

Maintenance Discipline How Do I Get It?



Please submit any questions or comments to maintenance expert **Steve Johnson**, Operations Manager for ToolingDocs LLC, and owner of MoldTrax.

Steve has worked in this industry for more than 32 years. E-mail steve.johnson@toolingdocs.com or call (419) 281-0790.

Q: In the last issue you wrote about the type of experience a person needs to repair tools in today's busy tool room. We hired two employees about six months ago and though both appeared to be highly qualified, the "OJT effect" that you spoke of seems to have kicked in, resulting in both employees noticeably slowing down and seemingly not caring as much. How does one go about improving discipline in a maintenance environment?

A: Discipline is a nasty word to some. Many people don't even like the sound of the word. It resonates something repressive, controlling, unpleasant and harsh. It makes the hair on one's neck stand up. Our Native Americans didn't like it either. If they could have acquired a small degree of it, and worked together as a unified force instead of small bands of disconnected ideas, experts claim that the US would be about 100 years behind where we are now. But there were just too many chiefs and warriors that wanted to do things their own way, so even with large numbers and much bravado; they lost control of the very lands on which they were experts at surviving. Sounds like a few companies I've read about.

What is it?

Discipline, in the life of a tradesman, is a mental skill. It's as important — if not more so — than possessing the physical ability to make your hands do exactly what the mind tells them to.

There are several Webster definitions for it, but somewhere I came upon a good one that described discipline as "having the ability to do what is hard when it is the hardest to do".

Unfortunately, some kind of discipline is required in almost everything we do. The lack of this character trait has been the downfall of many good people, ideas, and opportunities. Why is it so hard to attain? Because it requires a skill not usually acquired until the latter stages of our lives — after we have learned too many lessons the hard way.

Ask the Experts: Steve Johnson Continued



Many U.S. companies have shut down and/or moved overseas because of the lack of discipline. Sure, politics and low wages have played a prominent role in stunting the growth of businesses large and small via unfair trade agreements, tariffs, taxes and regulations. But other factors closer to home include a lack of simple, everyday workplace discipline in performing prescribed tasks, resulting in the general diminishing perception concerning the value of shop floor trade skills. Reversing this exodus to foreign countries will not only require major political moves, but it can also be affected by a single shop floor employee simply doing his job in a more efficient, effective and disciplined manner. In the extremely expensive field of injection mold maintenance, not doing so can most definitely be the last straw.

Discipline to Do the Right Thing

For a repair technician, it is the ability to follow prescribed administrative processes such as SOP's, BOP's, work instructions, etc. that provide instruction and continuous training to perform duties in a controlled and systematic way. It's a professional approach, if you will. A conscientious, disciplined tradesman will do the right thing even if no one is watching. By operating in this manner, results are more consistent and predictable. They allow us to make smart decisions behind a bench, in turn allowing a company to optimize labor and tooling costs. The lack of a formalized, strategic and measurable plan leaves repair technicians on their own to determine how best to spend both their time (critical labor hours) and thousands of dollars of company funds (tooling).

It makes no sense to abandon a repair tech at his bench, and then expect him to efficiently and effectively control these thousands of dollars on a daily basis, one repair at a time — and we haven't even begun to consider maintenance decisions that also directly affect part quality.

Ask the Experts: Steve Johnson Continued



Motivation comes in many forms and skilled, disciplined craftsmen who take pride in their trade want to work in a system where their accomplishments are measured against a standard vs. going un-noticed or lost in the fire-fighting cultures of a typical shop.

Difficult To Detect

Discipline is hard to detect and can be difficult for some to acquire, but it is in fact what separates men from boys, or a craftsman from someone who has simply been “doing it all his life.” Typical American skilled tradesmen are by nature competitive, proud freelancers. The challenge then is how to harness and manage these individual qualities that separately have

good moments, but jointly can achieve great accomplishments.

From a hands-on perspective, discipline at the bench means performing tasks using best practice techniques, and with tools and methods learned through experience with little or no supervision. A

**UPDATE YOUR SPECS...
IN A FLASH.**



UNLOCK MOLD HISTORY

End the searching by conveniently storing valuable mold information directly on the tool:

- Store part drawings, tool drawings, and setup sheets
- Access performance history and maintenance actions

Call 1-800-269-6653 to discuss how the Cve Monitor can connect you with your production tooling.

**PROGRESSIVE
COMPONENTS**

PROCOMPS.COM/CVe

Ask the Experts: Steve Johnson Continued

disciplined craftsman performs in this manner simply because his gut tells him it is the right thing to do. He knows working in a systemized approach, though perhaps not always as interesting, will yield profitable results by reducing costly mistakes on expensive mold components that occur during the disassembly, troubleshooting, cleaning and assembly stages of repair. This goes for anything bench-related that causes production to be halted and a mold repaired before it's scheduled.

With all the American ingenuity and plastics processing technology at our disposal, many tool room supervisors and managers still lack the desire — or discipline — to create a structured and formalized maintenance road map for repair technicians to follow and for skills to be measured with. In most cases, record keeping methods actually promote work that is substandard through ambiguous, illegible, nonstandard terms and incomplete "maintenance stories" in work order systems where accountability is non-existent.

Structure Promotes Discipline

Now, with all that said, a shop's level of maintenance discipline is just as much a factor of the working environment as our individual character is that controls an internal drive towards performance excellence. A structured approach is not only necessary to achieve continuous improvement in our processes and skills but it is a means to accurately measure this improvement over time. A structured approach to maintenance provides order and accountability to common tool room tasks that are viewed subjectively by apprentices and journeyman repair personnel alike.

A "structured approach" cannot take place without accurate data metrics where part and mold defect recognition, corrective actions taken, and tooling and labor used by every repair technician are counted and monitored to gage individual performance. It has to be this way.

Acquiring/improving maintenance discipline will not only save companies thousands of manufacturing dollars, but the metrics involved will provide motivational tools that will yield higher personal standards, increased morale and a renewed dedication to the job through the knowledge that skilled bench work is recognized and appreciated by our administrative leaders.

Bottom line? Maintenance discipline is a prerequisite to the health, prosperity and long term success of any molding company — once you learn how to measure it.

Steve Johnson ToolingDocs LLC, and owner of MoldTrax.



Do You Have Question or Problem You Need Resolved?
If you have a question on
MOLD MAINTENANCE?
E-mail Steve Johnson at steve.johnson@toolingdocs.com