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Maintenance in a Recession

As businesses of all types struggle to survive, maintenance departments have been left with noticeable staffing shortages and slashed budgets. Getting by with less means finding creative ways to make the remaining staff more productive, and to make supplies go further. "The true test is to find ways of increasing productivity without reducing appearance or cleanliness standards."

The key to controlling and lowering costs lies in analyzing 3 areas: products, procedures and priorities. Identify and quantify how workers clean specifically addressing these "3P's", and areas for improvement can be quickly determined.

- **Keep Good Records-** The only way to honestly assess a program is by using a formal tracking system. Departments should identify every task performed, as well as how much time and materials each requires. Create your own tracking systems using a basic spreadsheet, or invest in software that does much of the set-up and mathematical work.
 - Production rates in a maintenance process are complicated to understand because they include many variables. The square footage of a room, the types of surfaces to be cleaned and traffic volumes can all affect a janitor's speed. The size and speed of equipment and the quality of chemicals also make a difference. Other issues include whether preventative measures (walk-off mats, for example) are used, how far the janitor must travel to dispose of trash or pick up supplies, how many breaks are allotted per shift, etc.
 - Another important benefit is to be able to calculate the time required to clean 1,000 square feet with a mop versus a ride-on scrubber, for example. "You can calculate what you spend to do a job using current equipment, and then do a calculation showing what cost savings you would procure in labor reduction if you purchase new equipment,"
 - Create reduced cleaning specifications- make decisions about critical versus non-critical areas and cleaning frequencies, i.e. how often or how thoroughly to clean an area.
 - Prioritize cleaning tasks so you know what to give up first," While high-priority areas like restrooms are typically unaffected, less-public spaces like offices may be cleaned weekly or monthly. Some managers even allow custodians to make on-the-spot decisions whether a carpet can go another day or week. A carpet that's been ignored can be restored; the reputation damage caused by filthy public spaces may be irreparable.
 - Regularly inspect and maintain equipment so it functions properly and efficiently.
 - Gut reaction is to stop spending on equipment but some expenses can pay off. For ex- replacing 14-inch vacuums with 36-inch models allows custodians to accomplish more in the same amount of time. The labor savings may pay for the machines. Armed with information, a manager may be surprised to learn that he spends more money each month to keep an out-of-date machine operational than he would spend on a new machine purchased on a payment plan or acquired through a lease.
 - Chemicals in the custodial closet should be examined and analyzed. Savings can be found in eliminating supply waste, such as choosing one product that does the job of four, or installing a chemical dispensing station to help control product usage.
 - Standardizing chemical lines has also streamlined efficiencies by reducing the number of decisions a custodian must make.
 - Micro fiber cleaning cloths, dust mops and wet mops have also proven to clean better and quicker. Micro fiber can help streamline cleaning tasks and improve cleaning times if implemented properly. This technology can also reduce chemical and water usage, minimize product replacement costs and is more effective than traditional tools in locking down harmful bacteria. Its financial benefits heavily outweigh the initial costs. The fact that this product can help meet green goals, because it requires the use of minimal chemicals, while reducing expenditures goes a long way to support its use.
 - Micro fiber can be used effectively in so many areas of the facility that one facility reduced cleaning product inventory by 60 products, saving substantial budget dollars. Uses range from the standard hard surface wet or dry wiping to polishing wood or stainless steel, removing grease from hard surfaces, dusting computer and TV screens, removing soap scum from shower fixtures, cleaning spills, wet mopping, gym floor
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cleaning, chalk and white board cleaning, restroom cleaning and sanitizing, dry dusting, damp dusting and window cleaning.” And can even be beneficial in laying floor finish.

- A roll of towels or tissue is among the least expensive things a housekeeping manager or building service contractor (BSC) must buy. Taken cumulatively, however, these simple paper products add up to a seriously expensive line item. It’s not unusual for a facility to spend one-third of its supply budget on consumables alone. Buyers also worry about quality, which affects perception and usage. “Cheap product tends to lead to over usage as the user has the tendency to use more product to compensate for the [poor quality],” There are a variety of criteria a buyer uses to evaluate towels and tissues. Among the most important factors are softness, absorption rates, waste minimization, aesthetics and price. Touch-free systems are moving from trendy to expected. Building occupants prefer these dispensers because they minimize the spread of infection. Custodians appreciate the metering capabilities, which reduce how many times a dispenser must be refilled and also reduce how much waste is left in bins and on the floor.
- Switching custodians from swing- or night-shift work to daytime and team cleaning can increase productivity. One facility was able to increase its custodians’ workload from 34,000 square feet to 40,000 when it shifted workers to days. “When they report to work in the late afternoon, they’ve already spent an entire day working.” More energy helps daytime workers, as does the ability to better see what they are cleaning.
- Conduct shift analyses to identify areas for improvement. Timesavings can be found by creating job cards that outline tasks and routines for every worker and training may be needed to teach employees how to correctly use tools or where shortcuts are acceptable.
- If staffing cuts aren’t enough, housekeeping managers can reduce some employees to part-time status, which eliminates some benefit expenses without an across-the-board cut.
- Help Is Available- Distributors can help a manager meet budgets by reviewing the department’s purchases of chemicals, supplies and equipment to find areas for reduction. They can also set up just in time ordering to reduce or eliminate the need for stockpiling. Suppliers can also provide training on best practices for product usage and identify methods to reduce waste.

“At some point, human beings reach a limit of what they can do,” Bailey says. “It’s going to be the advancement in equipment that will improve efficiencies and productivity.”

With technologies changing every day, the well-informed, well-supported in-house service provider will survive and thrive as they partner with their management team for a win-win outcome.”

Excerpted from the following articles written by Becky Mollenkamp: *The Big Squeeze - Productivity And Your Employees*

Trimming Your Budget - Pare your budget without sacrificing safety and appearance!

Towel & Tissue: On A Roll
