



How Smart Plants Use Weekly Work Schedules to Improve Performance

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Ask any manager working in an industrial setting if they would like to see a weekly work schedule developed; they will, of course, reply in the affirmative. Now, sit them down and explain the amount of effort and coordination that it will take to achieve this, and most will run for the hills.

The individual activities we carry out to develop and execute a weekly maintenance schedule are pretty straightforward, but the coordination and discipline required to carry them out represent one of the biggest challenges facing the organization.

So why bother? There are two simple reasons why we must develop and execute a weekly maintenance schedule to the best of our abilities. We do this to:

1. Ensure that the most important work is completed first
2. Maximize wrench time

How to Identify Critical Maintenance Work

It is a bit of a separate discussion. Still, if we had a good handle on all the work that must be completed by the maintenance department (corrective, construction, preventive, predictive, etc.), and if we had a system for prioritizing this work, then we should be able to prioritize these jobs in order of importance. Additionally, if we had such a list, we would logically pick from the top of the list each time we needed to find something for our people to do.

A prioritized list only works if you're disciplined enough to follow it – especially when it's inconvenient.

The problem with this idea is that the list of prioritized work is both lengthy and complex, and it often shifts in response to recent events. It is tough for any individual to have a complete and clear grasp on priorities at any given moment.

Maintenance supervisors who find themselves in a position of assigning work to their people will assign what is fresh and recent in their minds, but not necessarily the top job from the prioritized list.

WO #	Asset Criticality	Technician	Asset Number	Work Type	WO Duration	Date / Time Due	Part/Material Kitted	WO Status
R340027	4	Jim Booth	S34087	PM	4 Hours	August 4 8:00am	Yes "Bin 1A"	RTS
R310078	10	Sue Franks	S37098	CM	4 Hours	August 4 12:00pm	Yes "Bin 32P"	RTS
R329851	8	Tim Idol	T94560	CM	8 Hours	August 5 8:00am	N/A	AP
T376890	4	Oscar Tox	T23459	CM	8 Hours	August 5 8:00am	N/A	RTS
T794321	9	Paul Ham Sam Smith	T45677	CM	8 Hours	August 4	Yes	RTS
R34021	9	Tony Ball	Y90976	PM	2 Hours	August 4	Yes	RTS
R45321	4	Oscar Frank Tim Scott	S23008	CM	6 Hours	August 6	N/A	AP

Weekly Maintenance Schedule Example

Through the use of a weekly scheduling process, the organization is forced to look at the entire prioritized list and come up with a weekly maintenance schedule that represents the shared priorities of both operations and maintenance, as well as their capabilities for the coming week.

When we make scheduling and prioritization decisions on the fly, the most recent flare-up often comes to the forefront, which is not necessarily the most strategically vital activity to be performed.

How Weekly Work Schedules Help Maximize Wrench Time

Be very careful who you talk to about wrench time and how you approach it. If you are not careful, you will end up with a situation where the top of the organizational chart thinks that people are not working hard enough, and the bottom of the chart thinks you are unjustly calling them lazy. Neither is true.

Wrench time is defined as that portion of a tradesperson's day that is spent positively affecting the assets. In its simplest form, this means a wrench is on the equipment. Most estimates place this percentage of time in the 20-30% range, with top performers often considered as those who operate in the 50-55% range.

Even among the best organizations, at least 45% of the time is lost to non-wrench time activities such as travel time, trips to the storeroom, waiting for instructions, waiting for equipment, etc.

| Wrench time doesn't improve by accident – it improves by schedule.

We will never eliminate these activities, but with discipline, we can shrink them and bring our performance into the 50% range. What is one of the typical traits among those top performers? They all develop a weekly maintenance work schedule that is agreed upon, widely communicated, and followed as closely as possible.

The worst thing you can do is hand a tradesperson a work order and say, "Come find me when you are done with that one, and I will give you your next assignment." Engaging your employees with this lack of the big picture leads to significant losses in productivity and morale. As a result, you will be lucky to operate at the 20% wrench time marker.

Develop a schedule that covers 100% of available time and actively (face-to-face) communicate this schedule to the affected employees in advance. You will automatically see a boost of productivity within your organization.

How to Make Room for Emergencies Without Losing Control

The counterargument to scheduling to 100% availability is: "How will we handle emergencies?" The answer to this is quite simple, if you can accept a few simple facts.

Controlled Flexibility Is Essential

It is acceptable to break the schedule, as long as it is done in a formal and controlled fashion. Have clear definitions of what an emergency is and what it is not. If you add an emergency job to the schedule, something must be removed. Let's control it and ask why;

perhaps we can take steps to prevent this particular emergency from happening again in the future.

100% Compliance Isn't the Goal

We will not achieve 100% schedule compliance. From a young age, we are conditioned to look for perfection in our performance. The weekly scheduling process requires us to be open and honest about our performance. More desirable than 100% compliance (which is usually a sign of making the numbers fit the crime) is a 5-10% improvement over last year's performance.

The Payoff of Weekly Work Schedules

Please make no mistake about it, the discipline required to develop and execute a weekly maintenance schedule is significant and, quite possibly, the hardest thing that we have to do within the maintenance organization.

We always feel like we can cut a corner today and catch up tomorrow. Sadly, tomorrow never seems to come.

When doing something difficult, it is often beneficial to remember why we are doing it. Maximizing wrench time and prioritizing work will lead to asset reliability performance that we can all be proud of.

Author



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Ricky Smith, CMRP, CMRT is the Vice President of World Class Maintenance and a leading Maintenance Reliability Consultant with over 35 years of experience. He holds certifications such as Certified Maintenance and Reliability Professional (CMRP) and Certified Maintenance and Reliability Technician (CMRT). Ricky has worked with global companies like Coca-Cola, Honda, and Georgia Pacific, delivering expert maintenance solutions across 30 countries. His career began in the U.S. Army, advancing to leadership roles, including a position at the Pentagon as Facility Investigator for the Secretary of Defense. Ricky is also the co-author of *Rules of Thumb for Maintenance and Reliability Engineers* and *Lean Maintenance: Reduce Costs, Improve Quality, and Increase Market Share*.

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