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Bureaucracy

By Paperitalo Staff

Last week we talked about being candid. The flip side of that coin is bureaucracy.

Comodore Cornelius Vanderbilt is credited with creating the first company large enough and expansive enough in its reach to require some bureaucracy. That company was the New York Central Railroad. The NYC was the first enterprise that "did something" --that something being transportation--that required a significant number of people not engage in the actual activity of the company. Yes, the old shipping companies of Europe had some people like this, but in reality, those companies were mostly run from the ships themselves. It was the NYC in the 1860's that started to have a number of people who were mostly paper shufflers.

Today, all companies of any size have swarms of bureaucrats. Some of them may be doing some good, some may even be necessary. However, many just get in the way and are a hindrance to progress.

Useless bureaucrats are noticeable for several traits. You can pick them out by these characteristics:

1. They constantly seek more useless responsibility. For instance, they love to get themselves on all sorts of approval routings, even if they have no idea whatsoever about the subject requiring approval.

2. They like to spend time pondering the non-ponderable. If a pump casing has a hole in it and you need a new one now, now is not the time to think great thoughts such as: "What is the purpose of this pump anyway?" Get a new one and redesign the system later.

3. They love to reject pieces of paper crossing their desks which do not completely match the twenty-seven signatures required by company policy to get past them.

4. They have not been out of their office and into a real operation within the past month. You spin the invoice printer in your operations, not in your offices, and everyone needs to take a look at this on a regular basis.

5. The size, location, and amount of windows in their office is important to them. So are reserved parking places. Any of the trappings they think makes them important is very important as far as they are concerned.

6. They have to have the latest gadgets. They collect frequent flyer/traveler cards by the boatload.

In general, if you notice anyone who spends their time noticing the trappings of office, you have a genuine bureaucrat on your hands.

Want to upset them? Ask them, if you are a public company, to how many decimal points would you have to calculate your company's earnings per share in order to see their contribution. Not only will that upset them, it might give them something to do for a week or two, allowing you to get something done.

For safety this week, don't let the bureaucrats run your safety teams. Enough said.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##