7 BIGGEST GAGE MANAGEMENT MISTAKES
(& HOW TO AVOID THEM)

Everyone has a dream of creating a world-class system, no matter what their calling is. Being second best just doesn't sound great. Unfortunately, in that quest, many people get caught up in the same common mistakes. In the world of gage management, that does not change.

Fortunately, we have been able to identify the 7 most common gage management mistakes, and have provided solutions to avoid them. Do you catch yourselves as guilty of any of these?

1. Not Getting Calibration

Problem: Let's address the most troublesome mistake first - not getting calibration. It doesn't matter if you have a world class gage management program set up. If you are not routinely having your gages calibrated, there is no way to ensure that what you are producing is accurate. Plain and simple. The risk and future expenses of poor quality issues FAR outweigh the cost of an annual calibration program.

Fix: If you are making this mistake, the fix is easy. Go find an ISO 17025 Accredited calibration provider. There are many reasons why this is the right choice, but the main one is confidence. By utilizing an accredited source, you are guaranteed the quality that you would expect of an organization inspected by a third-party.

2. Improper Intervals

Problem: Hopefully, you are already getting calibration, but if so, when is the last time you put thought into your calibration intervals? If you are like most, your intervals were arbitrarily assigned as a year a long time ago. Since then, you probably simply haven't questioned it and used the line, "That's how we've always done it."

Well, the problem is, those intervals are exactly that, arbitrary. There is nothing magical that happens on the 365th that automatically throws that instrument out of calibration. In fact, there is a very good chance that piece of equipment is already out of calibration, causing you quality issues you are not even aware of yet.

Fix: There are all sorts of factors that play into how quickly a gage falls out of calibration. It is nearly impossible to predict all of these factors by just throwing a date out there. The best way to combat this is through usage analysis.

To do this, you will need to track how often each piece of equipment is being used. Over time, you will be able to determine, on average, how quickly a class of equipment (i.e. calipers, micrometers, etc.) falls out of tolerance. Once you are armed with this information, you then simply set your calibration intervals to be the arbitrary cycle assigned years ago OR the average number of uses required to knock an instrument out of tolerance, whichever comes first.

3. Not Using Tracking Software

Problem: Once your intervals are under control, the next biggest mistake is not properly tracking these calibrations. Unfortunately, too many people think they can get by with relying on calibration labels, drawers full of calibration certificates, or handwritten spreadsheets for managing this data. Even an Excel sheet will not cut it. The reason is, all of these systems are missing one key component: automatic reminders. Let's face it. You have a lot on your plate. It is very easy to forget about calibrations until it is too late.

Fix: The good news is, there are many gage management software systems available to you. All of these systems will allow you to keep your equipment organized, provide the data when you need it and keep you on top of the ball when it comes to having them recalibrated.

Many of them are paid subscriptions, requiring initial purchases and annual fees. Thankfully, many calibration labs provide a free gage management software with their services, such as Fox Valley Metrology's very own, Metrology360.

4. Manually Updating Data

Problem: Simple fact: having a strong calibration program is a huge value add for your company. However, the time you spend on this is not. Perhaps the biggest time sink that exists in this realm is manually entering data into your software program.

The unfortunate reality is that most third-party software programs have no way of directly taking in the calibration data being provided to you by your calibration provider. This means you, or one of your team members, must spend hours, if not days, entering this information in. I am sure most people would agree that manual data entry is far from a valuable task for the organization.

Fix: In order to absolve yourself of this time sink, the answer is easy - find a calibration provider that offers access to a gage management portal, in conjunction with their calibration services. The data will automatically be there for you, allowing you to spend your time focusing on projects that will make a true difference for your organization.

5. Not Having a Central Storage Location

Problem: Each year, we conduct a survey of the quality industry. One of the questions asks each respondent to list their biggest hassle in gage management. The number one response each year (by a landslide) has been "finding equipment in our facility".

In other words, the vast majority of the industry spends far too much time looking for equipment, another non-value added task. If I had to guess, I would bet you are too.

Fix: The easiest way to prevent this is by creating a central storage location. In this setup, instead of allowing the equipment to "live" wherever the end users decide, you would create a central "crib" for the equipment to stay.

This has several immediate benefits. First, you will know where the gages are when needed, dramatically reducing your time spent searching. Secondly, it will significantly increase the lifespan of the equipment, reducing your capital expenses.

6. Not Having a Checkout Process

Problem: As mentioned in Mistake #5, the number one hassle our survey respondents have is in regards to searching for their equipment. While having a central storage location is one huge step towards eliminating this, what about if the item is not in the crib? Where do you begin looking for it?

Fix: The answer to fix this problem is by tracking the usage of each piece of equipment. By requiring a process of checking out equipment, you will know exactly where to begin searching for the asset, once it is needed.

There are also some sneaky benefits from this setup as well. First off, accountability of the end user is built in. Now, they have their name attached to an asset. You better believe they will take more care of this instrument once this has happened. Secondly, you will now easily be able to track the usage data discussed in Mistake #2.

7. Not Taking Proper Care of Equipment

Problem: Unfortunately, we see an average of 7% of total expenses being allocated to repair of equipment and another 6% being allocated to replacement of that equipment. This means that over 10% of a quality department's expenses can be eliminated.
While some wear and tear is expected, this number is alarming to most quality departments (and their accounting departments).

Fix: The good news, is there is, once more, an easy fix. First off, routine maintenance (along with regular calibrations - see Mistake #1), will keep the equipment in very good shape. You can refer to the owner's manual of the equipment for how-to's on this.

Secondly, storage considerations are vital. When the equipment is not in use, it should be stored in a safe, secure place, away from any debris resulting from a manufacturing process. Additionally, be sure to keep it in a proper environment, with temperatures and humidities in the recommended ranges.

Finally, make sure all employees are trained on proper use of the equipment. The most common reason for equipment failure is through improper use. Luckily, organizations such as Fox Valley Metrology,. will often provide training on this subject.

Summary
Well, there you have it. How did you fare? Do you find yourself falling into any of these mistakes?

Don't worry, as stated, these mistakes are incredibly common. The good news is they are 100% fixable, most of the time, quite easily.

The real question is, will you carry on as you have been proceeding? Or, will you take the steps necessary to creating a world class gage management program?

The choice is yours.

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