. By embracing continuous learning and applying these principles, leaders not only enhance their own performance but also elevate their teams and organizations. Leadership is a journey of development, and focusing on these core areas ensures long-term success and resilience in any environment. Δ

THE CAPTAIN

Captain Unreliability

FOR THE LOVE OF BUREAUCRACY

Ah, bureaucracy—the lifeblood of every truly great corporation. You can say what you will about bureaucrats, but it's undeniable that they are the true architects of the modern workplace, building bridges (that lead nowhere) and creating systems that, frankly, nobody understands—but everyone has to follow.

First, let's dispel a ridiculous myth: that bureaucracy is inefficient. If only the naysayers understood the incredible efficiency that comes from a system where decisions require the approval of no fewer than twelve people, all of whom are essential. And why wouldn't they be? After all, each member of the committee brings a unique perspective on, say, why a memo needs a particular font or how to optimize paperclip usage. Where else but in corporate bureaucracy could you find a team whose purpose is to sign off on every PowerPoint slide before it's presented? That's progress.

The beauty of corporate bureaucracy is its unique self-sustaining nature. Bureaucrats are like bamboo: resilient, growing stronger every time someone tries to cut them down. After all, who can truly understand the intricacies of the Compliance and Synergy Optimization Division but the people who work there? And let's be clear, these champions of corporate process have no intention of working themselves out of a job. The notion of actually *solving* a problem is for those naive souls in operations. Bureaucrats understand the real goal—keeping themselves indispensable. And they do it masterfully.

Take, for example, the *Committee on Actionable Optimization*, established five years ago to streamline the company's expense-reporting process. Five years and six consultants later, expense reporting has become a process so intricate it requires an Excel masterclass, a six-page policy document, and, if we're being honest, a small prayer. But the team insists they're "almost there," and hey, as long as the work is still "in progress," everyone's job is safe. Efficiency achieved? Perhaps not, but job security? Absolutely.

Of course, let's not forget the *Hierarchical Feedback Loop*, the jewel of corporate bureaucracy. In this setup, feedback must ascend through no fewer than five levels of management before it can return to the originator, often in a form that's completely unrecognizable. It's a system that ensures ideas, by the time they've passed through every Vice President of Optimization, Improvement, and Transformation, bear no resemblance to what they were in the first place. But who cares about practical implementation? The feedback loop isn't about achieving change; it's about making sure everyone has a chance to sign off. Because if everyone touches it, no one can be held accountable.

Then there's the myth that bureaucrats never make mistakes. A "mistake" in a bureaucracy is just an "opportunity for procedural improvement" and the perfect justification for establishing yet another task force. After all, that's what accountability looks like in a well-oiled machine. Rather than taking action or assigning blame, it's much more productive to create a spreadsheet, track the data, and monitor the *trends* in mistakes. It's about the long game.

And if you think for one second that these stalwart guardians of procedure are going to fire themselves, think again. Termination is for people in, you know, "regular jobs"—the ones who do things like make products or serve customers. But bureaucrats? They're the ones who *know* why every step exists and have a binder to prove it. They've filled out all the paperwork, dotted all the i's, and ensured that only their position could possibly fulfill the role that they themselves created. If anyone needs to go, it's not the person who's integral to the three-tiered approval process for updating the weekly reports. It's that project manager who thought they could bypass the process. The nerve!

In conclusion, let us celebrate corporate bureaucracy for what it truly is: the art of process for process's sake, the science of creating job security through inefficiency, and the absolute mastery of never-ending relevance. Here's to the departments you never knew existed, because while some may argue that bureaucracy stifles innovation and slows growth, we all know the truth: without bureaucracy, who would approve our purchase orders? Δ

Captain Unreliability is a satire of the state of manufacturing in 'Merica, USA, by an industry professional known for using humor to get the point across. Email him at *Captain.Unreliability@ReliabilityX.com*, or follow him on Twitter: @CUnreliability.

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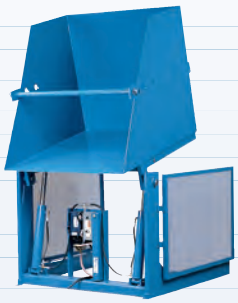

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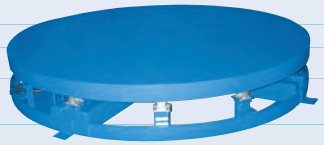

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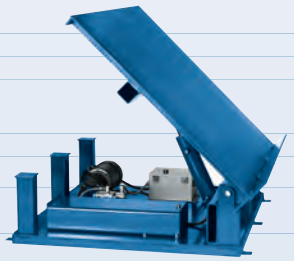

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