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Free Assets

By Paperitalo Staff

I was sitting in a beautiful meeting site the other day on the shores of Guntersville Lake in northern Alabama. It was hard to keep my mind on the subjects for the walls on one side of the room were solid windows, the length of the room and probably thirty feet high and looking out on some magnificent scenery. However, I did pick up at least one idea from noted consultants Dick Reese and Ken Hill. I'll expand on it here.

The idea is simply this: in these tough times, you are most likely sitting on a basketful of free, new, and unexploited assets. These assets may be able to make the difference in whether you make money in the coming months, indeed, whether your facility even survives.

What are they?

Studies you have bought (or sometimes been furnished for free) that outline paths you can take to save energy, save fiber and who knows what else. If your mill is like most mills, you engage consultants, sometimes for a fee, sometimes as a freebie from a supplier. These consultants produce reports, often full of useful information. Many times these reports collect dust on the shelf, ignored and not implemented.

Often the life of a consulting contract goes something like this. A problem or an idea springs up in your mill. Its genesis can be local, a customer, headquarters, makes no difference. Enthusiasm abounds as you seek, engage and work with the consultant. Then, about the time they see your mill in their rear view mirror, your management team is on to the next thing. And nothing is ever implemented, despite a significant investment in time and treasure. Soon, your team is off to slay a new dragon, without ever finishing the job with an old one. Unimplemented and long ago paid for, these recommendations are free assets, just waiting to be used.

So, where to look for these free assets? How to approach exploiting them? I recommend you start by making a big deal of it, if you are the mill manager. Announce to your morning meeting that your entire management team is embarking on a search for gold. Then, start looking. There are several obvious places to look for your unimplemented studies. Purchasing is the prime and first place to look. Have purchasing identify all the outside studies bought by your facility in the

last five years. They will know who signed the purchase orders and those people can be brought to account to pull out the studies for the whole team to review. Engineering, technical departments and process engineers are other good sources. They need to be checked to not only dredge up the studies purchasing may miss, but also because they may have been able to obtain free studies from suppliers that purchasing never saw.

Bring the studies together—make a war room where they can all be displayed and reviewed by everyone on the management team. Set a ranking criterion and post it on the wall. Then invite reviewers to scan the studies identifying impactful ideas that cost no money to implement. You can have chart paper on the walls, perhaps broken down by operating departments, where team members can write down ideas and their reference sources. Have your senior management team review all ideas, select appropriate ones, develop and execute a rapid plan of implementation.

And to put some teeth in this, I recommend you put a moratorium on hiring more consultants until you are satisfied you have fully mined this mother lode you have found (I, a consultant for nearly seventeen years, cringe when I say this, but it is absolutely the right thing to do).

If you have any success stories you wish to share along the way, please drop me an email, without revealing any confidential secrets, of course, and we will publish them as an encouragement to others.

I suspect your safety department has unimplemented recommendations, too. Unimplemented safety practices can have deadly consequences. Each safety team in your facility should earnestly dig out any and all old safety surveys and make sure they are fully implemented.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##