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## ***More Fundamentals***

By Paperitalo Staff

The quiz results for last week's article, "Disrupting the Culture", were a bit shocking. Over 40% of respondents said they did not think the upper management of their company understands the fundamentals of their business. It would take more detailed work to figure out who really does not understand the fundamentals (subordinates or leaders), but that the troops in the trenches hold such a high level of uncertainty concerning management is certainly eye opening.

The best managers I have known have kept things simple, within their own area and in interpreting direction from above. That is why, since I have grown to understand it, I like the military approach best, for it is the most challenging management role there is. The objective, at the basic level, is as simple as it can be--impair the enemy before they can impair you. I carefully chose "impair" rather than "kill" for it has been well proven that injuring the enemy causes more chaos for your opponents than does killing them.

But back to our careers. The major conflict, often unspoken, which obfuscates fundamentals involves employment and working conditions. Keeping headcount at current levels is not a fundamental goal in any business. Neither is excessive mental downtime (call it "idleness") for most production environment positions.

One way or another, one has to plan that the effort hours expended by the mill, all people included, must continuously and forever go down on a per ton of production basis. This is a detail subset of the fundamentals of spinning the invoice printer faster than one spins the check writer.

When one is in a growing grade or experiencing a growing market share, there is little emotional baggage involved with this. However, when one is in a stagnant or shrinking grade, this means people have to permanently go out the door. When a product growth (decline) scenario tips over to this condition, all sorts of cloudy issues begin to affect judgment and decisions.

Employees start to think, for instance, that full employment is a fundamental. This is further complicated by government goals of full employment. Employees sometimes become confused about company goals versus government goals. A company cannot long survive by adopting the government goals concerning employment.

Of course, all of this becomes highly personal if you or your buddy becomes a casualty. Things can get ugly in a hurry. If not watched carefully, tasks are created to keep people employed. Some managers erroneously think their worth is measured by how many people report to them (often called "empire building") and they become as caught up in making up things to do as those more directly concerned.

A few years ago, I was hired to examine a company that was for sale. Despite the dire straits in which the company found itself, the CEO was maintaining a separate office, with secretary and other trappings, more than thirty miles from the mill. It was in a high rise in a large city. The mill was in a decent size city and there was plenty of office space at the mill. There were soon going to be no other facilities but the mill. However, for some reason beyond obvious explanation, he had a thousand reasons why he needed to maintain that office. Last time I checked, it was gone.

Understanding the fundamentals really means understanding the fundamentals. If you can't distill your business to spinning the invoice printer faster and the check writer slower, you have a problem. And, often, that problem involves personnel trying to preserve their current way of life.

For safety this week, what are you doing about preventing accidents? That is the fundamental!  
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