

Meatballs

“You get no bread with one meatball.”
Depression era folk song

6

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PLEASE PASS THIS ON

Meatballs is put out in the belief that a strong union at SHAP depends on an informed and involved membership. Meatballs welcomes different points of view. Contact Mike Parker, electrician second shift, body shop, or you can email meatballs@rts-tech.com. Publication labor is volunteer and views are those of the writers.

TPM: Coming soon to SHAP

Chrysler, with the cooperation of the International UAW, has been rolling out a new joint program called Total Productive Maintenance. So far plant participation is voluntary--11 plants have it, with 4 more scheduled soon. However, the way these programs go, if your plant does not volunteer, eventually it will be a direct order to do TPM.

Corporate takes this program very seriously, since it has strong roots in Japan and is parallel to the Toyota Production System that our top management uses as a model. TPM, as its name suggest, focuses on maintenance and will mean area teams, a new round of appointments of coordinators and trainers, and trial runs. More bureaucracy and record-keeping and fewer people to do the work.

But what makes this program especially strange is that the single most important feature of TPM, as it is usually practiced in most of the international auto industry supposedly will not be part of our TPM here at SHAP. Nor is it likely Corporate has interest in other noted themes of TPM. **So why does Corporate want it so bad? What should we do?**

A Bath without the water?

In industrial relations circles, what makes TPM distinctive from other alphabet-soup programs is that it breaks down the old separations between operation and maintenance. The father of TPM, Seiichi Nakajima, who is widely studied by management in the U.S. says, “The key innovation in TPM is that operators perform basic maintenance on their own equipment.”¹ One of the jobs of skilled trades is to train production operators to do this maintenance. “All employees must agree that operators are responsible for the maintenance of their own equipment; in addition, the operators themselves must be trained in the skills necessary for autonomous maintenance.”²

But Corporate and the International assure us that TPM at Chrysler does not mean turning over maintenance work to production or breaking lines of demarcation. Fine promises. Then why do they call this program TPM? And how long till we move to the next phase, where these promises mean as much as the ones about respect or job security?

More strangeness: Management has already made clear that they want no part of several other key features of TPM. Some examples:

1. Contracting in? Nakajima argues, “We strongly encourage in-house design and manufacture of equipment and dies because it helps polish and perfect production techniques and skills.”³ Our union has often argued this—the question of outside contracting should not be decided on immediate costs, but should consider the value that the people who do the work building and installing will do a better job of debugging and maintaining equipment. Does that fact stand a chance against

management’s zeal to contract out and reduce Harbour numbers? (See Meatballs #5, July 02)

2. Listen to the people who know/do the work? TPM holds that the people who best understand a system are the people who work on it. This means allowing a certain respect and autonomy for the area—letting the people in an area take ownership rather than trying to run things by edict from above. But both Corporate and plant prefer the opposite direction. Generate standardized corporate lists of directions and enforce them with a “do as ordered or off with your head.”

3. Eliminate inferior equipment? TPM includes the idea that you get to the root cause of downtime by eliminating inferior equipment. Yeah, sure! But when we get to the root causes we are told “there is no money.” Everybody knows the Bleichert conveyors are inferior. But Corporate, which specified them, refused a plant request to replace them (except one) and refuses to take responsibility for the massive amount of PM required.

So why does management want TPM?

It clearly is not so they can do points 1, 2 or 3. But if we have to have TPM, we should use it to press for these. We do not have to accept management’s agenda; we can have our own. In any event we have to be on guard that we hold the company to its promises about maintaining lines and skilled work.

We also should be watching that the company doesn’t try to use TPM to go in the opposite direction. If they can’t get operators to do maintenance, maybe they have plans to move more operation **to** the trades. They have been deskilling us and moving us towards being enhanced operators anyway. Management may try to make the trades responsible for “uptime” the main measure of TPM, which will mean dealing with parts and operation in addition to the machine problems. MP

Notes

1 Nakajima, S. (1988). Introduction to Total Productive Maintenance. Productivity Press, Cambridge, MA. p. 2.

2 Fumio Gato in Nakajima, S. (editor) (1989). TPM Development Program: Implementing Total Productive Maintenance. Prod. Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 21.

3 Nakajima (1988), p. 43.

PM?

Preventive Maintenance. Uses a general schedule, based on general experience, whether or not the specific equipment or use requires it.

Predictive Maintenance. Based on anticipating problems in specific equipment. Makes use of data bases to project trends and uses specialized monitoring equipment like infrared thermography, vibration analysis, and fluid analysis to detect signs of potential breakdown.

Productive Maintenance. Organizing maintenance around the goal of improving uptime. See main article.

Management on the Attack: *We have to make the union stronger*

⇒ Corporate recently threatened Belvedere with “Give us what we want or we will close the plant and build a new one our way.” And what way is that? Modular Production. They want to source as much of the car as they can to vendors and have those vendors operate departments within the plant. In the extreme, the whole body shop would belong to one vendor, the paint shop to another, and the cockpit to yet another. Even if we were members of the same union, imagine how weak we will be when each department has a different contract and different company policies, and you can only exercise seniority in your own department.

In this case, the company seems to have stopped the grand threat. The Belvedere union leadership told them NO! The leadership of the assembly plant locals united at the recent UAW DC Council meeting to let management know that we would not stand for them to pick us off one plant at a time. But we know clearly what direction they want to move, and they will try to grab pieces of their master plan as big as we let them get away with.

⇒ Companies are slashing medical and retiree benefits. The Big Three are signaling their intentions for the next contract by cutting non-union salaried benefits.

⇒ SHAP management has been notching up the discipline and other fear tactics. In several cases they have shown a preference for finding tradespeople to blame instead of solving problems.

Faced with these attacks at all levels, we need to do all we can do to make the union stronger. Here are some suggestions. Others are welcome.

1. More regular skilled trades meetings similar to the monthly meetings on midnights, where we can get and exchange information. It's easier to organize on midnights but we need them on other shifts just as much. Certainly during down weeks we can take the opportunity to hold meetings on each shift.

2. We all have to take responsibility for keeping the company from outsourcing our work. When the union takes a project, we all have to make sure that it is a success, even if the company would like to see us fail. Unless we continue to get this work, we not only lose overtime possibilities and our ability to maintain our current number of jobs, but we also lose the work which provides us with the best training for apprentices, and upgrade training for ourselves.

3. We need to put the divisive overtime and project debates behind us. No single arrangement is equally good for each of us with different needs. But we have a reasonable process and it is now being implemented consistently and we have equalization of overtime. Over time (pun intended), things even out.

4. We need to settle the disputes between trades. They serve only to weaken us and help management. We should be using our resources to bring in the work we don't have rather than fighting among ourselves over the fuzzy areas.

5. We need to be more involved in the union. It is easy to forget how much the union has won for us over the years and how much we have to lose. MP

2nd Shift Trades Steward Election

In my view, the steward is the single most important elected union officer. When the company knows that the people are organized and ready a bargainer has something to use. The famous saying about international diplomacy applies equally to labor negotiations. You can't win at the conference table what you can't win on the battlefield.

Unfortunately, too many of us view the steward as a kind of hired servant to clean up if we make a mess. I think the steward needs a different role:

- Provide us information and help organize us so that we act in solidarity to improve conditions.
- Train more members to do things for themselves individually and with others. A few people in a department sticking together can blunt a lot of bad management policy without ever going through the paperwork.
- Tell us the truth--not what we want to hear.
- Help unify the trades and bring together the interests of the high and low seniority.

The steward's election shouldn't be a popularity contest. Nor should we try to find someone to fight battles we won't fight ourselves. One way to start would be to hold a series of 2nd shift trades meetings during down week where members can ask questions of each candidate and each candidate can state their views.

The dates for the election and runoff will be determined in January. MP

SHORTS

Union VP election coming up. Keith Mickens has been appointed to be an International Rep. Keith did a great job of implementing the union social action vision of community involvement as well as helping make the union stronger through the Worker-to-Worker program. January 3 and 6 sign-up, January 16 election for replacement, January 23 runoff.

Right now the plant is being managed by fear techniques-- some mix of visual management, threats, write-ups, and yelling. The method is to put the pressure on supervisors to put the pressure on us. Supervisors are so fearful of failing to make their numbers, they are unwilling to allow us the time to make things right. But this kind of management can produce numbers only for a short time. You can only sweep so many real problems under the rug.

Computers don't kill jobs, management kills jobs. In principle, good record-keeping and a reminder system for maintenance help us do a better job. The problem with TMS is how it will be used. If we have enough of the three requirements — time, materials and staffing — to do the PM, TMS could be very valuable. But this management is committed to the lean strategy of continually reducing the amount of these three factors below what we need, turning TMS into a method of tracking work to assign blame. As with all lean strategies, the first to feel the pressure of TMS will be the supervisors, forcing them to learn to use the system against us to survive.

The IEs recently joined the UAW for protection against management cuts in benefits and conditions. Now that they have union protection, isn't it time for them to act like union members and help protect the jobs of their brothers and sisters?