

# Management Ideas



FOR STILL BETTER

RESULTS

RELATIONS

REPUTATION

a monthly newsletter to key executive-leaders  
on practices, possibilities and ideas generally  
for stepped up performance

edited by

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on problem-solving and creative ideas

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### 3492 THE BIG, BIG PICTURE:

Two unusual books have been recently published. They are:

\* **TURNING THE CENTURY:** Personal and Organizational Strategies for your Changed World by Robert Theobald (Pp 235 Knowledge Systems Inc. \$12.95)

\* **HOW TO SAVE OUR COUNTRY:** A Nonpartisan Vision for Change by Mike Szilagyi (Pp.235, Pallas Press \$17.95).

Both the authors are concerned citizens - of the emerging world. Unlike many others who specialize only in chargesheeting the powers that be, these two secular prophets', both immigrants to USA from Europe, one a futurist and the other a scientist, are courageous realists and they describe in fair detail pragmatic strategies. Dr. Theobald emphasises the compulsion for "A Compassionate Era" and Dr. Szilagyi pleads for assertive, positive change in all areas that affect Man's quality of life.

The books deserve to be reprinted in India for wide circulation and discussion. Better still, they may get translated and serialized in language papers.

As researchers of ideas, we keep asking: Are they useful? Are they significant? Are they relevant? The very questions readers will be asking.

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TESTING  
NEW IDEAS

We can have more detailed questions applicable to *our* organization. For example:

The U.S Navy has a ten-point checklist for pretesting ideas to make sure you do not waste time putting unworkable ones into practice. Here are some questions to ask yourself to see if your ideas will measure up:

1. Will the idea increase production or improve quality?
2. Is this a more efficient way to utilize people than what is being done currently?
3. Will this plan improve operations, maintenance, or construction?
4. Is this plan--if it involves equipment--an improvement over the present equipment?
5. Does this improve safety?
6. Does this idea reduce waste?
7. Does it eliminate unnecessary work?
8. Does the idea reduce costs?
9. Does the plan improve present office methods?
10. Will it improve working conditions?

*In the accompanying article (from N.Y. Times) Susan Fishman Orlins describes her experience with Japan Airlines and United Airlines. We too have comparable experience in India. The hope is the airlines and others will level up. All that is needed is the will to serve — and survive.*

3494  
IF JAPAN CAN  
WHY CAN'T we:

When a United Airlines flight to Tokyo turned out to be fully booked some months ago, I reserved seats for myself and my children on Japan Airlines. Talk about friendly skies! Returning to New York on United, I realized that auto makers are not the only ones who could learn from Japan.

Attention to detail was evident from the moment my three daughters and I checked in for J.A.L's Big Apple Express. Even before processing our baggage, the agent clipped a Family Service badge on each of us and introduced our escort, whose job it was to accompany us to the plane.

While stuffing our excessive hand luggage in the Executive Class overhead compartment, I mentally saluted the designer who had placed mirrors inside the bin doors to reflect their contents. The flight attendants had already served us drinks. Each one had asked the children their names, then walked away reciting them as though memorizing "Hamlet" for 10th-grade English. Throughout the flight, they returned often with juice refills. We never had to ask.

Each time I approached the lavatory, a flight attendant was standing there, but gestured for me to go first. Each time, the basin was spotless and the toilet paper had a folded point. Finally, I realized that the attendant had not been waiting to use the bathroom, but to clean it after each use.

Ready for sleep, I put on the stereo headset that had a feature for reducing sounds, both from engines and children. I coughed, and the flight attendant brought me a honeycomb filter to hang under my nose. "To purify the air," she explained. The eye mask from my complimentary silk amenity kit completed the ensemble.

We arrived relaxed and looking forward to being in a place where good service is taken for granted. I worried only that we had already experienced the highlight of our trip.

Nearly two weeks later, with no one but a thoughtful passenger to help us, we mounted the metal steps to board United for the return flight.

"Welcome abroad Connoisseur Class! We are confident that the dedication of our personnel will make your journey a most memorable and enjoyable experience," the menu said.

When I went to the lavatory, however, not only were there no points on the toilet paper, but a new roll had been stuffed onto the holder and I had to separate the first sheet to get it started. Three hours later, wet newspaper littered the floor, used tissues garnished the dirty sink and soiled towels peeked out from the overflowing trash receptacle.

The bathroom was a minor irritation compared with the service. After I rang for help and no one responded, I asked a passing flight attendant if someone could remove my tray. "Yes", she said, continuing on empty-handed. Finally, I set the dishes in the aisle. A crew member materialized and whisked them away.

Later I got up to ask for straws, knowing no one would answer the call button. I arrived at the food station just as the flight attendant was poised to pop a Godiva chocolate into his open mouth. His hand stopped in midair. He said he'd search for the straws, which he delivered 10 minutes later.

My oldest daughter finished a can of juice and wanted another. "Mom, you ask," she said.

"Drink some water," I told her. I couldn't bear to see the crew roll their eyes again.

When we landed in New York, I had to stand on the seat to peek inside the overhead bin -- no mirrors. The flight attendants watched, motionless, as I struggled off the plane with backpacks, tote bags and three sleepy children. I longed for the J.A.L. escort who had helped carry my kids and our luggage through immigration, baggage claim and customs when we landed in Asia.

Japan Airlines lost money last year. Having decided to fly J.A.L. the next time we go to Asia, I called to ask if the airline would be cutting back on service or amenities. "That would be totally counterproductive," the representative replied.

I called United to ask for the ratio of attendants to passengers and to suggest that the carrier's executives take their own trans-Pacific flight incognito and compare it with J.A.L.'s. A receptionist took my number, but no one called me back.

*IAC may raise its fares 100%. That will not reduce our growing and incessant travel; and the accompanying stress. We will do well to learn from researchers.*

*Anne Scheck writes as follows in the Investor's Business Daily:*

When you travel you feel like a cross between a night owl and a lark -- up early and unable to wind down for a good night's sleep.

But if you're like most weary but wide-awake travelers, you've taken the wrong road to rest, a probable victim of your own unwitting, sleep-disrupting behaviors. Attributing sleep problems to jet lag instead of late-night, last minute packing and preparation, for instance, is a common mistake.

Here are a few recommendations to help you from making others:

[ ] **Leave the medicine cabinet at home.** Contrary to common public perception, many cold remedies don't result in drowsiness but do quite the opposite, and virtually ensure a wake-up call. Decongestants often arouse the system, while some pain relievers exert the same effect, notes Dr. Frisca Yan-Go, director of the UCLA Sleep Disorders Center in Los Angeles.

What about over-the-counter sleeping tablets, as easy to buy and take as aspirin? Practically every medication has side effects, and they should not be seen as more than a temporary solution. It's imperative to get to the root cause of a chronic sleep problem, she stresses.

[ ] **Stay away from stimulants.** You probably already know not to drink a cup of coffee prior to retiring. But what about that chocolate mint the hotel staff graciously places bedside before turning down the covers?

**3495  
HOW TO  
MANAGE  
TRAVEL  
STRESS:**

It's loaded with caffeine. The same probably can be said for much of the room's mini-bar stock, from soft drinks to some of the liqueurs. And certain supposedly soothing herbal teas have eye-opening compounds as well, Dr. Yan-Go points out.

[ ] **Postpone muscle-building exercise.** Most experts agree that a little physical activity can pave the way for a good night's sleep. The trick is to go light on the exertion. A strenuous workout should be done a minimum of three hours before bedtime.

To keep the exercise a gentle stretch and a "bromide" for sleep, don't push it past the point in which the pull on the muscles is apparent. A feeling of pressure at the joints is a signal the regimen is going a bit too far for sleep preparation, says Carl Foster, director of cardiac rehabilitation at the Milwaukee Heart Institute. He recommends 30 minutes of leisurely walking.

[ ] **Don't read work-related material before bed.** Scientific accounts of insomnia are filled with anecdotes illustrating the sleep-disturbing effects of this habit.

Instead, try the "boring book routine," suggests Dr. Gerald Keller, a family physician from Mandeville, La., who travels frequently. He suggests picking a book deemed by critics to be important but lackluster, and in no time "it will fall out of your hands," and you will be nearly comatose from the effort. "It's practically guaranteed."

"The worst thing in the world is to go to bed and try to force the onset of sleep," he added. "The more you work at it, the more restless you become."

But there are some healthful ways to promote sleep:

[ ] **Try eating foods high in tryptophan.** This compound, an amino acid, got a bad reputation when it was on the market in tablet form. But in its natural state, it has been one of nature's most successful sleep inducers.

A warm glass of milk, a centuries-old treatment for sleeplessness, is relatively rich in tryptophan and "is sometimes helpful," affirms Dr. Samuel Potolicchio, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Georgetown University.

Tuna fish, soybeans and turkey also have tryptophan. For some people, a light snack containing one of these foods helps set the stage for slumber.

Melatonin, a natural hormone, is being marketed for the same purpose. Sold primarily through health-food stores, early studies suggest it's effective in quickly readjusting out-of-sync biorhythms for some people, although "the final word isn't in," Dr. Potolicchio observed.

[ ] **Listen to soft music.** Easy-listening music has a calming effect, a fact established in several studies that documented lower blood-pressure readings and slower heart rates among the anxiety ridden, from test-taking college students to pre-operative surgical patients. In one investigation, music was found to be more than a relaxant -- it actually gave those in the study a psychological lift.

[ ] **Try catching some rays.** Experts advise gearing sleeping and meal time to the expected time change prior to departure. Don't succumb to sleep until the correct time in the new time zone. As an alternative, go get some sun.

Exposure to light can help exhausted travelers reset their biologic clocks and get the right kind of rest, Peter Hauri, director of the Mayo Clinic Insomnia Research and Treatment Program, advises in the book "No More Sleepless Nights."

On the first day, "go outside -- even if you are tired -- and walk, sit in the park, or eat at a sidewalk cafe and soak up as much sunshine as possible," he writes. By the third day, your body clock should be set to local time.

[ ] **Screen out irritating noise.** A change of scenery means a different, often irksome auditory environment. There are products that screen out that background drone without cancelling out more pleasant sounds.

*What is new, many ask. Especially when that new has helped someone to prosper. What works in one place may or may not work. We cannot be totally carried away by success stories. We should see the seamier side as well. In the accompanying article by Peter B. Scott-Morgan in Boston Business Journal, the 'other' side of re-engineering is examined.*

3496  
RE-ENGINEE-  
RING:

By now everyone has heard about business process reengineering, the latest radical approach to improve business performance. According to the theory, companies that streamline complex activities straddling several departments can expect massive improvements in productivity at all levels.

From talking to hundreds of top managers around the country, it's apparent that about 80 percent of reengineering efforts produce little more than frustration. The continuing high profile of this methodology, often requiring the use of outside consultants, has made it doubly dangerous for executives to admit that reengineering is not working in their organization.

Arthur D. Little recently surveyed 250 U.S. companies and found that only 17 percent were truly satisfied with their current change initiative, while nearly 70 percent were experiencing unanticipated problems and side effects. For all this, more than 80 percent of these companies anticipated another major corporate change within the next few years. The rationale seems to be, if this magic bullet won't work, perhaps the next one will.

Executives are frustrated with change programs because every initiative, especially reengineering, looks wonderful on paper.

The problems seem to enter the picture when company leaders begin to implement the program--the same point at which common sense goes out the door. Why is this so? Reengineering and other change efforts focus on the formal, official aspects of a company--the written rules. Written rules include everything from strategy and policies to procedures and reward systems. At a computer company entering a new phase of production, a written rule might be, "Promote personal computers over mainframes."

Unwritten rules are the sensible coping skills in an organization the ways to be street smart, to survive and thrive. They are influenced by factors such as national and local culture, economic climate, legislation, regulation, and people's personal agendas--all factors out of a company's control. These factors reinforce, undermine and twist the written rules become a parallel set of practices that drive day-to-day company behavior.

In that computer company, the economic gain and personal prestige of selling mainframe computers might produce the unwritten rule, "Give lip service to PCs, but seek out the big mainframe sales." Unwritten rules can have unintended side effects that act to undermine change initiatives, including reengineering.

A consumer products company wanted to improve product development. Management decided that cross-functional cooperation was key to its success, so it implemented a large-scale reengineering programme to encourage collaboration and thereby generate better product ideas faster. The written rules the company drafted were clear:

- \* To become a top manager in product development, acquire breadth of experience.
- \* Top performers in product development will receive accelerated promotions.
- \* The chief measure of product development performance is profit and loss.

Everyone was enthusiastic, and the program seemed to make perfect sense, but two years later the company had to admit the program was a failure.

The company was running the new program strictly by the written rules. When managers there were interviewed, the unwritten rules for advancement became apparent:

- \* Since one of the primary motivators in the company was career advancement, managers job-hopped quickly and called that breadth of experience.
- \* Since top performers got promotions from immediate superiors, managers tried to stand out from the crowd and duck association with failure.
- \* Since P&Ls were the chief measure of performance, managers only looked after their own division's turf.

These areas reflect three sets of variables every company must analyze in mastering its unwritten rules: motivators, what is important to employee performance; enablers, who is important in rewarding performance; and triggers, how a company rewards or penalizes performance.

Now the program's results--chronic short-term thinking, abysmal lead times on new products and uninspired product ideas--made perfect sense. Because the company hadn't analyzed its unwritten rules, it kept tinkering with the change program instead of looking at the motivators, enablers and triggers employees actually operated under every day to move up the corporate ladder. Once it realigned the written rules--what employees received, who gave it to them and how they received it--to match new reengineering goals, product development soared.

Analyzing unwritten rules can release many untapped benefits of change programs that were deemed partial failures and lie fossilized within American companies. Having suffered the financial and organizational pain of implementing programs, companies owe it to themselves to clear up the interference of unwritten rules and enjoy a bit more of the gain.

All managers implicitly know unwritten rules exist, yet most deny their validity in one of several ways:

\* "Written and unwritten rules are practically indistinguishable". (But try getting onto a Boston rotary by only following the instructions in the driving manual. The unwritten rule is to proceed without eye contact.)

\* "Grasping unwritten rules is a matter of good intuition." (This may be so at one level, but unwritten rules change constantly, and the intuition one builds while rising in an organization may soon become outdated. One CEO lauded his powers of intuition six months before his company went bankrupt.)

\* "Unwritten rules will disappear if you push the program through." (The results of this tactic are always destructive. When change contravenes a company's unwritten rules, the conflict merely gets forced underground and festers there.)

Mastering unwritten rules should become the core management skill of the '90s. Even in companies where reengineering has been deemed successful, analyzing unwritten rules could further enhance performance. Moreover, in companies that reengineer with a crisis mentality, lack of mastery over unwritten rules will probably come back to haunt them later.

Before jumping on the reengineering bandwagon, take a look at the unwritten rules on the game. Unless a company has mastered them, when it bets on reengineering, it is likely to lose.

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