

“Be Impeccable with Your Word.”

Preventive Maintenance and Capital Renewal

YMCA facilities are settings for character development, instruments for growth, stages to work out our lives and stretch our capacities to live thoughtfully, responsibly and well. We attune the operation and maintenance of our facilities to their high purpose, integrated with the mission and values of the whole. Our stakeholders’ trust and commitment to mutual stewardship is shaped by the language we use to express our convictions about priorities, our work and methods. *“Be impeccable with your word”* invites us to say what we mean; mean what we say; back it up with integrity.

“Preventive maintenance” and “capital renewal” are fundamental strategies for facility management. The terms describe accepted practices and often, they are jargon more honored in the telling than in the doing. Flagrant abuse of ordinary words masks poor management discipline, erodes credibility and support.

“Prevent” what, exactly? Failure? Breakdown? And how do we define “failure”? Lights-out, dead-stop, send-everybody-home-and-close-the-doors catastrophe? Premature deterioration? Inefficient operation? Incorrect use? Unintended consequences? Inconvenience?

The standards for success, the priorities for maintenance and the allocation of skills, material and tools (including money) are not solely determined by manufacturers’ manuals for equipment or software. SchoolDude and similar work management systems can crank out stacks of orders for unnecessary or incompetent work. We have a responsibility to initiate conversation with stakeholders to arrive at agreements and understandings about the value and impact of work priorities and mutual stewardship. Technical expertise marries stakeholder needs and objectives so that maintenance does not merely prevent failure but anticipates user demands, system stress, technology limits and varying conditions of use. Perhaps “pre-emptive maintenance” is a higher aspiration?

The completion rate for scheduled PM tasks is a standard metric for maintenance performance. By prioritizing those tasks, we first define the tasks that are critical and recognize their effects on stakeholder performance. When we measure work, we measure its value, not merely its quantity. This infuses the numbers with meaning, invites critical thinking and stokes engagement with stakeholders.

The concept of capital renewal is another opportunity to make an impeccable word choice, displacing the misleading “deferred maintenance”. Timely and correct maintenance “defers” the premature replacement of capital assets. Maintenance is an investment that extends asset life and creates the option to incur capital expenditures at the last gasp of assets’ operational effectiveness, when they are either completely worn or woefully inadequate or hopelessly obsolete. Often, “deferred” maintenance is a smokescreen for shortcuts that avoid current spending and invite unintended consequences. Defer what? The cost of maintenance, the cost of replacement, the cost of neglect, the cost of disruption, the cost of dereliction? What costs do well-intended but uninformed or irresponsible cuts impose? We fully vet opportunities for savings to appreciate their costs and consequences.

Executive facility managers engage their constituents in decisions about opportunities, risk and priorities. They shape objectives, priorities, performance standards and accountability based on facts rather than assertions. They convey a vision of mutual stewardship that displaces vague and random expectations. Their impeccable words shape credibility, trust, conviction and commitment.

The first in a series of articles on Five Principles of Facility Management based on the writings of Miguel Ruiz, whose writings pose "agreements" that reconcile us to ourselves, to others and to God. The agreements are:

Be impeccable with your word.

Don't take anything personally.

Don't make assumptions.

Always do your best.

Be skeptical, but learn to listen

Don Miguel Ruiz