Milton Reid
Welcoming NAFA's New President

Plus
- How are Hybrids Holding up in Fleets?
- NAFA's 2002 Annual Report
Milton Reid

Give Teams the Power to Succeed

You could say Milton Reid has been in management since the tender age of 13. Home on the weekends from boarding school, he worked for his parents' company, which hauled sugar cane from estates in his native Jamaica. He spent time driving in the cane fields and supervised workers loading the trucks. It was there that he began developing his idea of how management should be practiced.

Reid believes in inclusion, in teamwork, in self-motivation. Most importantly, he believes these ideas bear fruit only when you step out from behind the clichés. "Lip service doesn't work; you have to give people the opportunity to feel they are empowered."

Reid has put these concepts to work in his maintenance facilities. Personnel are assembled in teams of six to nine members, and each group supports a particular city department. The teams consist of technicians with varying skills and experience that as a unit are capable of maintaining the vehicles used by that department.

In his opinion, the best way to manage people is to give them the resources and knowledge they need to do a job, and then to get out of their way.

Reid spent two years teaching all of his technicians teamwork skills, things like showing respect for the ideas of fellow members, developing agendas, and running efficient meetings. Each team meets monthly and each technician serves time during the year as his group's leader. The discussions might include brainstorming solutions on specific projects, reviewing processes and procedures, addressing individual team issues, and developing input for an assignment. Another member of the fleet department facilitates the meetings, though he's there to ensure meetings run smoothly and not to offer input.

This approach was tried for two years at one of the city's two maintenance facilities, and proved so successful that it was expanded across the board. Today, two levels of management have been eliminated; these self-directed teams report their recommendations directly to the operations manager. The technicians' performance is evaluated based on productivity - how many hours are billed in relation to how many hours of work were available from each mechanic. Monthly performance statistics are posted, and technicians are subject to individual annual reviews.

Reid calls the teams his greatest success in management because so many good things have come from them. Union grievances have been eliminated, customer service has improved and, possibly most importantly, the technicians have come to demonstrate real pride in their work.

"They know they're the ones making the decisions, that they are important to the organization," Reid says. "They have a real interest in fixing the equipment to the very best of their knowledge."

In his 20 years as director of fleet management for the City of Gainesville, Fla., Reid has seen an increase in the emphasis from employers on financial management. "A lot of folks are coming into the field from financial disciplines, instead of coming up through the ranks."

Reid says the importance placed on financial management skills is justified but there is still an opportunity for people to advance from within the department. To get there, they'll have to recognize their limitations and pursue the education needed to fill in the gaps.

The same can be said for the business school crowd; those from a finance background who can't manage people aren't likely to succeed either. As a teenager back in Jamaica, Reid worked with people from across
"Teams are just like vehicles. You have to see what isn't working and go in and fix it."

GAINESVILLE REGIONAL AIRPORT

"As a manager, be honest and be fair, and give people opportunities."

I'm very fortunate to have some excellent employees," people who are dedicated, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their work, Milton Reid says. His team includes: Tammi Gibson and Kristy Crawford, staff assistants who handle office administration; Ken Green, the fleet analyst who handles internal billing; Nancy Liston, the fleet support services supervisor who manages external billing and oversees the fleet specialists; Dexter Martin, CAFM, a NAFA member who writes specifications, oversees environmental issues, and facilitates team meetings; and NAFA member Will Massey, CFM/CAFM, Gainesville's fleet operations manager who directs garage functions. There are four fleet support specialists who manage the parts room and act as service writers: Bobby Chesser, Albert Gronbach, Frank Seltzer and Wayne Whidden.

the social spectrum, from the sugar cane estate's top management to the unionized workers in the fields. His parents were independent contractors, and he learned early about the need to keep all the players happy.

Years later, he's on the management team negotiating with the Communication Workers of America union. They've engaged in interest-based bargaining, which identifies the essential needs of each party and seeks consensus, whereas traditional bargaining focuses on taking and defending positions that often lead to compromises that satisfy neither side.

Interest-based bargaining works, Reid says, because it lays bare the underlying motivations of each side's positions. "Once you make those lists, you find that management's interests and employees' interests are ultimately the same, and you can move forward," Reid said. So successful has this method been in Gainesville, that when a business school class came to observe a bargaining session, the students were unable to tell which side was which.

Reid draws on this concept in his daily work. "You communicate best when you put yourself in the other person's position," he says. "You're more effective, and you see a brighter picture of whatever you're doing."

"You have to make people comfortable around you. If they are comfortable, they feel free to make suggestions, to try new things."
Milton Reid: Fleet Manager By Design

First Milton Reid learned to make things. Then he learned how other people break them, and finally how to put them together again.

Reid graduated from Clarendon College, a secondary school in his native Jamaica, and Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he earned a B.S. in mechanical engineering.

He began his career here in the States with General Electric, working on the development of diesel-electric locomotives, the types you see pulling 100 car trains for the transport railroads. The job appeal to Reid because he started with steel and worked with the project all the way through testing.

After a while he headed back to Jamaica where he got his first experience with maintenance management, working with equipment in an Alcoa mining operation. “I fell in love with it,” he says.

Responsible for repairs in the field, where replacement parts aren’t always readily available, “it was a good opportunity to see where we engineers messed up.” He appreciated the challenge of making a design last as long as possible, as cheaply as possible. He credits some very talented machinists for making the repairs and improvements the circumstances demanded.

GE wanted him back, and they helped him receive permanent U.S. residency status. He worked in Erie, Pa., until he couldn’t take the cold any longer. Ironically, his next move was to Dearborn, Mich., which he insists has better weather. GE’s design environment was much different than that at his new job, designing engines at Ford Motor Co. Product design engineers focus on their individual component, with little input into what is created to go around it. Much as his management style is inclusive, so is his inclination in design. “It makes a lot more sense to me to have an overview of what is happening with the project,” he says, rather than to have “tunnel vision.”

Itching to get back into maintenance, he accepted a job with Occidental Chemical in White Springs, Fla., and later started his own consulting firm called Memcab. By this point he was living in Gainesville, and in 1984 an opportunity opened to run the city’s fleet management department.

Gainesville was the first U.S. city to completely privatize its fleet maintenance operation and Reid was hired as the contract coordinator. Looking at the contractor’s bills, Reid was convinced the job could be done in house more efficiently and less expensively. It took him a year and a half to sell the idea, but once the departments were on board, it essentially took one city commission meeting to seal the deal.

The contractor had been using the city’s existing facilities and Reid was able to rehire about 90 percent of the employees who had been doing the work. He made some policy adjustments and provided workers with additional training. The best move he made, however, was performing C maintenance routines on every vehicle in the fleet just after taking over the operation. “We suspected there were things that weren’t being done and we caught them, which saved a lot of cost down the road,” he says.

The results were overwhelming positive. “The first year after we took maintenance back in house, the quality of service went up just ridiculously, and with a big cost savings — 20 percent or so,” he recalls.

Today his two maintenance facilities operate two daily shifts with a total of 19 technicians, down from a high of 24, a number that was reduced through attrition. The maintenance operation services all city vehicles and equipment except for regional transport buses. In total that’s 1,380 primary vehicles and an additional 450 pieces of secondary equipment like trailers and pumps. He estimates the fleet size increases by 3 percent each year.

Reid’s biggest challenge is keeping labor rates down. Gainesville has a full-burdened labor rate, which means indirect charges like risk management and shop insurance are rolled into the prices billed out to other departments. Those indirect charges keep increasing. He also has very little control over the salaries of his unionized technicians.

Also on his agenda, the city will review in the next few months whether to consolidate fleet maintenance to one centralized garage.
Milton on NAFA: Online Networking Brings Answers to Your Desk

Hands down, NAFA's greatest benefit is networking. Reid cited the volume of posts on the law enforcement list serve during the second week of March as an example. "It's been very active, getting 20, 25 responses a day," he said. "In the past, do you realize how difficult it would be to get that information?"

A few years ago a fleet manager would have had to attend a conference to gather those details, at considerable expense. "Now you get all of it right at your desk."

Companies are pulling their belts tighter and tighter, and NAFA needs to help control costs for both fleet operations and the vendors who support them. The association's services must be provided in the most time- and cost-effective manner possible; the list serves are just one example of how this can be done.

At the same time, fleet managers need to make their bosses see the benefit of their NAFA membership. "Show them where you got your information, I sent March's DOE decision about fleet mandates to my boss, to show what NAFA has done and what I'm getting out of it."

Reid says the association is on the verge of making a big break-through in education.

At their February meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a list of skills NAFA believe every fleet manager must possess. The association is examining how current educational and informational offerings relate to this list, with the aim of developing new materials that address areas that haven't been explored.

"It's the start for some real dynamic educational programs. We will know what a fleet manager's core competencies are, and the gaps in their knowledge will be so easily identified. We'll know where NAFA educational development money needs to be spent," Reid said.

In the next two years Reid would like to encourage greater participation by corporate fleet managers on the national committee level. The industry segment is represented on the national Board of Trustees and on the local chapter level, and he hopes to ensure their voices are heard at this intermediate level, where many decisions about the direction of the association are made.

**NAFA LIST SERVES**

Share your ideas or post your concerns online by joining a NAFA list serve. Go to Resource Center on www.nafa.org. Click in and first subscribe to any or all of NAFA's nine public subscriptions. You'll be added to the group so at any time you can reach other "subscribers" to the specific list serve and e-mail questions and answers at your pace. List serves include law enforcement, alternate fuels, and global fleet.