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Power to The People

I grew up during the turbulent period of social upheaval and change in the sixties. Many phrases and catchwords seemed to latch on into our daily vocabulary. One of these, "power to the people," was typically defined in unique ways by a host of famous and infamous radicals. Unfortunately, I don't recall many of their interpretations of this phrase as being positive or constructive. Leaping forward four decades, perhaps we can define a meaningful interpretation of "power to the people," as it applies to the metal finishing industry. My take on it is experience and education. Let us review some factors that contribute to optimizing power to the people.

Our Most Important Asset

Simply put, it is people. Metal finishers, suppliers, and related support personnel. Without us, things wouldn't click. But, if we aren't revved up or optimized, the metal finishing process would certainly be lagging. People who care and are attentive, experience success and develop a keen awareness of and for their work. A quality job is achieved when quality time and effort are invested to see it through. People who care don't just go through the mechanics. They not only look, but see as well. It is these well caring folks who learn in many ways, by experience, asking questions, experimenting, and by making accurate assessments. The chemist senses a problem will eventually occur, based on data interpretation. The plater realizes a hazy nickel plated part is really caused by a manufacturing problem way before the part reached plating. The QC inspector senses the smudges on the finished parts occurred in handling, not in any of the tanks. Discoloration of the waste water and sudden loss of floc tip the keen waste treatment operator to an unannounced cleaner dump. These are a few examples of

real time situations that confront us every day. Our challenge is to make the right call before passing time and rejects make life miserable. People who care, people who know, and people who react appropriately, can make a big difference. No matter what we do in the industry, we can be a most important asset.

Feeding the Asset

There is an old saying that I think never ages with the passage of time. It is that "knowledge is power." Since we are the industry's most important asset, proper sustenance will keep us sharp and in the know. People who want to be an important asset usually indicate a willingness to learn and expand their horizons. There are many ways in which this is done. On the job exposure is a great experience. Get a handle on barrel and rack plating. Understand the differences and cycles between deburring and burnishing. Decide whether an oxidized or plated black is appropriate. In a given application, is cleaning by displacement or emulsion preferred. Why is the filter packed with carbon and filter aid in a specific way with related loadings? An oscilloscope is the best tool for checking AC ripple in a rectifier. Accurate troubleshooting and corrective action can be a life saver and make one an instant hero. We have two invaluable aids at our disposal. Actual involvement and the wisdom and experience of our sage industry veterans. The former beckons us either by assignment or by our willingness to take on new responsibilities. The latter encompasses the cumulative decades of practical knowledge and expertise, attained and retained, for our benefit. Ask why. Get an explanation. Make a reasonable assessment. Don't be afraid to experiment or evaluate a new process. Nothing can ever be shielded or immune to improvement. There is never a

charge for the information and experience. However, the payback can be a tidy sum. The sustenance is quite fulfilling. AESF is another excellent resource for feeding the asset.

Our society was founded as, and has always been, one based on improving our industry through education. Check this issue of *P&SF* magazine and the Web site, aesf.org, for sources. Technical information is available in hard copy and electronic media. The coverage is comprehensive, including books, lecture series, technical reports, and research articles. Many authors contribute to making this information palatable, thus feeding the asset. Suppliers invest time, effort, and capital into developing new systems and improvements to existing ones. They also provide technical training, advice, expertise, and practical workshops dealing with proprietary processes. AESF and other finishing organizations sponsor regional technical presentations, expositions, and workshops. Educational credits may be earned in many specific disciplines, such as waste treatment, plating for electronics, decorative plating, and plating chemistry. Professional designations (CEF levels) are awarded based on confirmed proficiency. Employers and management covet people who want to learn, work hard, and contribute. They are overwhelmingly pleased to invest in their people. Because, they know the positive payback never ends.

People are our most important asset. For those who desire it, there is much to learn and experience every single day. I cannot recall a boring day in this industry. There is a great deal of power ready to be tapped. Be an opportunist. Take advantage of the resources available. Remember to pass along your valued experiences to the next generation of finishers so they can also experience "power to the people." *P&SF*