

TRANSFORMING MAINTENANCE WITH CULTURE AND SYSTEMS AT WOODS GROUP



**THE WOODS WAY- GROW REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA BY FEEDING THE WORLD.**

Written by Brad Jeavons, Co-Author of "Leading Excellence" with Chris Butterworth and Stephen Dargan.

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Background

The Woods Group, led by Tom Woods, is a driving force in regional Australian manufacturing, focusing on value-added grain products. Based in Goondiwindi, Queensland, the company plays a crucial role in the local economy by creating jobs, developing skills, and enhancing the region's manufacturing capacity. However, as the business grew, it faced significant maintenance challenges, including unplanned breakdowns, dependency on individual expertise, and inefficiencies in capacity utilisation.

Considering the initial challenges, Tom Woods believes, "Maintenance is one of those things you underestimate when starting a business. Equipment starts new and runs well, but if you don't maintain it properly over time, you lose capacity, face breakdowns, and ultimately struggle to keep the plant running efficiently."

The Challenge

Woods Group encountered:

- Reactive Maintenance Practices: A reactive approach led to unpredictable equipment failures and costly downtimes.
- Knowledge Dependency: Operations depended heavily on the expertise of individual staff, creating vulnerabilities when they left.
- Inefficiency in Equipment Utilisation: Reduced capacity in a single machine affected the entire production process.
- Lack of Systems: The absence of a structured maintenance framework hindered operational efficiency.

Tom emphasises, “Without a system to manage maintenance, you rely on individual skills. If someone with critical knowledge leaves, the whole place can fall apart.”

The Solution

To address these challenges, Tom Woods and his team implemented a holistic strategy, combining Predictive Maintenance (PdM) and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) underpinned by strong cultural values. This is also known as Total Productive and Predictive Maintenance (TPPM).

Specifically, they took the following steps in their transformation:

1. Implemented MEX Maintenance Software.

Woods Group adopted MEX, a maintenance management system, and focused on:

- Asset Identification and Categorisation: Every machine was entered into the system with standardised identifiers.
- Preventive Maintenance Programs: Tailored schedules ensured that machines were serviced proactively, reducing breakdowns.
- Data-Driven Decision Making: Real-time tracking of maintenance activities allowed teams to measure the balance between preventive and reactive tasks.

Tom notes, “The real work is in setting the system up properly so that the people using it can follow it effectively. If it’s not set up right, it’s not much use.”

2. Built a Maintenance-Focused Culture.

- Daily Huddles: Teams conducted maintenance huddles to review performance metrics and align on shared goals.
- Values-Driven Collaboration: Woods Group emphasised teamwork and respect, ensuring seamless cooperation between operations and maintenance.
- Focus on Proactivity: Teams measured and rewarded preventive actions, shifting the mindset from reactive to proactive maintenance.

“Maintenance is everything,” Tom states. “Breakdowns happen, but how you handle them and get the plant running again makes all the difference. It’s about teamwork, respect, and being proactive, not reactive.”

3. Streamlined Communication.

Recognising the importance of efficient communication, the team adopted a group texting system to quickly address urgent issues, ensuring faster resolution and minimising downtime.

Tom explains, “A lot of time gets wasted waiting for someone to call back or respond. By using group texts, we can communicate instantly, solve issues faster, and eliminate frustration.”

4. Lead from the Front.

Tom and his leadership team actively participated in daily huddles and on-site activities to instil a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

<https://www.enterpriseexcellencegroup.com.au>

Results

The integration of TPPM and total predictive and productive maintenance at Woods Group delivered outstanding results that rippled across multiple facets of the organisation, from operational efficiency to workforce engagement and business growth.

1. Enhanced Equipment Reliability and Uptime

One of the most immediate benefits was the reduction in equipment breakdowns and unplanned downtime. By transitioning to a proactive maintenance approach, the team could predict and address issues before they escalated. This improved reliability ensured that production lines ran more smoothly, avoiding costly disruptions.

Tom Woods explains, “When one machine in the plant doesn’t perform, the whole system suffers. Now we’re getting ahead of the curve by identifying and fixing issues early, which keeps the plant running at full capacity.”

Results

2. Increased Capacity and Productivity

Optimised maintenance practices enabled equipment to operate closer to its original design capacity. Woods Group could meet growing demand without requiring significant capital investments in additional machinery.

Tom noted, “Keeping equipment performing at its original standard is critical. Even a small drop in capacity on one piece of equipment can have a big impact on the whole system. Now we’ve got the systems in place to ensure every asset operates as intended.”

3. Significant Cost Savings

The focus on preventive maintenance helped reduce maintenance costs. These savings came from:

- Lower emergency repair costs.
- Reduced reliance on expensive external contractors.
- Optimised inventory management for spare parts, minimising waste and delays.

By accurately tracking asset data in the MEX software, Woods Group also avoided over-maintenance, ensuring that resources were allocated efficiently.

Results

4. Improved Workforce Integration and Retention

Standardising maintenance practices and building robust systems enabled the company to attract and integrate skilled workers, including international recruits. New hires were able to quickly adapt to the "Woods Way" of doing things, reducing onboarding times and improving efficiency.

Tom explains, "We've created a system that's not reliant on one person's expertise. Now, when new staff join, they can slot into the process seamlessly and make an impact from day one."

This approach also fostered employee engagement. Maintenance teams took pride in their contributions, with daily huddles providing a platform to celebrate successes, address challenges, and stay aligned on goals.

Results

5. Strengthened Team Culture

The emphasis on culture as part of the maintenance transformation proved pivotal. Maintenance teams worked closely with operations staff, creating a unified approach to tackling challenges and driving performance. Values such as respect, teamwork, and accountability became central to the company's maintenance philosophy.

“Maintenance isn’t just about fixing machines—it’s about people. When teams respect each other and work together, it creates a great place to work. That positivity reflects in the results,” said Tom.

6. Data-Driven Decision Making

The use of real-time data tracking in the MEX system gave Woods Group valuable insights into maintenance trends and opportunities for improvement. Key metrics, such as the ratio of preventive and reactive maintenance, became leading indicators of success.

Tom emphasises, “We measure ourselves on critical metrics like spare parts usage, time spent on breakdowns versus preventive tasks, and how quickly we get the plant back up after a fault. These numbers help us stay proactive and accountable.”

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Results

7. Empowerment and Leadership Development

The leadership team's hands-on involvement in daily maintenance huddles set an example for employees at all levels. This leadership style fostered a sense of empowerment, encouraging teams to take ownership of their roles and think critically about improving processes.

“By leading from the front and participating in the huddles, we’ve shown that we’re invested in their success. That’s been key to building trust and commitment across the team,” Tom shares.

8. Community and Business Growth

As a key employer in Goondiwindi and surrounding regions, Woods Group's success contributed to broader community development. The improvements in operational efficiency enabled the company to scale its production and support regional economic growth.

Tom remarks, “This isn’t just about our business—it’s about what we can do for the community. By creating jobs and developing skills, we’re helping to build a stronger future for regional Australia.”

Conclusion

Under Tom Woods' leadership, the Woods Group transformed its maintenance practices by combining predictive technologies with a strong cultural foundation. The results not only improved operational efficiency but also strengthened the company's role as a leader in regional manufacturing, driving growth and innovation in Australia's agricultural sector.

Tom summed it up best: “This isn’t just a feel-good exercise—it’s a necessity for running a sustainable business. When people see the company grow and themselves grow with it, it creates something truly special.”



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