

OEE, Inc.

*Find Efficiency in
Management Structure
And Internal Process*

**Jesse W. Brogan
Proprietor**

**Brought to you by
THE MANAGEMENT UPGRADE SHOP**

OEE, Inc

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The Management Upgrade Shop is a corporation with the purpose of promoting the development and use of the science of management. This includes training industrial engineers in the technical aspects of the subject, and training managers in general use, supporting their individual and artistic applications.

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Foreword: OEE, Inc.

OEE, Inc. is a real corporate entity with potentials such as are indicated in this work. My business is not currently performing management consulting, as its products are more general in scope, and better suited to publication than one-client-at-a-time presentations.

I am the principle officer of OEE Inc., doing business as The Management Upgrade Shop. It has been in existence since January 1993, when my early efficiency studies on the structure and operation of management started to come into a coherent focus. This was when the first management engineering products were developed.

OEE, Inc. is an S-type corporation, a vehicle wholly owned and operated by the Brogan family. It was initiated to promote and do business based on original efficiency engineering work applied to management structures and operations. It was initiated to market management training and products.

The original corporate name was a contraction from the name originally applied to this general area of expertise, Organizational Efficiency Engineering. The first product was a fairly complete computer aided training program for macro-applications. It was well before its time, being general training for senior managers who desired to make their subordinate organizations operate more efficiently and effectively by what they were personally able to accomplish. The need was there, but not the market.

Another direction was indicated for presentation, the teaching seminar. This faced the challenge of extreme novelty. The OEE principles may not have been new in themselves, but they were not in accord with past or then current management-improvement directions. They were rather applications of good management in new and very different directions. As such, some form of coherent management support was necessary for getting the basic concepts of OEE before the management public. This fiction work was one result of the ongoing effort to make presentation. It was originally prepared as general advertising material for OEE. It was copyrighted in its original and somewhat abbreviated form, but was not further published until 2003

Continued work on the basic science of management lead to more directed products. These addressed potentials for more limited studies that were easier to present. The concept of situs was developed, and a full book-length text, The Senior Manager's Toolbox, was prepared to demonstrate and teach local application of the principles of OEE to a senior manager.

It was in 1999 that the corporate name, The Management Upgrade Shop, was selected to be more appealing to potential customers, and more descriptive of what the Corporation was to accomplish.

On review of this situs-based "Toolbox" by a publisher, the work was further broken into a series of works, to be published in four parts. These now form the Management Science Series.

The first is The Cure for Common Management, addressing the stress that results from a failure to perform effective senior management, along with the tools to apply management to relieve the stress.

The second is Harnessing the Technology Demon, arranging benefits from assuming effective management over technology, an area where remarkable problems are well recognized, even if not well understood.

The third is Mastering the People Game, which raises new potentials for managing a workforce. It addresses advantages from developing and using contract labor, with benefits in handling employment as well.

The fourth and most comprehensive member of this series is The Senior Manager's Toolbox. It was rewritten to generalize the lessons of the earlier works, and to give form and substance to many of the concepts and ideas that form the technical basis of management engineering.

This final work, OEE, Inc. is fiction, and addresses situs management, the application of scientific management principles to a recognized authority area.

The two main characters in this fiction are both named for me, Jesse William Brogan. I am married to Charlene, who is, of course, also an officer of OEE, Inc.

OEE, Inc. is, in this sense, a real entity with potential to actually pursue the business as described. The application is fiction, as are the characters; though they do have some necessary parallels with the author.

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CHAPTER ONE: EXCEPTIONAL REVERSALS

It was cold outside. It was most uncomfortably cold. The winter was wearing on us, and Bill and I were very much looking forward to a time in the sun.

There was a steady tapping from Charlene's desk as she worked on replies. The short days seemed to bother her even more than Bill or I. She put more effort on paperwork than telephone, as the office was simply home base for a business that was largely on the road. We spent so much time on assignment as workers that most people learned not to expect to get to us by phone. For the most part, OEE, Inc. answered letters, and Charlene produced them.

There were some very good perks to having a unique consulting business. One was an ability to find customers that were generally to our liking. In our immediate situation that meant looking for someone who would pay us to go where it was warm and sunny. Since it was the first time in the office for over a week, we had many options. There were several jobs that we had put on hold, and a pile of new correspondence that Charlene had passed along.

Somewhat unusually, Bill and I worked our way into the pile together. We found and settled on the Gravely Boilers Company as a good opportunity. It had warm Southern atmosphere and a problem with efficiency in its management system. The letter told us all that was necessary to indicate that it had good potential as a job that would respond well to our special attention.

Dear Mr. Brogan,

I am interested in talking with you relative to the amount of work being performed by managers within my management system. I have established the following:

a. I used your management efficiency measuring system to establish that each person in my management system supports only 2.2 people performing my conversion process. I do not find this to be an acceptable managerial efficiency.

b. General efficiency analysis has shown that my management subordinates are not able to perform all work asked of them within normal workdays. I am regularly expending on overtime by managers and internal support people. Again, this is unacceptable.

c. By spot check, managerial duties assigned have been based on valid work requirements. All requirements were properly placed and directed to needs addressed at higher management levels.

Yours truly,

John R. Gravely, Jr.

From his letter, John Gravely seemed to be a very reasonable sort of person. He also had a deep southern accent that spoke of plantations and cotton. That in itself seemed to bode well for us.

I know about his voice because I called the number myself, and was connected immediately with Mr. Gravely. The secretary who answered apparently had our names, and we were passed through without further need to identify ourselves.

John Gravely was not a man to waste our time, or his own, on small talk. He cut immediately to the chase. It appeared that John was the son of the founder of the business, and had largely continued the managerial practices of his father. What worked for John Gravely senior was becoming a problem for his son.

The potential was obviously there. I asked if the business had grown substantially since the time of his father, and he proudly noted that it was three times the size that it had been when he assumed control.

That was enough to identify the initial potential for our special services.

I noted the same to Mr. Gravely, and that we would expect to not only reduce the amount of work being performed in his management system, but to help him with prioritizing what work remained.

I gave him the usual terms as to per diem and travel expenses, and indicated that our time on site would be unlikely to go beyond two days, including the out-briefing. He seemed surprised that I could make such a statement, but was certainly willing to give us a chance

to do as I proposed, especially as I made payment contingent on his satisfaction that I had addressed his problem successfully. Charlene handled the rest for us, and I signed off the Faxed contract less than thirty minutes later.

Charlene didn't miss much. She noted again that the Stevens Company was still trying to get our attention and probably had greater potential. She also noted, that they were located in Northern Montana, where the temperature had not gotten above freezing for the last three weeks.

I sympathized that our office was also in a colder part of the country, but reminded her that her presence was necessary to keep the office going while we were attending to earning the business income.

I didn't much care for the look I got for that one. She just pegged us with, *"You get to pack your swim suit, and I get to pay the heating bill?"*

Not having an answer, I just smiled. Charlene left to her own desk to arrange our flight; and in spite of her attitude toward the benefits of our position, it was a non-stop.

The next day saw us landing in warmth and sunshine, and it felt good. We immediately checked into a motel for long enough to give us a few extra days to take in the scenery. We checked back in to let Charlene know that we were in place and had the rental car, and to thank her for her efforts.

Later that afternoon we drove over to meet our client. The Gravely plant was ugly and utilitarian. It had a smell about it that was probably not appreciated by the neighbors, and it had no skirting trees or vegetation. It had obviously been there for longer than the neighborhood that now ringed it, or they would have complained enough to force a change.

For all we know, they could be complaining even though the plant had obviously been there first. Mr. Gravely said it had grown substantially.

Just beyond a quiet and peaceful reception area, the administrative offices were a beehive of activity. Computers were everywhere, and all seemed to be spitting out some sort of printed information.

I looked over at Bill and saw that he had picked up the same impression. I told him softly, *"This one shouldn't take too long."*

He told me in return, *“Want to bet that it's not reverse exception management?”*

I responded, *“I might risk a quarter against your ten.”*

We had a laugh over that, as the situation was pretty obvious. We had seen it many times before.

We were ushered into Mr. Gravely's office, and noted to each other that the efficient secretary at the desk hadn't exactly taken us by the hand, but might as well have.

We found Mr. Gravely to be a pleasant and easy-going manager, though definitely no-nonsense when it came to addressing the point. He basically repeated to us what was in the letter and our phone conversations, and the fact that he had set aside a work area for us if we found that convenient.

When he wound down, I stepped in. *“We need to start with the obvious. Do you have any reason to believe that you are the source of the extra work?”*

It seemed to catch him off guard, and he stopped a moment to think about it. *“I may be asking for a few things I could get along without, but not enough to make a dent on what I have seen others doing around here. It seems like we have some source of unending work.”*

I continued, *“Again, we look for the obvious first, like checking that the computer is plugged in before we call for the repairman.”* The twitch of a smile told me that I had hit on a good analogy. It had appeared likely considering the number of the computers we had seen.

I continued, *“Can you give me an estimate, say monthly, of the man-hours of work that you might be assigning which are more convenient than required?”*

He settled back for a few minutes, then penned a few notes on a pad. He answered, *“I would guess twenty to twenty-five hours a month.”*

I then asked, *“Do you know who actually performs the work?”*

He answered immediately, *“Sometimes, but usually not. I presume that a substantial portion is done by those to whom I assign it.”*

I pressed on, “Are your work assignments primarily to your immediate subordinates, letting them pass some assignments to those beneath?”

He replied, “I sometimes make direct assignment to staffers, but usually try to involve their supervisors in the assignment. I occasionally want work done by some specific person, and coordinate my actions with subordinates in order to keep things running smoothly.”

I continued, “And finally, I would ask you if you have any special policy for passing work down to subordinates. Is there formal documentation or just an understanding of what is appropriate.”

He continued, “I don’t produce standard operating procedures for managers, if that is what you mean. I hire people who know what they are doing, and I generally support their efforts so long as they appear effective.”

“That should do it for our first analysis,” I told him, “but we will need to interview a few of your immediate subordinates and a few lower-level middle managers. Do you have any recommendations for who we contact?”

His only request was for an estimate of time that we would require from them. On being told that we expected to spend twenty minutes of their time at most, We were then given four names.

“And Gentlemen,” he added, indicating a large box of books, ledgers and materials, “These are a sampling of our managerial work product and general organization and setup of tasks.”

Bill, who didn’t much care for having someone other than me fixing his work requirements, responded with what was most unusual tact for him. “At this point, we are not sure whether we might need to make that review. It will be enough if the materials are made available, say at the secretary’s desk, so that we have ready access to whatever we need.”

On our way out the door I congratulated Bill on his little speech, and got an unsmiling response, “I know, you’re beginning to rub off on me.” He mimed brushing dust off his arm.

Ajax Butterman was a nervous middle manager in charge of the production floor. He didn’t really rise to acknowledge our presence, but shifted up and nodded toward a few straight-backed chairs.

After establishing that Mr. Butterman knew why we were there, I asked to see what was in his in-box.

He was willing to pass it over, but specifically noted that the more immediate and pressing matters had already been addressed. These largely represented work that he had not yet had time to complete.

I handed the packet to Bill, who dutifully wrote down a brief synopsis of what was being tasked, and who was asking for it.

I asked Mr. Butterman the important question, *“How much work do you have to pass down to your subordinates?”*

His answer was as expected, *“Far too much, I’m afraid. I’m in a position where my limited hours do not permit me time to do all that I am asked to do. If it has to be done, and I can’t get to it, I do pass it to the foremen.*

“They are what keep me afloat. I have a very good work crew.”

Then as an aside, *“Without them, I wouldn’t be able to get the work of the job done. As you note, I have no staff assistants to do administrative support work.”*

It was pretty obvious that this was a matter of contention with his boss. It was not something to be explored as part of the present assignment, so I let it pass.

Based on information we had gotten from Mr. Gravely, I asked, *“John Terram works for you, doesn’t he?”*

When he answered in the affirmative, I told him *“We were also given his name for interview, noting that he is one of the foremen who suffers most from administrative duties.”*

Butterman responded, *“I have to tell you, foremen are not the best administrative assistants. John is one of the few who really shows some special ability. He does get an unfair amount because I can rely upon him to get administrative things done well enough so that I don’t end up having to make a lot of corrections or redo them myself.”*

I looked to Bill, and he nodded and returned the pile to the Mr. Butterman’s in-box. We asked a few questions on where work came from to establish a pattern, but otherwise let the interview wind quickly to a close.

As expected, administrative requirements came from everywhere in the organization. Management was tasking management with work.

I asked if others in the organization knew that he was assigning work to foremen. He replied, that they should, as there was way too much coming back for just his product.

We were pointed in the direction of John Terram's area, and Mr. Butterman actually rose to usher us out. On the way Bill told me, *"You lost your quarter."*

I replied, *"I didn't actually make the bet, I just let you know the sort of odds I would require and the maximum I would put at risk on such an obvious situation."*

He noted, *"All that to keep a quarter you lost fair and square?"*

I replied in kind, *"It must be an important quarter if it's worth your notice."*

John Terram was a smooth sort of person, even though his vocabulary and word usage indicated a weak education. It seemed that he had learned to more effectively write than to speak. He appeared very able and competent, with a quick intelligence that took us in with a glance. You could almost see him place us as outside experts with briefcases. It was clear that he didn't look forward to having to entertain us for the benefit of the higher-ups in the business.

Bill had an affinity for such people, so I let him take the lead. He asked, *"Mr. Butterman tells me that you get a substantial amount of his administrative assignments. Can you verify this?"*

He stated that he knew he got a lot of them, but not that he did that much more than others. He did recognize that the harder and more involved assignments came to him, and that he was able to handle them at what appeared to be about the same time that other foremen had to spend on their administrative assignments.

Bill asked, *"Do you have to involve any of your people in these assignments?"*

He replied, *"I get a great deal of assistance from Peggy Briant and Steve Warral, who are hired as a material handler and utility operator."*

Bill continued, *"These are your senior people, the ones who take over as manager when you are away from your work group?"*

On getting an affirmative response, I picked up the stuff in John's in-box and began to make notes on it. I'd let Bill continue with the interview. The effective part of it was already complete.

The in-box contained editing requirements for a new job description, material requisitions awaiting signature, a question from the front office on worker morale and sick leave, a production schedule, and a notification of a visit from OSHA based upon a disgruntled ex-employee's allegations of unsafe working conditions.

There were also notes from an executive-level committee looking into overlapping shifts to minimize traffic in the local communities. This last tasker asked for his comments and input, noting that the idea seemed sound, but that it put an unusual burden on scheduling supervision.

I also noted that the sources of work requirements were diverse. We were obviously addressing an endemic problem that could be handled as a part of good exception management.

When I returned the pile to his in-box, Bill saw that I was finished and closed the interview with thanks. The brevity of the process seemed to take John by surprise, but he was obviously most pleased to get it over and done. He obviously had other requirements pressing on him.

As we left, I told Bill, *"He had an editing requirement for paperwork he prepared for personnel."*

Bill tried to act indignant, *"You owe me the quarter. You aren't going to be able to describe all this as a support for support-groups issue."*

I chuckled and tried to act innocent, *"I just thought you might want to know."*

The other interviews went essentially the same. The managers involved were swamped with administrative requirements. They had so much work that they were tapping their subordinates.

With these, however, we were able to confirm two additional and very important pieces of information that would factor well into our out-briefing. They were part of the problem, and we already suspected that they could be found. The chief of finance had reporting requirements placed on all operating areas to gather information on expenditures. His subordinate, the budget officer, had budget approval on all personnel actions that exceeded two man-hours or \$500 in expenditures. The deeper pattern of the problem Mr. Gravely faced was well established throughout the management system.

The day was drawing to a close. We had the situation well in hand and it felt good. We expected to write up our findings and

recommendations during the morning and be able to brief Mr. Gravely in the early afternoon.

With any luck, he would be able to take some sort of immediate action that would keep us employed for at least one more day. With that in mind, we set up a one-thirty exit briefing to take forty-five minutes.

Then we headed back to the motel before the local rush hour really got started. We both agreed to risk the imaginary quarter on a bet as to who got to swim first.

It ended up with Bill already in the air off the diving board when I hit the water at the other end of the pool. Our general disagreement over that quarter (which had never really been bet) continued into the evening.

The following day, we were again ushered into Mr. Gravely's office. It was to be a private exit briefing, which we had specifically requested. Speaking of top management policy did not need to involve subordinate managers until there was a decision on what to implement. Before then, their presence could actually inhibit progress.

I took the lead, *"We were able to narrow down the scope of our investigations to a single source of difficulty, and to concentrate on that area."*

Mr. Gravely interrupted, obviously to make his concern known, *"And this accounts for the brevity of your study?"*

I replied, *"When the problems are as obvious as those which caused you to call us in, it is usually pretty easy to establish one or more basic causes. We are not trying to polish an organization, only to address a few major difficulties for positive corrective action."*

I continued, *"In a very indirect way, you are the cause of the problems your business faces."*

There was the expected flash of anger, tightly maintained under control. He would hear me through but reserved a possibility of having me bounced out. I wondered idly if his efficient secretary could do the job, or whether he would have to get someone from the floor.

"While you only create a moderate amount of work for others in the organization, it appears that your management and staff people have picked this up as a general practice. They are all creating work for each other to do."

"The problem you face is a destructive management practice which has had your general approval in the past. Your management system is working itself to death, even to the point of tasking those who were hired to generate your salable product with work supporting management."

We got that cocked head look that we had come to understand as, "Are these guys crazy?" He asked, *"I know there is a lot of work like this out there, but surely not that much."*

Bill noted the appendix to the report that listed the contents of in-boxes. It was a pretty effective piece of evidence.

I continued, *"The work actually cascades down your organization until it can't go any farther. Your lower level supervisors are forced either to fail or to task workers with management duties."*

Mr. Gravely took it in, *"Thank you for insisting that this be a closed meeting, it would be inappropriate to discuss this with my senior staff present, even though my first instinct was to have them here."*

He paused, obviously to catch a thought before continuing, *"I won't argue with your findings except to verify them further myself. I take it that this is your analysis?"*

I responded, *"It is generally this, with some additional explanation provided in the body of the report. Our more valuable effort, however, should be in correction rather than analysis. The analysis was relatively elementary using our approach."*

"Solution will involve your effort to assume more effective charge of the management system being employed in your operation. It will involve you providing your subordinates with an effective definition of good management practice that will limit the amount of work your managers assign to subordinates."

You could see him thinking about this before he interrupted, *"You'll pardon me if I have a little difficulty following your work. It is so new to me that I have to step back before I can go forward with it."*

He wasn't likely to find it any easier if he had more time to think on it. I took his statement as humor, smiled in response, and marched forward on my own, *"In your case, we agreed that the best approach would be to activate the little-used second side of the exception management principle."*

He asked suspiciously, *“And this is different than the first side which determines what work will be raised up the administrative chain for exception action?”*

“Of course. The first side limits productive work performance to that which is exceptional for subordinates. The reverse application limits administrative work to what is exceptional for superior managers.”

The light didn't come on in his eyes. It was clear that he was not getting the gist of the thing. A more down-to-earth explanation would be required.

I explained it as, *“If you hire a manager to manage over a work process, you don't want that manager passing his management work efforts to those who he manages, do you?”*

“No.”

“What logic would you use to limit the work you pass down?”

He obviously knew how to manage, *“I hire the one to manage, and I expect him to do the management work. I hire the others to work, and I expect them to work. Neither is paid to do the work of the other.”*

We both nodded, and I added, *“And if you hire a middle manager to manage over other managers?”*

There was a short pause, followed by that obvious eye-opening understanding for which we watched. We both saw the light come on when he picked it up, *“I like it!*

“If I hire them to manage managers, I don't want them passing their responsibilities to others for performance. I hire them to support performance by subordinates.”

He was positively beaming at this point, *“You guys are worth every cent I'm paying you, and probably more.”*

“What is your recommendation for implementation?”

We were obviously over the hump. Mr. Gravely had the idea, and was simply looking for a way to put it into practice. *“Our first recommendation is to replace the unwritten policy which allows this tasking with a written policy that implements good management practices.”*

“There is a draft policy letter at tab c., and a copy for mark-up included in the back fly leaf pocket.”

He took the time to read the copy carefully before addressing us again. *"I'm curious about the reference to hours of exception from the policy. If passing work down is bad-management practice, why would I make exceptions."*

I answered, *"The good management practice is based on performance of assigned mission. It does not include things such as research into available processes for performance, or preparation for special events, or even for special duties such as showing someone else around an area of the operation."*

"Unless you want to be consulted for all such assignments, you need to allow your managers room to make less important decisions on their own. The limit just tells them the maximum amount of man-hours that they can assign to someone else for non-mission work."

"As stated in our contract, this puts you more in charge of the management system, and in a position to not only control the action of subordinate managers, but to establish a basic definition of what will be a management exception item to be brought up for your decision."

He actually laughed for the pleasure of it, *"I have to admit you boys are worth what you charge."*

"Have you got anything else for me?"

Bill and I looked at each other, we had another day's work at least. Returning to Mr. Gravely, I set the direction for him, *"What we have addressed to you may affect seven to ten percent of the management work being performed in your organization. Eliminating this will free a lot of man-hours, and eventually support reduction in the size of your management system. Your managers will know this immediately, and will be threatened by it."*

"Bill and I would be glad to sit down with you and rough out a plan of action with this in mind. We would then be glad to address the subject to your managers as the outside experts, giving you an opportunity to present your implementation as a method of controlling any damaging results."

I glanced over at Bill, who raised two fingers. I had to admit that his was a good estimate.

Mr. Gravely dropped into intense concentration for a few seconds. He checked his calendar, thought a bit more and responded, *"I'll need you gentlemen for the next two days if your schedules permit."*

It was so nice there that we stayed on for even two more days just to soak in the sun. We even changed the tickets ourselves rather than bothering Charlene. We did tell her though, and got that disapproving silence for a response.

CHAPTER TWO: ANTI-NOVELTY MANAGEMENT

Life is not fair. We returned to the office bearing a healthy check, one that could pay the bills for some time into the future. We handed this to Charlene; she handed us the note from her telephone conversation, with an indication that we should call the man back as soon as possible.

The person's situation was heart wrenching. Both Bill and I could see that it was a classic non-functional management in an internationally acclaimed business.

We'll call the CEO of the business, Mr. Doc; and Doc International will do for the business name.

Mr. Doc first contacted us by phone, and Charlene passed on his suggestion that we give him a call on his personal cell phone when we did come available. Apparently, it had taken a little convincing to get Mr. Doc to accept that we didn't carry phones with us on assignment, as it caused unnecessary distraction.

We called back; and we had to insist that he provide a written description of the situation for our general business records, for inclusion in our contract documentation, and for support of our scheduling. The following, provided in longhand, was the response he faxed some twenty minutes later.

Dear Jesse,

Two years ago I noticed that there was very little originality to be found within my organization. I began an investigation that involved identifying patterns of novelty in the business with the hopes of harnessing new processes and customer service enhancements.

The result was disturbing, as there was no lack of originality being generated, but it just never got to me for implementation. My early attempts at resolution through an open door policy generated surprising complaint up and down the management chain. In every attempt to

institute a beneficial change, I found myself opposed by elements in my own management.

While no overt action was taken to prevent the improvement, the resentful and half-hearted support of managers almost assured that benefits were not going to be generated.

Some months ago, I reviewed the changes I had tried to implement, and note that all of them have been successfully used in other businesses. It is only here that they fail.

I even tried releasing and reassigning some of the most negative of the managers without result. The ones who replaced them were just as bad.

I wish to hire your services to discover how to correct this situation so that the ideas of my people are made effective. They appear to be as frustrated as I am.

Yours truly.

{Mr. Doc's Signature}

Bill looked up from the letter, "This challenge is a bad one, Jesse. Do we have time to take on something like this?"

I answered, "This one can be an impressive advertisement. I'm inclined to take it."

He responded, "I'm sure it would be, but we could face a few weeks of solid hell in training sessions. Are you ready for that?"

"With a tan like we have, I don't think we'll ever be more rested or ready. I'm going to give him a call."

Mr. Doc had a high squeaky voice, not really bad but somewhat irritating. He gave us the idea that he knew his problem was in management, and that he was ready to take on his whole management to get it fixed.

He made it clear that he was looking for the bad-guy outsider to institute whatever changes needed to be made to get things back on track.

I told him, "I have discussed what we know of your situation with my associate, and we agree that solution should be possible, but that

it may take time to have the proper effect on so many management people.”

We then discussed the definition of work and fees, and reached an acceptable understanding. Mr. Doc indicated that he would pass this on to his contract people to make final arrangements, and I noted that we would do the same with our office staff. I didn't mention that Charlene was all the staff we had, and that he had already spoken with her.

When I hung up, Bill said, *“Mr. Doc sounds a little defensive, don't you think? He's not going to be happy when you tell him the source of his problem.”*

I answered, *“That's two assumptions that are in question. We may find some new reason for the problem; and you're assuming that I'll be the one to talk to the boss this time.”*

Bill just grinned. I had to admit that he had good reason to do so.

Charlene, who had pushed this project, seemed very pleased to set us on our way, and was especially gracious when she knew how long we expected to be at work. I was glad that I was the boss, and that she worked for me. She would give new definition to the term, “slave driver.”

I had to admit that I had done well in hiring her. Not only was she a physically attractive addition to the business, but had a most effective telephone voice and manner.

She was actually a graduate of business school with credentials for managing investments. If it hadn't been for hiring her right out of school, she would have been too much into that area to take on the management of our small office. She turned out to be perfect for the job, even if it involved a lot of ministerial office work. She was even beginning to pick up some of the technical expertise that Bill and I used.

She always did her job efficiently, and we found ourselves on a plane two days later. She had even begun to gather the training materials that I requested.

I had a sneaking suspicion that she preferred it when we were out of the office. Then she was her own boss; and she gladly accepted both the authority and responsibility of the situation. She seemed especially fond of shopping for supplies and materials in support of our efforts. She seemed to find bargains everywhere, from

the phone service we used to the copy services for our training manuals.

I even remembered one time Bill had to come to her rescue. The budget phone service she found turned out to be a dud. Bill ran an analysis that reminded me that her efforts were saving us more than we paid her in salary. I had backed off pretty quickly from that, and she had accepted my apology most graciously.

The accommodations near Mr. Doc's headquarters were superb. This was attributed to the cluster of corporate headquarters buildings in the vicinity. We were told that the local and state tax structure favored these, providing a very attractive business environment in general. There were a large number of high-end managers and professional service personnel staying in the area. There was even a rumor that the various business headquarters were tapped to subsidize them. It was a rumor we had no interest in validating; we just enjoyed our stay for what appeared to be very good rates.

Mr. Doc was one of those people who was super-organized. Everything in his office was extremely neat and well presented. Everything had its place, and I was sure his files were accurate and immaculate.

Our in-brief was cordial. Mr. Doc turned out to be as meticulous with his treatment of guests as he was in other things, and a delightful conversationalist. He knew when to talk and when to get on with business.

The real effort got stated when he told us, "I have hesitated to do much more than I have, knowing that you have been coming; but I have looked into some alternatives."

We just indicated interest, and he continued, "I trust that you gentlemen are familiar with Total Quality Management, and its use of program action teams to generate ideas."

I lifted a warning finger to Bill, who would have launched into his usual speech on the subject. It was not a good time to indulge his petulance on the subject.

I responded, "*I would recommend not making any move in that direction until we have time to look over the situation. If our initial understanding is correct, we should be able to describe the problem, and to outline a solution approach in fairly short order.*"

That got a lifted eyebrow from Mr. Doc, and a wave of a hand indicating that we should begin.

Bill was still simmering a little, so I took the lead, *“Who have you made responsible for the number and quality of suggestions or ideas which are raised?”*

I could see it hit him from left field. It was not something that he had considered in those terms. He answered, *“I consider it everyone’s responsibility, especially all managers.”*

It didn’t really matter what his answer was, so much that he received the thought and responded. I stuck the first needle in his balloon right from the definition of management, *“If everyone is responsible, it’s the same as nobody being responsible. That was our initial assumption as to your situation.”*

“Our activity from this point will be directed to finding the most effective means for managing this function.”

He did not seem happy with this.

I had to admit that Bill was right, and I was going to get the frown. *“You mean that it comes back to me, that it isn’t being managed?”*

That was pretty quick, even for the high powered thinkers who filled such positions. The demolition of old ideas was already under way, so I was politic by appealing again to general management. *“I mean that the solution to any problem that we finally define in this area will start with your management, and will assign responsibility effectively to those who will be required to perform.”*

Bill changed the subject, which got me off the hook quite neatly, *“We probably should start with the higher-level manager who has been most effective at getting ideas from his people.”*

As this was followed by a short silence, Bill explained further, *“We are engineers; we start with what works.”*

He gave us Myron Pfourts, the chief of operations, who turned out to be a very sharp workman. Myron had worked his way up the foreman ladder and was now an executive manager. He was one of those people who was able to inspire his subordinates by personal example.

When asked, he told us that his secret to getting ideas forward was actually quite simple. He called in the people who did the suggestion, and redid things in the best presentation format he could develop. As he put it, *“If it isn’t in spic-and-span order, it gets pushed aside.”*

I asked if the foremen were good at getting these ideas to him, and he said that he didn't know. He just gave the best he could to as many as he could.

In response to the question of whether his foremen had the same sort of dedication as he did, he responded that he couldn't tell. He noted that he was no longer in intimate day-to-day contact from headquarters, but he knew they were too busy to do much of that sort of work, and lacked his skills at developing presentations.

Bill opened a good direction for investigation, even though its potential for benefiting our analysis was not great. Its primary value would be in working effectively with Mr. Pfourts, which could have later value in arranging training. *"If you can't do them all, how do you know which ones to work on and which to let pass?"*

Myron responded that it was a matter of experience. He knew what sort of suggestions were well received and used his own judgment in the matter.

Our interview was over in less than fifteen minutes. We next talked to a line supervisor, Doug Jacob.

After considerable prodding he indicated that he received little if any support from higher-ups in getting ideas moving up the management chain.

He spoke very highly of Myron and his support, but noted that it was sporadic. It was very demoralizing for the men when one or two of them got intensive support and the rest had their ideas tossed back to them. He was, however, highly appreciative of Myron's efforts, as he always gave the credit to the worker, refusing to take any credit for his own efforts that were so obviously important in gaining a successful outcome.

Doug also let us talk with Finny Simms, one of the workmen who had been most active with idea generation. In the past few months, he had three suggestions rejected without comment. Two other suggestions had been supported by Myron, and one of these was to be implemented.

He told us, *"They are all good ideas. We have a management that doesn't want the workers making improvements."*

The remainder of that day, we inspected the paperwork that had been submitted to Mr. Doc over the last two weeks that bore on suggestions. Following Mr. Pfourts lead, we looked into the presentation and content.

The following morning, Mr. Doc's secretary greeted us for him, and indicated that he would like a word with us before we continued with our efforts.

He looked a lot happier than when we saw him last, and told us, *"You fellows gave me a good idea, and I should appreciate you a lot more than I did. If I offended you by my attitude, I am truly sorry."*

We assured him that we were used to ruffling feathers, and that we often had to do so on purpose. I addressed it, *"It is necessary to make people uncomfortable with the way things are or they won't ever let them change."*

He seemed to accept that on face value, and continued, *"Well, I reflected on what you told me and I have to agree. I have not been managing the suggestion effort, and I suspect that much of the problem does originate with my office."*

"I am prepared to set suggestion-generation goals of some sort for my managers. I take it that you gentlemen will provide me support in this; as I find no good reference for this type of goal setting."

I had to use the finger sign again to keep Bill from stepping into it. Management by goals and objectives was another of the flags that always seemed to tick him off. Myself, I just chalked it up as another aberrant direction for management efforts. It didn't seem any better or worse than the others.

I answered, *"I thank you for your support, and we are generally of the opinion that this will be part of the solution. I would again suggest holding back for a time, until we are able to finish the investigation and analysis phases of our efforts."*

Our next interview was with a baddy, Mr. Doc's Chief of Facilities and Equipment Management. Mr. Doc had mentioned that he never had gotten a good idea out of the George Smith's area. If it was not for the excellent general management that the man performed, he would have taken action on the matter. As it was, Mr. Smith was able to keep track of all the real and personal property of the businesses, located all over the world. He not only was able to anticipate where needs would arise, but usually had solutions planned before challenges even came up. He was a most proactive manager, but directed most of the performance himself. He seemed to have little interest in promoting, or even recognizing, any subordinate support.

On being told that we were there to see what could be done to enliven the suggestion program, which was not really true, George told us that the program was a disgrace. He said that his people

never seemed to submit good ideas, and that he had to reprimand his foremen for not doing more to get them to him. The few he had found worthy to submit were not implemented. He had even tried submitting some himself, but they were all turned down.

In response to Bill's question, he responded that he no longer encouraged his people to submit ideas; it was not productive.

Bill asked further, *"Do you support the ideas which are submitted and approved by others?"*

He answered, *"I'll gladly give my support to any suggestion which does what I need to have done."*

Bill must have been looking for trouble, as he continued, *"What do you use as a basis for determining what you need to have done?"*

I read the dark expression coming onto George's face, and indicated to Bill that he better explain himself. He picked up my signal and continued. *"Do you use current practice and procedure to determine the value of the suggestion?"*

It seemed to pacify him a little, but he wasn't friendly when he answered, *"I consider doing my job as the basis."*

Not wanting to prolong the agony, I thanked George for his time and asked directions to his maintenance manager, Gilbert Summersbee.

Gilbert was helpful, in a negative sort of way. He pointed out that his people submitted a few suggestions each year, but that they never went anywhere. They did get passed up the chain, but nothing ever came down.

I asked, *"Are they ever approved at lower levels in the organization, and implemented as local actions?"*

The answer was, *"No."* It appeared that this had been a matter of discussion between Gilbert and his Boss, with the upshot that George wanted to give full recognition to those who earned it. He went for maximum exposure on all suggestions.

If they weren't approved at higher levels, George just passed them down as *"not approved for implementation."*

The analysis, of course, was simple. We left before the regular shift ended, and headed to the Motel to enjoy a good meal and decide on a best way to present what we had found. That was direct enough, as we had a good idea of the problem before we got off the

plane. What was not simple was developing an approach to break the news to Mr. Doc.

Finally, we decided that the best approach was simply to tell him. There was no management system support for suggestions, and what management system was in place was arranged to interfere with any implementation.

We had already established a sort of mini-briefing on the analysis just to get the rest of the effort on track. Mr. Doc had to understand what we intended to accomplish before he could bless it with a modification to our contract. We wanted to have our relationship pretty well defined before we went on to any training and indoctrination regimen.

The following morning we met with Mr. Doc; and started with the same friendly atmosphere as the first time we entered that office. I couldn't help but notice that Mr. Doc was an excellent host, and probably maintained his practice by how he treated his own people. He would be very effective in dealing with some of his more important business contacts, though I doubted that his retail customers got to see him.

As Bill had predicted from the beginning, I was the one to tell him that the solution started in his office with his own approach to suggestions. I was the bad-guy who got to spoil the mood. Bill was actually presented as our spokesman, but he passed it to me. I guess breaking unfriendly news is just a manager's burden.

Mr. Doc took it a little better than I thought he would. Apparently he had time to think about it himself, and our earlier prodding had brought him to some of the same conclusions.

Bill took my political commentary, and put it in common terms. *"You are grading the quality of the presentations that are made to you rather than the suggestions themselves."* Bill's brief review of the analysis of past suggestion approvals and disapprovals made that pretty obvious. It was fact, not theory.

I added, *"You will note that when you analyzed the content of basic ideas that have been generated, rather than the presentations; you came to the idea that many of the suggestions were good. Your rate of acceptance indicates a different basis for decision when they are presented up management channels."*

He again seemed to be partially prepared, *"I suppose I have been expecting a higher level of professionalism from what my*

immediate subordinates give to me. I didn't consider that they were generally passing up what they received."

I added, *"Myron Pfourts was the exception to which you directed our efforts. He actually does preparation for his people, and the results are as noted. Where other managers are called to be more into the assurance of their primary performance, they have less time to do this type of work."*

"Myron has more time because of his style of management."

I continued, but shifted into a more productive direction, *"I also note that you are fully capable of evaluating the ideas on the basis of content, and that your people should be able to do the same."*

He waved our conversation aside with the back of his hand, *"You're overselling your product, gentlemen. I'm ready to go on."*

"I still need to address the failure of my managers to implement the suggestions which I do approve."

I continued to carry the ball. *"That is not a single issue, but one that needs to be addressed through management training, and through development of a more effective way of addressing suggestions throughout your organization."*

He responded, *"I came to that conclusion myself. The question is how, and what management goals will achieve the desired effect."*

I knew Bill winced, even without looking at him. I responded, *"I would not consider goal setting to be adequate, we are talking about an attitude toward suggestions that has to be changed. As long as the current attitudes are in effect, you are unlikely to implement any effective change in this area."*

"There are unwritten procedures and processes in place that will interfere with any goal-setting. It is these that prevent even a new manager from making progress. Your managers are now doing what is expected of them when they interfere with suggestion implementation."

I paused to let this sink in, but not long enough to allow any alternative thoughts to form. I did not want to have to answer challenges until we had presented a complete idea.

When the time seemed right, I continued, *"This is the reason for addressing solution in terms of training rather than specific management actions - though some actions will certainly be required."*

I had to admit, he was pretty fast on his feet. He stated, *“You mean that the problem is bigger than I was imagining it to be; and that it will require a more extensive effort for resolving it than you expect that I envisioned.*

Would you mind enlightening me of what I am missing?”

It wasn't really a question, but it might be taken as a warning that I had to be careful in how I addressed the matter.

Feeling that my specific presentation wasn't really that important, I just continued. *“Bill and I decided that a best approach would have to involve your redefinition of the work requirements you place on your managers. The most obviously effective approach will include suggestion actions as a measurable part of management performance.”*

He answered, *“I am sure that you must know my concerns in this. I don't know what sort of goals I can set for managers when most of the suggestions are generated by workers.”*

It was time to put the hammer down, I asked him the generally unasked question, *“Whose job is it to gather and encourage suggestions?”*

This was followed by the usual pause, and then by an almost embarrassing silence. When he didn't answer, I continued, *“Whose job is it to implement improvements - part of which come from suggestions?”*

He was obviously getting it, even though he was not replying. I couldn't help but think that I wouldn't like to play poker with him at the table.

After the silence, I pounded in another nail that would hit a little closer to home. *“And whose job is it to set subordinate manager work requirements?”*

He finally responded, probably to keep me from uttering something even harder for him to accept without rancor, *“You don't need to badger me, I get the idea. Suggestions and ideas are a part of management, and I'm in charge of it all.”*

He was suddenly back to being all business, *“What I need now is process and procedure, not incentive.”*

I switched back with him, *“Management starts with a requirement for output. How many suggestions and ideas are you going to require each of your immediately subordinate managers to provide for your*

decision? How many suggestion approvals will you, as the most senior manager, require of yourself?"

I could almost hear the gears turning as he tried to come up with answers. I still wanted him to get more of the scope before responding, so I continued, *"How many decisions and implementations are you going to require of your subordinates without submitting them to you."*

He picked up on it immediately, *"You mean to define what is exceptional, so that they are forced to make decisions on their own."*

He didn't ask, but made it a statement indicating his acceptance. I kept it focused, *"Do you have a list of your managers so that you can assure that they are all being addressed, or will some generalization be used to set their limits?"*

Mr. Doc buzzed his secretary and cleared his afternoon, passing work to others in this action. What followed was a brutal three-hour session broken only by a working lunch. Mr. Doc came to the conclusion on his own that he would only set limits for his immediate subordinates, making our job one step simpler. He would require them to set the limits for their subordinates to achieve his assignments.

It was, as he said, *"just good management."*

This, of course, meant that Bill and I would take on the roles of trainers.

We had, of course, brought samples of our training materials with us. We had also, in accord with common sense, left them in the motel room. We had planned to begin the next day.

As agreed from the beginning, Charlene had already sent the materials for the first seventy trainees to the motel. She was awaiting a count to send the others to Mr. Doc's facility. We got the basic information on who was to be trained, and passed this on before leaving the plant. It was to be a restful evening. We not only had several days hard work ahead of us, but had set a good working relationship with the guy who was going to pay the bill.

The training was also arranged very quickly, as Mr. Doc wanted to make the change and get on with other businesses needs. If his headquarters operation stagnated for a day, then so be it.

The next day, we discovered that Mr. Doc was also an excellent speaker, even with the high pitch of his voice. He explained to the

gathering of his subordinates that he had decided, at our urging, to change his policies and procedures related to suggestions and ideas.

He told them, *"I'm starting with myself. I will accept and evaluate any idea submitted without regard to how it is presented. I will also approve no less than four suggestions each month. I will no longer give preference based on presentation."*

He paused dramatically at that point. *"You gentlemen,"* indicating fifteen others at the table, *"are going to make sure that I only receive those that I need to see. To achieve this, I am also setting goals for beneficial ideas that you will implement on your own initiative. These will be implemented within your authority area. I am also setting a maximum number of ideas that you will pass up to me for decision."*

"I strongly suggest that you take a similar approach within your assigned performance areas."

"We, and I mean both you and I, are going to start managing our own progress." He handed out single sheets which listed the goals for all senior staff.

This obviously ruffled George's feathers, *"How am I supposed to get people to submit more ideas. We can only manage what we can control."*

Mr. Doc looked meaningfully around the table, *"I have placed each of you gentlemen into your positions because I know you have the capacity to manage. I consider the generation of ideas for improvements to be a part of that management for which you are employed."*

"It would be wrong for me to try to tell you how you are going to make it happen, but I will be available to answer any questions and to provide the support you need."

Then indicating us, *"Jesse and Bill here, have a prepared presentation on the subject with suggested lines of action and approach. I direct you to listen carefully, even as I did."*

He again paused, and looked meaningfully around the table before continuing.

"And these," he passed out single sheets, *"are the only excuses which I will hear for non-performance."*

He was obviously done, and turned the meeting over to us. I passed the action to Bill and grabbed up one of the pages.

Mr. Doc's list of excuses was a masterpiece. It neatly told everyone not to come to him with problems, only with concerns and solutions. I slipped a copy into my case for later reference.

ACCEPTABLE EXCUSES

1. I don't have competent subordinates.
2. I forgot how to manage.
3. My own people want to prevent my success because:
4. I can't tell good ideas from those which aren't.
5. Your assignments are meaningless and stupid.
6. I would rather that the business failed.
7. I lack competent supervision.
8. I don't know how to motivate my own subordinates.
9. I don't know why I failed.
10. I would rather work for someone else.

We were three layers of managers deep when Mr. Doc called us in and raised the issue of vanishing benefits. He didn't want to pay us to teach those any lower in the organization, but decided to do the best that he could with his available staff.

We received praise graciously, with full knowledge that ideas had already started to flow and to be implemented. Better still, Mr. Doc found himself and his staff with more time to spend on other issues - such as doing this sort of training for others in the organization.

We had done most respectfully for a couple of efficiency engineers; we had worked ourselves out of a job.

Mr. Doc agreed to accept queries from other potential clients as to our performance, and we headed home. It would be good to spend a day or two in the office, even if we had to supervise Charlene directly. She would be in a good mood as the business was doing very well indeed.

At the airport, Bill noted unkindly, *"Your tan is fading. You look like you need a little R & R."*

I didn't have to tell him the same. It had been a very busy assignment, and neither of us considered ourselves as expert trainers. We earned our pay with ideas and understandings; the training was just necessary to get the ideas across.

We knew we did well as far as Charlene was concerned; we had first class tickets waiting for us at the airport.