How a Single Decision Propelled My Company Forward

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Companies make countless decisions every day. Entrepreneurs know that one decision, or the lack of a decision, can be the difference between success and failure. One decision I made after founding my company was to develop unique, proprietary methods and procedures to standardize the way we executed our work. The processes resulting from that decision helped guarantee that everything we did was done with quality and consistency. Indeed, these methods evolved over time to earn the title “tried-and-true”, but simply deciding to build and incorporate them is what helped turn us into the global competitor we are today, as I believe they can be applied to almost any business.

The right stuff

One of my company’s areas of expertise is in plant commissioning, a complex process that involves meticulous testing at multiple stages, thus proving every component and system within a processing plant. Commissioning is a relatively small scope but an extremely crucial part of any industrial project, as it ensures the plant has been built to spec and performs its intended purpose as safely and efficiently as possible. This work is what avoids critical project delays and guarantees the stakeholders meet their goals and objectives. There are many different, overlapping

phases to building and commissioning an industrial plant, and they require close integration with separate teams, departments and vendors. Because of this, I knew it was important to establish a clear purpose and approach to our scope of work.

At the core of our mission, we address the concept of commissioning through our quality management system, which is centered around a methodology of verification and validation. This concept can be applied to almost any endeavor: You must deliver a quality product or service, and it must meet its specific, intended purpose. In the commissioning world, success means confirming a plant is ready for safe, stable operations. Additionally, assembling the "right stuff" (an expert team with the skillset, experience, knowledge and tools) is key.

At my company, we apply a simple workflow process to everything we do:

Identify > Classify > Prioritize > Plan > Schedule > Execute > Analyze > Close-Out

We also have three basic rules:

1. **Early discovery.** Take every opportunity to discover the unknown. Great effort should be given to identifying all real or potential issues as soon as possible.
2. **Details are in the engineering phase, so don't reinvent the wheel.** Work to *prove* the existing design until all your bases are covered.
3. **Report back.** Timely and accurate reporting is critical to effective communication, ensuring milestones are met and establishing a documented history. Ten minutes a day will save weeks or months on project delivery every time.

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Planning leads to quality

A plan must incorporate clear and exact methods, procedures and documentation processes to be successful. During the planning stage of commissioning, we start with the end in mind. We first define the sequence of how a facility is to be brought into service, from processing systems, energy transmission, process automation and digital systems to water management and waste control. We call each segment of this sequence a “Logical start-up unit”, or LSU.

Each LSU also contains its own set of systems and subsystems. Because of the scale of this industrial work, we developed a work package methodology that would prepare our test engineers with every drawing, document, procedure and tool they would need to do their job right for each system. The work packages also serve as an ongoing record. Once the equipment is tested and verified, it is input into the documentation system for the supervisor to validate. If there are discrepancies, these are clearly noted. This means critical issues are identified, documented, reported and corrected early. Planning leads to quality. Yes, this level of planning takes time, but having a built-in system to identify, monitor and prevent problems early on will always save you in the end.

Implement early

In commissioning, one of the first objectives must always be to build a well-integrated team. We need to work with the design engineers, safety, construction, procurement and operations teams, plus equipment manufacturers, vendors and integrators. With so many moving parts, documentation traceability is critical to maintenance and operations, management of change, accountability and safety. The work package methodology we use allows you to monitor and manage things with fact-based data. It provides a complete history of each component’s project lifecycle and ensures an effective

transfer of custody from the project to operations to become the baseline reference for asset management throughout the life of the facility. We can report progress and any issues in real-time, as uninformed decisions can lead to accidents, injuries and ultimately loss of production.

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The big picture

We are in a period of industrial advancement and societal transformation – it is important to acknowledge your purpose and the impacts of your work every day. Most people drive by industrial plants and mining facilities and do not think about the amount of work that goes into them. At the end of the day, these facilities support every function of modern society. Even the tiniest details count. But, if you can connect your business plan with quality management, sustainability and innovative technologies, you will not only help secure the future of your business but the future of humankind.

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