

Dr. Die Cast



Is it Time to Give Your Shop a Tune Up?

Some people remember when automobile engines required a tune up every 5,000 to 10,000 miles. Through improvements in high energy ignition, lead free fuel, electronic fuel ejection, etc. many manufacturers only recommend tune ups at 100,000 miles. So can we apply the same approach to our facilities, our equipment and our personnel? Ask anyone who has neglected their health for an extended period of time and if they are being honest, they will admit they would pay anything to recover their health. This is often just as true for our companies. So where do we start?

A very quick test is this. If your most prized potential customer called and announced they wanted to visit your plant next month, what would you do in preparation? Would you steam clean the aisles and machines? Would you have to scrape the grease and flash off the ceiling and the walls? Would you have to warehouse a bunch of obsolete machinery that is setting in the production, shipping departments or in the parking lot? Would you

fill pot holes in the parking lot or driveway? Would you mow the grass and trim the shrubs? Clean off your desk? Wash the windows in the lobby? Why wait? Some of the most important people you know already visit your plant every day. They're your employees, your coworkers, your team.

I've witnessed several of these clean-ups in my career and some of them were simply frenetic dog and pony shows that produced no lasting benefit. Others were very well coordinated and supported with benefits that continued long after the tours. These are not top down "5S" projects although they can begin like that. Some of the best results were accomplished when the machine operators cleaned and painted their own machines and work spaces. In the process of cleaning and painting machines, they discovered oil leaks and wear that previously went undetected. Each department worked with a common mission to clean and organize, purging what they knew to be obsolete material and cataloging and organizing critical spare parts that were valuable and had long lead times that would

cripple the organization if you had to wait for spares to be manufactured. (I have actually heard of brand new tie bars scrapped during a 5S exercise because 'after all they hadn't had to replace one in over a year'. Now that's waste!)

Maybe it's time to perform that machine locking or shot process capability study. Just because the machine manufacturer's plate says 1,000 ton how do you know that it is still capable? After all, your sales and tooling engineers are still counting on it being capable and selling and/or designing to the original capability.

So let's face it, every physical item wears and gets soiled and some even become obsolete. How about it, let me hear from you. What were your most important discoveries or improvements following a major plant tune up?

Who's Dr. Die Cast?

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