

Appreciating the Value of Good Stewardship

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"I'm doing the best I can, but it's not enough. The other crew doesn't seem to care about the equipment here. They beat it up, run it dry, don't put things back. They don't seem to understand that our jobs depend on taking care of it so we can take care of our customers. Good stewardship is lost."

What's stewardship? Simply stated, it's the "personal responsibility to take care of something owned by someone else." Here are five areas to focus on when developing and/or strengthening a culture of stewardship within our organizations:

1. Shared Vision

There must be a clear “shared organization vision” that emphasizes the critical importance of individual contributions. Communicating a “vision for stewardship” should address the benefits and the “WIIFMs” (what’s in it for me) when we take care of the equipment and processes.

2. Organizational Values

The organization’s “values,” i.e., beliefs that encourage individual and group behaviors and support the “vision,” are crucial. Here’s where senior leadership earns its stripes: in modeling and consistently communicating fundamental organizational values, which, in themselves, aren’t overly complicated.

Values that support good stewardship might include quality, safety, reliability, and empowerment. It takes just a few non-caring individuals to undermine the stability and reliability of a process or facility. One person could upset the balance and cause unplanned downtime or inefficient operations.

3. Work Culture

This area is key. Allowing conditions that communicate “our vision is just words and not actions” prevents people from believing in said vision. Consistency is enormously important. No person, office, or crew can be exempt.

Starting in one critical area of the operation, a culture of good stewardship shows what can be done and what is expected in your organization. Or, if a stewardship culture already exists in one or more critical areas, showcase them as “islands of excellence.” People in those areas are showing responsible care for their equipment and processes. Leverage the experience in these islands to expand elsewhere.

4. Personnel Decisions and Actions

When it comes to personnel decisions and actions, leadership cannot afford to show favoritism. Nor can leaders look the other way when the organization’s values or work environments are compromised.

For example, if taking care of the its maintenance shops means organization and orderliness in all areas and practices, leadership must reinforce that standard. If a shop looks as though a bomb went off and clutter abounds, but nothing is done to change it, others will think leadership has a double standard. That will undermine values and beliefs and prevent good stewardship from prevailing.

5. Leadership

This is a major element in mastering the art of stewardship. From senior levels to the front line, all leaders are heading in the same direction. What does that look like?

Leadership must be able to SEE that the “vision for stewardship” is important for business success and their personal satisfaction and success. Leadership must BELIEVE this is the right thing to do and, as well as TALK and WALK THE TALK. Leadership must TEACH others in their areas of responsibility and motivate them through coaching, encouragement, and recognition.

Good stewardship means people care for equipment and work areas in ways that allow potential problems to be spotted before they turn into failures or unplanned downtime. Leaders must put this vision and supporting values into action. When they observe conditions that aren't in line with good stewardship, they must communicate where the gap is, how to correct it, and why this is of significance.

See it, believe it, talk it, walk it, teach it. As RAM pros, we are leaders. We can make a difference as good stewards.

About the Author

Bob Williamson is a long-time contributor to the “people-side” of the world-class-maintenance and manufacturing body of knowledge across dozens of industry types. His vast background in maintenance, machine and tool design, and teaching has positioned his work with over 500 companies and plants, facilities, and equipment-oriented organizations. Contact him directly at 512-800-6031 or bwilliamson@theramreview.com.