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(F1C)

Quality of work life: loosening job rigidity

By Kevin Brown
staff writer

"Big boss man, can't you hear me when I call?"

"You ain't so big — You just talk, that's about all."

When blues singer Jimmy Reed sang these lyrics in the '50s, he spoke to workers who knew the indignity of facing the mean 'ol foreman.

Even today, workers in certain jobs, typically mass production, perform set tasks under strict rules for companies uninterested in their suggestions.

Often, output and quality have suffered as workers take little pride in a company that equates them with another tool or machine. But in some companies, this is changing.

"The basic organizational structure in industry has been for decades that management makes all the decisions and employees are told what to do and how to do it," says Irving Bluestone, retired United Auto Workers vice president. "The failure to include employees was a failure to utilize their resources."

By the late '60s in the auto industry, "There was a growing alienation taking place as the younger workers left school and experienced the automatic behavior one finds at an auto plant," says Bluestone, now a professor of labor studies at Wayne State University.

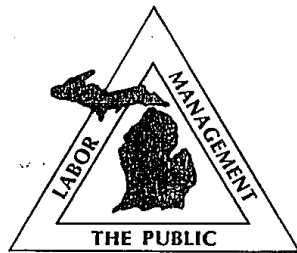
AS AN ASSISTANT to UAW President Walter Reuther, Bluestone presented a proposal to General Motors in the late '60s. It called for worker involvement in decision making. The plan was rejected in 1970, but GM accepted the proposal in 1973 as Bluestone helped establish a National Committee to Improve the Quality of Work Life.

Today, quality of work life (QWL) programs involving managers and employees are working in major car companies, in the steel industry, at AT&T and Honeywell, and in city and state government offices.

Generally, a QWL program involves managers and employee representatives meeting regularly to solve problems and discuss goals. Where the process has been successful, companies generally report higher productivity, less absenteeism and fewer worker grievances. And workers report higher job satisfaction and more pride in their work.

Deimar "Dutch" Landen, a former director of organizational research and development for GM, left that company four years ago to start consulting services to firms implementing QWL programs. He's also president of the Michigan Quality of Work Life Council, a non-profit educational organization which includes state management, government and labor leaders.

LANDEN SAYS that in order for



those programs to succeed, management "has to accept the fact and realize that there is nothing divine about an organization (structure)."

The QWL concept caught on when manufacturers sought to improve quality and productivity in the face of stiff foreign competition. Before this, businesses generally followed the precepts of scientific management, he says.

According to scientific management, Landen explains, a telephone operator's efficiency was not measured by how successfully she communicated with a customer. Rather, she was evaluated by how briefly she dealt with a caller.

In the auto industry, "having the product was more important than how good the product was," says Landen. "Back in the late '60s, what did you compare an American car to? This was not only true of the auto companies, it was true of much of American industry."

Today, GM provides these general

guidelines to its divisions for developing QWL programs: Assess employee talents and use them where possible in decision making, make jobs more challenging through use of new methods and technology, create a work place where employees want to contribute to company goals, and insist that management groups both accept and solicit employee contributions.

Bluestone says QWL programs at some plants have shown marked success, while others "have limped along." Landen says a big stumbling block is convincing middle and lower managers "traditionally disciplinarians" — of the concept's potential.

IN MARCH 1981, the city of Southfield began implementing its own QWL plan. Donald Michaelson, city personnel director, says it was suggested by a former GM employee who joined the city staff. "You're talking to an evangelist — I really believe in the process," Michaelson

says.

"We started initially by discussing it with the union leaders in various organizations. Their reaction was positive," he recalls.

Still, union leaders were wary of giving up freedoms under the plan. And managers were concerned that they might be compromising their right to manage. "The line man could feel it was a means of end-running them," Michaelson offers.

And because those seeking to implement the concept embrace language like "resource management," "maximizing potential" and "coordinators-facilitators," some in management, Michaelson says, thought the QWL idea was a lot of "mumbo jumbo."

WHILE IT'S taken time, the QWL concept is working in Southfield, Michaelson says.

"What it's done is improve our communication, our trust. There was one year when management and labor didn't communicate, except through grievances," he says. To demonstrate, Michaelson says the number of worker grievances has fallen from 20-30 per year before QWL to no more than three per year after.

"Before, if you saw a problem coming along requiring disciplinary action, you'd let it happen, then go through the grievance process," says Michaelson. "Now if I see a potential

problem, I feel no problem at all in picking up the phone and calling Ed (Turnquist, union local president) and saying, 'Let's talk about this.'"

Michaelson says it took two years for the concept to begin working well. "It's been more accepted the more we deal with it. It was a dramatic change from the old school."

Bluestone says implementing a QWL program has fallen when top management wasn't strongly committed. "The chief focus of the process is to create increased job satisfaction. It's not a productivity gimmick," says Bluestone.

ON THE OTHER hand, GM spokesman John Mueller said the effectiveness of QWL programs lessens when workers "blur the lines" between a QWL program and the grievance process.

To those planning to adopt a QWL program, Michaelson offers advice: "Be sure it's an open process; keep middle managers informed and your line supervisors. For management, an easy pitfall to get into is ignoring some middle management people."

In evaluating the QWL concept's success in industry to date, Bluestone, said, "Overall, I'd say it continues to grow and will continue to grow."

Five years since implementing the program, Michaelson says, "We've got a long way to go. But no one I think would go back to the old way."

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Dutch Landen

Amnesty: calm before crackdown

More than 80 percent of Michigan's \$400 million in uncollected taxes is owed by businesses.

According to the Michigan Tax Information Council, two of the most common causes of business delinquency are failures to turn over sales tax (\$100 million outstanding) or employee withholding taxes (more than \$75 million).

In contrast, individuals in arrears on their personal income tax account for about \$95 million.

State Treasurer Robert Bowman expects Michigan's tax amnesty program, coupled with the stepped-up enforcement efforts recently approved by the Legislature, to enable the state to recover \$50 million in lost tax revenue.

Bowman noted that included in the delinquent taxpayers are people who made mistakes or didn't fully under-

stand their obligations. Among businesses, many borrowed the tax money they collected when interest rates were much higher to help them get through recent hard times.

Through June 30, individuals and businesses can settle up on unpaid taxes, including a 9 percent interest without criminal penalties or fines. On July 1, new penalties and enforcement efforts go into effect.

TAXES INCLUDED in the amnesty are: individual income tax, single business tax, sales and use taxes, intangibles tax, cigarette tax, petroleum and natural gas severance tax, aviation gasoline tax, marine fuel tax, diesel motor fuel tax, highway gasoline tax, inheritance tax, utility property tax.

Taxes can be paid by check, bank draft or money order. Cash will be

accepted at any treasury office. Michigan becomes the first state to accept payment by credit card; Visa or MasterCard will be accepted.

Amnesty is designed to help pay for a state income tax cut from 5.1 to 4.5 percent. Any additional money raised through amnesty, above \$50 million, will help accelerate the tax cut to a date before March 31, 1988.

The only taxpayers excluded from amnesty are those who have been convicted on a criminal tax charge, are under criminal investigation currently, or who are currently involved in criminal or civil court litigation. Taxpayers who have current

assessments outstanding from the treasury department for the tax periods in question are eligible for amnesty, and may have any assessed penalties waived if taxes and interest are paid by June 30.

Under the revised Revenue Act, penalty and interest charges on tax delinquencies will increase dramatically beginning July 1. Maximum penalties for failure to file a return or pay tax will jump from 25 to 50 percent of taxes due. In addition, failure to take advantage of amnesty will result in a 50 percent penalty on

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Get to us before we get to you.



1 Tax Amnesty - Ends June 30
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Supply scam targets small business

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Some unsuspecting businesses appear to be getting duped by some out-state copy machine supply companies.

Small businesses, in some cases, have paid up to four times the normal price for toner for their copy machines. Some have caught on to the scam in time, like The Community House in Birmingham.

Others, like Communication Specialists in Birmingham, haven't been so lucky.

According to Lynne Fuller, her company paid \$265 for one case of toner (four cartridges to a case) for her Canon PC copier from Main Distribution Center in Los Angeles. When the shipment arrived, she received only one cartridge.

The price for one cartridge at a local photo copy store is \$65. Fuller was charged \$34.99 to ship the three-pound package. United Parcel Service usually charges around \$4 to ship a package of the same weight.

FULLER CALLED Main Distribution, asking for the remaining three

cartridges to be sent. A few weeks later the second shipment arrived along with another bill for \$870.

When Fuller questioned Main Distribution Center's office, she said they became abusive.

"They cussed away at us," said Fuller, who's a partner in the 16-month old business. "We told them we were returning the stuff. They said they wouldn't accept it."

Fuller and her partner Carole Lewis were told they would be charged shelf space for the returned merchandise.

Fuller and Lewis told Karen Wilkinson, an office manager at Interstate Photocopy Co. in Berkeley, of the problem.

Wilkinson has heard similar complaints from other area small businesses, which have been overcharged for toner by suppliers located in California. She first came across the scam after one of the companies in Culver City, Calif., Interstate Distribution Center, was confused with Interstate Photo Copying Service.

The Community House in Birmingham was charged \$149 for two bottles of toner by Interstate Distri-

bution Center for their Sharp copier. Jennie Caslo of the Community House refused to pay the bill.

"TO THE BEST of my knowledge, they (the photo copy suppliers) have a Watts line," said Wilkinson, who lives in Bloomfield Hills. "They'll call up a secretary and say, 'I was in your office the other day. That's a neat copy machine you have. What type is it? Where did you get it from?'"

Then, according to Wilkinson, they call back a few days later. They tell the secretary that the price of toner is going to go up soon and they should place an order before it does.

The secretary, thinking of saving the company money, orders the toner at the inflated price.

Fuller recounted a similar story. A person from Main Distribution Center called and said they were in charge of her account and urged her to order a case of toner before the price rose.

A general inquiry was made to Main Distribution Center's office in Los Angeles, asking what the price was for a case of toner for Canon PC copier (the same type at Commu-

cation Specialists). A person said \$265.

WHEN ASKED how much toner was in a case, the person replied "a case" and wouldn't elaborate further when questioned.

The state's attorney general's office has received similar complaints from other companies who've been overcharged for toner.

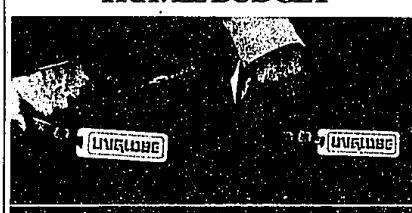
"Periodically we get these complaints and refer those to the Federal Postal Inspector's office, which is trying to shut some of these places down," said Fred Hoffecker, an assistant in state's Attorney General's Office.

Hoffecker said there's no law in the state which covers this type of phone solicitation unless it's for personal or household goods.

A person for the Federal Postal Inspector's office in California said that such complaints usually don't come under their jurisdiction since most sales are made over the phone. The U.S. Postal System is not normally used.

But the Postal Inspector's office is currently investigating Main Distribution Center.

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