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Work order management: 10 hurdles to overcome

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Establishing and maintaining an effective and efficient work order management system can be very similar to running a 400 meter high-hurdle race and winning. However, where just one hurdle can cause considerable damage, it's vital to ensure that they are promptly identified and addressed. In the context of T.A. Cook's experience with clients based in North America, the following list includes the 10 largest hurdles Maintenance Managers face, as well as suggestions for how they can best be overcome.

1. Not properly writing a work notification

If notifications can't be understood or found easily, they can't be fixed. Send them back to the originator and explain why they are not fit for purpose.

2. Lack of discipline and understanding

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority: not understanding or lacking the discipline to follow a simple prioritization system is a key issue that absolutely must be addressed by Managers. Also, when a 1-2-3 priority system degenerates into having 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, then the discipline has deserted the system. Go back to basics; redefine the priority system, keeping it simple. Create a one-page visual aid and post it everywhere work notifications are created, discussed or reviewed.

3. Absence of notification gates

Not having a "gate" between notification and conversion to approval and not tracking the rate means you are wasting time: not every notification needs to be approved. If the approval rate hasn't been properly defined, too many are getting through.

4. Ignoring planning capacity

Planners have a finite planning scope each week and they need to know which work orders are the most critical: otherwise the risk of not having enough planned work to build a full schedule is high. Additionally, fail-

ing to properly plan work orders – including poor work estimates, omitting steps, tools and equipment – and not following a standard for building a complete work package creates lost time in execution.

5. Scheduling by tasks or activities instead of by work order

If scaffolding is still up all over the place after jobs are complete, this could be where the error occurs. It also increases the complexity of coordination between craft and specialty equipment such as cranes.

6. Not challenging "break-in" work and lazy scheduling

Schedule break-ins are often simply accepted, leaving managers in fire-fighting mode and ensuring that the backlog will just grow and grow. Similarly, not tracking the rate of rejection or acceptance means the schedule of planned work will never be attained. Additionally, issuing a weekly schedule and then conducting daily meetings to agree what will be worked on during the following day means that a weekly schedule won't be followed. You operate to a daily work list.

7. Absence of short-interval-control

Not employing short-interval-control during the work-day to manage and when necessary problem solve issues to keep the work flowing. Set the expectation that first line management must tour the area every 2 hours. Provide coaching to the first line to reinforce pro-active management behaviors during the short-interval-control tours.

8. Leaving finished work orders open

Not closing out work orders which are completed keeps the backlog inflated and confusing.

9. Bad documentation

Not documenting errors or omissions in work plans or packages and not getting this feedback to the right



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Planner means the packages will never get any better nor will the craft increase efficiency.

10. Poor KPI standard or relevance

Not having the right set of key performance indicators or metrics to track and review your performance against the previous hurdles or only reviewing performance monthly renders the very existence of KPIs redundant: monthly metric reviews are only marginally better than no review.

If any of the above hurdles are familiar to your organization, money is being wasted and the maintenance budget will overrun.