



5 Work Order Habits That Instantly Improve Your CMMS Data

Most CMMS systems don't fail because of the software. They fail because the work orders going into them contain too little useful information. When technicians close jobs with "fixed" or "replaced part," the database fills with records that can't support planning, reliability analysis, or better decisions. Leadership ends up trusting gut feel and hallway conversations more than the system.

The fix is not another training program or a major process overhaul. A few disciplined habits on every work order can dramatically raise data quality in a short time. Here are five that deliver fast results.

1. Require Failure Codes

Free-text problem descriptions make grouping and trending nearly impossible. One technician writes "leaking," another writes "seal failed," and a third writes "oil on floor." The same issue appears as three different problems.

Define a short, practical list of failure or problem codes that match how your equipment actually fails. Make the code a required field before a work order can be closed. Keep the list manageable—ideally under 30 options, organized by equipment type if needed. Within a few weeks you can run a simple Pareto of top failure modes instead of guessing which assets are chronic problems.

2. Capture Actual Wrench Time Versus Response Time

Many plants only record total time on a job. That mixes travel, waiting for parts, diagnosis, and actual hands-on work into one number. The result is inflated labor estimates and poor visibility into true wrench time.

Split the time fields or add a simple note that separates response/travel time from actual wrench time. Even a rough split (for example, "45 minutes response, 1.5 hours wrench") is far more useful than a single total. Over time this data improves job estimates, helps identify delays, and supports better crew planning.

3. Document the Root Cause on Every Reactive Job

A closed work order that only says what was fixed tells you nothing about why the failure happened. Without a cause, the same problems keep returning.

Require a short root-cause note—one or two sentences—on every reactive work order. It does not need to be a formal analysis.

- "Bearing failed from lack of lubrication; grease fitting was blocked."
- "Sensor drifted after calibration was skipped last month."

- “Operator adjusted set-point outside normal limits.”

When this field is required, patterns become visible. Weekly reviews of the notes quickly highlight training gaps, missing procedures, or assets that need a better preventive strategy.

4. Attach Photos as a Standard Practice

Photos capture details that text rarely does and reduce the need for the next technician to rediscover the same issues. A picture of the failed component, the repair in progress, or the finished condition becomes a permanent record.

Make photo attachment expected on reactive jobs and on any preventive task where condition matters. Most mobile CMMS apps make this a single tap. Supervisors can spot-check recent work orders and simply request a photo when one is missing. The growing library of images speeds troubleshooting and improves procedure quality.

5. Link Work Orders to the Correct Asset Hierarchy

Work orders closed against the wrong asset—or against a generic location—destroy the value of your history. You cannot see which specific pump, motor, or conveyor is generating the most unplanned work.

Require technicians (or planners) to select the correct asset from the hierarchy before closing the job. If the hierarchy is incomplete or hard to use, fix the most critical assets first so people can find them quickly. Consistent linking is what turns individual work orders into reliable asset history.

Before and After: What Good Data Looks Like

Before (typical incomplete close-out): Asset: Pump Area | Description: Fixed leak | Labor: 3 hours | Notes: Replaced seal

After (same job with the five habits): Asset: Centrifugal Pump CP-204 | Failure Code: Seal Failure – Mechanical | Labor: 0.5 hr response / 1.5 hr wrench | Root Cause: Seal failed due to dry running; inlet valve found partially closed. | Photos attached. | Notes: Cleared blocked grease fitting and verified lubrication schedule.

The first record tells you almost nothing useful. The second supports a failure Pareto, better job estimates, a targeted procedure update, and a clear history for the next person who works on CP-204.

These five habits do not require new software or a major project. They require consistent expectation and light supervisory reinforcement for the first 30–60 days. Once the data is complete and consistent, your CMMS stops being a filing cabinet and starts becoming a tool that actually improves reliability and planning.

Which of these five habits would give you the biggest improvement in your current CMMS data?