There is an old Chinese maxim that says, “May you live in interesting times.” That should qualify as being careful what you ask for in life because you might just get it.

We’ve had quite an interesting year, haven’t we? We’ve had political challenges and economic uncertainty. We’ve had business cost increase threats and a lot of noise outside of our control in the world in which we live. We have extremely high unemployment that has led many employees to work with anxiety, and that is not a good thing. The year has truly been a challenge. There are, however, true signs that things are starting to improve.

Control What We Can

For those of you who read this column regularly, you know I like us to keep busy with those things we have control over and not worry too much about those things we don’t have control over. It just seems to make life easier that way.

So I can’t control the level of debt our governments are taking on nor the savings rate that is running around 5% compared to −0.5% for the previous 20 years. One is positive and the other is negative.

I think the same world in which we are living is the world in which our customers are living. Therefore, I would like to suggest to you that we should embark on a path that makes the lives of our customers easier in 2011. We should help our customers contain their costs and maintain their water supplies and equipment at a high level of performance.

That means we must follow a proper and regular maintenance discipline and a strong inspection program. I am a strong advocate of preventive maintenance. I am also an advocate for keeping equipment as long as is practical. Too often over the years we have replaced equipment before the expiration of its expected life. That’s a problem our society has been living with in many aspects of life for the past two or three decades. We have not used capital equipment as long as it should have been used, or could have been used.

When you sell systems, install systems, or upgrade systems, you should sign the customer up for your annual review program—your system assurance program.

The Annual Check-Up

It is very much the same thing as the annual physical. It’s something we know we should do, but how many of us actually have one? I hope you do. You know it is the right thing to do. In my training business I like to ask everyone for definitions of three simple words. What is the definition of ignorance? What is the definition of stupidity? What is the definition of insanity? They are all simple words we all know, right?

In this illustration, ignorance is not knowing what to do, stupidity is knowing what to do yet not doing it, and insanity is continuing to do what we’ve always done while expecting different results. Still pretty simple, isn’t it?

I think it’s important that we know what the right thing to do is and then we do it. So when we inspect water wells, pumping stations, water movement systems, and methods we will be able to ensure the proper condition of all systems in place. We also know that if we can catch problems before failure, we can significantly reduce the costs of repairs.

So what is going on here? We should inspect every installation once a year. We also need to maintain cost control on how much we want to charge the customer so as to be reasonable in our pricing. The key, however, is that I want us to touch each customer’s system once a year. This is the same as your annual physical. It should be done.

Talk About an Interesting Year

We’ve been through a lot and we’re still standing. Now let’s improve our customers’ lives.

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up for your annual review program—your system assurance program.

Do you do this now? If you don’t, it is a strong program to introduce to improve customer service, improve your profitability, and reduce the owning and operating costs for your customers. What part of that is wrong?

**Preventing Problems**

Another program to consider would be regular preventive maintenance. We are dealing with mechanical equipment that operates regularly and irregularly over time. There are many different aspects of these systems: electrical, mechanical, hydraulics, and others. Each of these systems requires regular maintenance, and in many cases, lubrication. How can we make sure this is being done adequately?

Think about your vehicle. We should maintain our vehicles with regularly scheduled maintenance that is defined by the manufacturer of the vehicle. Our equipment falls into the same categories as our vehicles. They will work better and last longer if they are maintained properly. This is the second program that I hope you offer to your customers. You sell peace of mind with this type of program. That is a good thing to do.

These are two simple things that we could offer to our marketplace that would make the lives of our customers easier—inspections and maintenance programs. They help reduce the owning and operating costs of capital equipment, help us enhance revenue, and improve our customer service.

Is there anything wrong with any of that? *WWJ*