

Maintenance, Inside And Out

Outsourcing maintenance work is a serious decision; both practical and financial factors should be considered.

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"Be careful of an 'us vs. them' perspective-or the common misconception that contract maintenance work must mean lay-offs."-**Anna Wells**

"If you want something done right, do it yourself."

In a perfect world, this phrase holds a lot of water. I'm a bit of a control freak; I understand, even with my own job, the wish to maintain everything with internal qualified personnel—people who hold positions for long periods of time, understand the equipment and operations, and possess years of the required training to do so. Again... this is a *perfect* world we're talking about.

The decision to outsource maintenance work is a serious one, and factors both practical and financial should be considered. For a lot of larger facilities, outsourcing maintenance is a necessary reality. Still, keep these factors in mind:

Labor: In an age where manufacturers are having a difficult time recruiting and

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retaining qualified maintenance personnel, perhaps outsourcing is as much consistency as some facilities can hope for. Turn-over is an ugly word, but it's also a hard reality.

Preventive vs. Reactive: Preventive measures such as root cause analysis, TPM (total productive maintenance), or 5S can be a great way to manage maintenance in-house, before the point of breakdown. Examining the source, as we all well know, is the basis of predicting failure. Establishing consistency in these types of programs means that having a large team of "reactors," might indicate a problem with your program.

MRO Expenses: While maintenance is a costly part of your operations, we all know downtime is worse. Whether or not outsourcing is in the cards, make sure your bases are covered. Outsourcing can be an excellent way to supplement an existing maintenance program. For instance, some equipment is clearly designed to require little to no maintenance. But any maintenance manager will tell you that this doesn't mean that it won't. Still, be careful to consider the fact that a maintenance program involving contract work should still be streamlined from time-to-time.

From a purely pragmatic approach, many suppliers and distributors have qualified maintenance personnel available to come in and service the equipment once you've purchased it. In fact, many of these programs can be tailored to your facility's needs.

Many experts would suggest that it's not a matter of 'to contract or not to contract,' but rather which areas of the plant can be adequately managed with preventive maintenance programs, and how varying levels of throughput will change your needs.

Just be careful of an 'us vs. them' perspective—or the common misconception that contract maintenance work must mean lay-offs. The bottom line is what's best for your facility—and what leads to the most uptime. This can be achieved, if need be, with a mix of the right maintenance professionals, in-house and outsourced.

Click here to read IMPO Assistant Editor David Mantey's take on outsourcing maintenance.

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