



# Sustainment: The Final, Critical Step in a Manufacturing Plant Turnaround

We recently spoke to an operations leader for a large manufacturing company who offered these insights on the plant turn around challenge. Keys to maintaining performance gains include staying focused on the ultimate goals, maintaining your skilled workforce and eliminating tribal knowledge.

**When turning around a struggling plant, any failures to sustain performance gains must trigger an appropriate management response.**

We talked to a number of internal and external sources when developing the recently-released TBM management briefing on [How to Quickly Turn Around an Underperforming Manufacturing Plant](#). The briefing describes the four-phase recovery process that can get a factory's performance back to where it should be in a reasonable amount of time.

One of the operations leaders who we spoke to is responsible for four plants that

collectively employ around 2,000 people. He offered some insights on plant turnaround challenges—about sustainment specifically—that we did not have space to include in the management briefing. Here's what he had to say.

## **Eyes on the Prize**

Like everyone we are still trying to figure out all of the keys to sustainment. It's largely a matter of constant follow up, and making sure people do what they say they're going to do.

In one plant we're not quite back to the performance levels where we used to be, so we continue to highlight that target. Showing what we're capable of makes sure people don't sit and rest on their laurels after we've made a little progress.

Getting back to our previous level comes down to maintaining our skilled workforce. We have a somewhat complicated process, and we lost some skilled, hourly folks who understood how that process works. We didn't have a good succession plan for them, which put us in a hole we've been digging out of. We now have some good new hires who are going to take us there, but it will take some time.

## **Tribal Knowledge Undermines Forward Progress**

We're getting more people with training and understanding how our equipment works. People do a lot of things to make equipment run, but it's not always optimal. We don't want to have any tribal knowledge. Our work instructions are maybe 80% accurate, which is good, but it needs to be 100%. My challenge is getting those resources, making sure we're spending the time and money to educate and train folks to utilize the equipment the way it was designed to run.

Today, the nose is up and we're going in the right direction. I'd love to see things go faster. There are pieces from a leadership side that need some work, but I think it's just a matter of time and getting equipment repaired and maintained to the level that it needs to be.

## **Are Any of Your Manufacturing Plants Struggling?**

As described in the new TBM management briefing, *How to Quickly Turn Around an Underperforming Manufacturing Plant*, the process starts with a performance assessment. Phase two focuses on stopping the bleeding, supporting critical customers and introducing a daily management system. The majority of the time is then spent on establishing new processes, systems and governance procedures that will support sustainment.



**David Hicks, Vice President, Maintenance Excellence Practice Leader**

David Hicks is a lean leader and long-time quality professional. He currently serves as Vice President, Consulting in addition to his client management responsibilities.



**David Pate, Vice President**

Dave Pate is an experienced business leader with previous roles in plant management, planning and lean operations. He currently serves as Vice President, introducing new clients to TBM, cultivating long-term growth with current clients and on-boarding new clients.