

T.A. COOK IN THE PRESS

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Trends from the 2015 AFPM Maintenance and Reliability Conference

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The annual American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) Reliability and Maintenance Conference and Exhibition was held in Austin, Texas, in late May. This conference has been held for a long time. Over the decades, there have been good and not-so-good trends presented at this event, and the 2015 maintenance and reliability conference was no exception.

Training

As in previous years, over 200 exhibitors were represented at this conference. Unfortunately, the service providers and their staff outnumbered attendees from operating companies. It was again clear how, to some managers in the hydrocarbon processing industry (HPI), training is a deferrable option. It is assumed that not investing in targeted training will appear neatly on the company's balance sheet. Conversely, deferred training is a very unhealthy trend if it is sustained over the long term.

Stars of AFPM 2015. Fortunately, the 2015 maintenance and reliability event had many presenters and exhibitors deserving of commendations. Two co-presenters from Flint Hills Resources (FHR) plants in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, and Corpus Christi, Texas, conveyed their personal commitment and the company's consistent leadership model. Their collective norms of behavior are based on shared values and beliefs — a slow but commendable trend. Likewise, FHR doubled down on the company's commitment to training and sent a sizable group of reliability professionals to attend this conference. Good for FHR! Such actions have a greater impact for employees than clever slogans and press releases.

New trends

Favorable trends are developing in the emergence of service organizations with global experience that is anchored in analytical and implementation tasks. More specifically, companies, such as T.A. Cook, can find and explain massive opportunities hidden in an HPI company's maintenance routines or data. Suitable analyses and comparisons with other locations and competitors can help uncover opportunities that may have remained untapped due to a lack of solid proof. The time (or training) may not have been available to properly examine workflow or asset upgrading opportunities in a complex processing environment. Also, it is difficult to identify and apply benchmarking techniques that were devised for another industry or company.

Shutdown management and work definitions are deserving of accurate data gathering and detailed cost justification. Also, there are elements of risk management (RM) that are frequent prerequisites to turnaround work. Entrusting RM to competent service organizations that can provide all needed and relevant analysis and auditing tasks is a viable action.

In a follow-up review centered on one asset management/operational excellence provider, this author came away with the impression that sustainable efficiency gains, massive and accelerated learning tasks, plus effective management of future processes and decisions are needed. Working with highly experienced consulting companies and service providers is a favorable action. Such providers were present at the 2015 AFPM Reliability Conference and Exhibition. This is an obviously desirable trend.

Program

The 2015 program committee should be praised for selecting an unusually relevant keynote speaker, D. Michael Abrashoff, a former US Navy commander and the author of *It's Your Ship*. He was a navy



officer who was assigned to a ship with very poor performance and very low morale. To drastically improve the performance of the ship's crew, he had to change his own leadership style from the traditional command-and-control model. Captain Abrashoff created a high-performance culture, and it is one worthy of imitation. He encouraged crew members to identify problems when they are still small, and empowered them to take corrective action. Abrashoff's program was in sync with FHR. On a similar path, FHR developed and nurtured a culture strongly biased to action. It is the author's humble opinion that it is time for HPI organizations to recognize and imitate both FHR and Captain Abrashoff.

Next year's wishes

The 2016 event will take place in San Antonio, Texas. The optimist in us hopes to hear how other companies joined best-of-class ranks and learn how these organizations took steps toward growth. There is a need to become problem solvers and to mature in status and reliability performance. We must find and cure root causes of problems instead of just treating the symptoms. An optimistic trend would be that more companies work closely with competent solution providers. Finally, there are merits in training and grooming professionals in both salaried and wage positions. If you are among the very best, then please share your wisdom and experience.