

# Tool Box Talk – Work Execution Management



## “Why Have a Work Schedule?”

### Why Is a Work Schedule Important?

Ask any manager working in an industrial setting if they would like to see a weekly work schedule developed; they will, of course, reply to 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 actually quite straightforward and simple, 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 in order to:

- Ensure that the most important work is completed first
- Maximize wrench time

### The Most Important Work

It is a bit of a separate discussion, but if we had a good handle on all of the work that must be completed by the maintenance department (corrective, construction, preventive, predictive, etc.), and if we have a system for prioritizing this work, then we should be able to pick list 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.

The problem with this idea is that this list of prioritized work is quite long and complex and quite often shifts based on recent events. It is very difficult 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.

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 floats to the surface, which is not necessarily the most strategically important activity to be performed.

### 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 actually true.

Wrench time is defined as that portion of a tradesperson’s day that is actually spent affecting the assets in a positive way. 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. We will never completely eliminate these activities, but with discipline, we can shrink them and bring our performance into 50% range.

What is one of the common 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

# Tool Box Talk – Work Execution Management



## *“Why Have a Work Schedule?”*

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 effected employees in advance. You will automatically see a boost of productivity within your organization.

### **What About Emergencies?**

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.

#### Fact Number 1

It is acceptable to break the schedule, as long as it is done in a formal and controlled fashion. Have clear definitions of what is an emergency and what is not. If you add an emergency job to the schedule, something must be removed. Let’s just control it and ask why; maybe we can do something to prevent this particular emergency from occurring again in the future.

#### Fact Number 2

We are not going to achieve 100% schedule compliance. From a young age, we are conditioned to look for perfection in our performance. The weekly scheduling process is one that 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.

### **Conclusion**

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 back up tomorrow. Sadly, tomorrow never seems to come.

When doing something that is 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.