

A Modern-Day Fable: Into the 12th Dimension

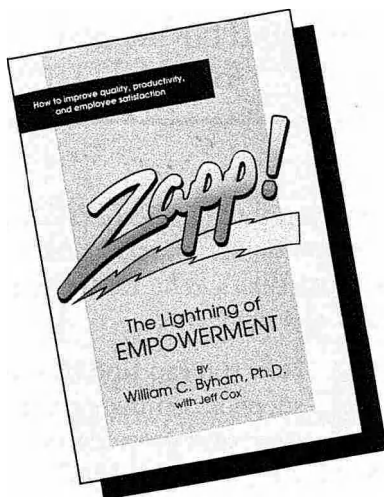
Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment, by William C. Byham with Jeff Cox.

Once upon a time, in a not-so-magic land called Normalsburg, USA, there lived a rather normal guy named Ralph Rosco. Ralph lived a basically normal life and worked in Dept. N of the Normal Company, where managers did the thinking, supervisors did the talking, and employees did the doing. After a while, Ralph grew weary of all the normalcy. He started wondering when the Zapp! in his job had been replaced by a sluggish sensation of Sapp! No one else seemed to get excited about anything work-related either, except, of course, their paychecks and pension plans. Everyone left the tough jobs for the "other guy" to take care of. Nobody cared about making improvements, mostly because they were afraid of change.

One day, Ralph had the incredible idea of inventing a machine that would look beyond this dimension of normalcy. But when he approached his boss, Joe Mode, about it, Joe was too busy worrying about the 167 rush jobs floating around Dept. N, as well as *his* boss's demands to "Raise that productivity! Cut those costs! Boost that quality! And, above all, do not let your efficiencies slip!" So, Joe did not really listen to Ralph's not-so-normal idea.

Ralph, breaking out of his normalcy, decided to work on his invention on the sly. Motivated by his project (which he called The Ralpholator), he began coming into work early and staying late, sometimes even working through lunch to get it ready. Finally, he was done.

"Naturally, Ralph just had to try it out. He connected the wire leads to his chair, sat down, flipped a few switches, and typed a command on his desktop computer. A high-pitched whine began to emanate from the innards of the strange



machine. His work area began to pulsate with an unearthly light. Ralph gripped the arms of his chair, grinned with anticipation—and vanished in a powerful flash" into the 12th Dimension.

In this little book with a big message, Bill Byham and Jeff Cox have pulled out all the creative stops. With Byham as the human resource specialist and Cox as the imaginative presenter, they have created a mythical scenario to appeal to our right-brain sensibilities and to snap us out of our lethargic modes of normalcy.

A few minutes after Ralph entered the 12th Dimension, Byham and Cox go on to narrate, his boss joined him there. When their eyes focused, they found themselves in a thick fog. All around were forms vaguely similar to their colleagues in Dept. N. A big, scaly troll turned out to be the nag-like department head; a faint ice-blue blur materialized into his boss's secretary; "a dim ember in the shadows turned out to be good old Mrs. Estello." Yet they all seemed to be "jailed in dullness, veiled and dim." There were walls around everyone, stone walls, glass walls, steel walls. "It was like wandering about in a maze."

It was just like Dept. N, except that in the 12th Dimension, Ralph

and Joe could see how people at the Normal Company felt, what was going on in their minds, and what things were like for them on the inside. It wasn't very pretty.

At last they found themselves in a place called Dept. Z. Here, things were similar, yet different. "Walls here gave structure, but did not confine. And this place did not feel stationary; it felt as if it were in motion. Most astounding here were the people. They radiated a mysterious energy that lit up the place. Some were brighter than others, but the collective brilliance of them was like a small, warm sun. . . . the light seemed to join them all, flowing from one to the next, connecting them in common purpose." They seemed "empowered."

In the midst of this magical place, Ralph and Joe noticed a small, robust woman in a cone-shaped wizard hat who walked around and talked to people and gave them little Zapps of lightning that seemed to charge them up.

Just then, a man in a battered and scorched suit of armor staggered out from a meeting. "His helmet plumes were burned to cinders. His sword was chipped and cracked. Behind him, through the door, Ralph and Joe could see a dragon panting fire." As they watched, the wizard lady Zapped the man with her lightning bolt. Sure enough, "one by one, the dents in his armor popped out. The scorch marks vanished. . . . His sword became whole again. And he marched back through the door to face the dragon again."

Byham and Cox continue the fantasy, and as the large-type pages breeze by, the connections start clicking into place.

In real life, they contend, many managers, like Joe, tend to defizz and defuse creative ideas, saying they are too difficult or zany or time-consuming. Only when they can see the difference between "Zapp!—the giving of power," and "Sapp!—the taking of power" can

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managers and employees begin to understand the importance of empowerment.

"When you have been Sapped, you feel like your job belongs to the company, you are just doing whatever you are told, your job doesn't really matter, you always have to keep your mouth shut, your job is something different from who you are, and you have little or no control over your work. When you have been Zapped, your job belongs to you, you are responsible, your job counts for something, you know where you stand, you have some say in how things are done, your job is part of who you are, and you have some control over your work."

Byham and Cox use Joe as "Everymanager" to show how to become an empowered boss and how to Zapp an entire company. Through trial and error and frequent visits back to Dept. Z, where empowerment really happened, and with Ralph monitoring Sapp!-Zapp! ratios on his Zappometer, the elements that made the difference gradually became clear:

- building and maintaining self-esteem;
- listening and responding with empathy;
- asking for help in solving problems;
- offering help without taking responsibility;
- coaching and encouraging;
- developing semi-autonomous work teams that are seen and heard;
- ongoing training and development;
- setting performance guidelines with key results areas, measurements, and goals;
- having a philosophy of and commitment to continuous improvement.

"Zapp! encourages employee initiative and allows managers to delegate responsibility without abandoning employees," says Byham. "By identifying problems, establishing periodic measurements to quantify

progress, and setting goals for the entire group, managers learn to share responsibility with co-workers and subordinates."

Zapp! is a little volume with a lot of zing. It captures the essence of the empowerment issue. For managers and employees looking for more Zapp and less Sapp, this imaginative book will be a time investment well spent.

Byham is president and founder of Development Dimensions International, a human resource training and development firm. Jeff Cox is an independent writer and editor. Both are located in Pittsburgh.

Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment. 212 pp. Pittsburgh, PA: Development Dimensions International Press, 412/257-0600, \$19.95 hardcover; \$9.95 paperback. Circle 180 on reader service card.

There's Something About a Harley

Well Made in America: Lessons From Harley-Davidson on Being the Best, by Peter C. Reid.

Coloring the business news every day are woeful accounts of the real price of increased competition on the marketplace. Tales abound of formerly thriving companies going belly up, after struggling valiantly against stiff market conditions.

In an all-American success story, Peter Reid tells of a beleaguered company that took on two industrial giants—companies with far greater financial, technological, production, and marketing resources—and came out a solid winner. *Well Made in America* is the story of Harley-Davidson's dramatic turnaround, in which a small group of devoted owners and motorcycle enthusiasts overcame daunting odds and pumped new life into their seriously ailing company. To paint the picture, Reid combines keen business and manufacturing acumen with a com-

elling touch of drama and an appreciation for the fierce emotions surrounding the struggle.

The first section of the book takes a behind-the-scenes look at the severity of the odds against Harley in the early 1980s: The U.S. economy was depressed, interest rates were sky-high, and the market for heavyweight motorcycles had dropped 20 percent. Motorcycle purchases were at an all-time low, as many of Harley's core customers—blue-collar workers—faced layoffs and unemployment lines. At the same time, Honda and Yamaha were flooding the market with Harley look-alikes at discounted prices. For the first time in 50 years, Harley was losing money; it had to lay off 40 percent of its workers. The company had to borrow money just to service its existing loan debt, and its major lender was threatening to pull out.

Despite the odds, in 1981 13 Harley managers decided to buy the company for \$81.5 million in a leveraged buyout. Why? Apparently, Harley had some strong business assets that were worth fighting for: an established dealer network, a high added-value product, an in-place and dedicated management team, and an incredibly loyal customer base.

Reid writes: ". . . Harley riders all have something in common: a fanatical dedication to their Harleys. It's a feeling that many cannot articulate, and for them there's a Harley T-shirt enscribed: 'Harley-Davidson—If I Have to Explain, You Wouldn't Understand. . . .' This incredible brand loyalty is emotional. It is based on a pattern of associations that includes the American flag and that other American symbol, the eagle (which is also a Harley symbol), as well as camaraderie, individualism, the feeling of riding free, and pride in owning a product that has become a legend. On the road, one Harley rider always helps another in distress—even though

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one may be a tattooed biker and the other a bank president."

Though not all of the 13 Harley company owners rode motorcycles, "they all shared the Harley rider's emotional commitment to Harley-Davidson," Reid writes. "They had an intense desire to see the last U.S. motorcycle manufacturer live to fight again. They had the greatest incentive in the world to improve: survival. They firmly believed that Harley-Davidson would go under at the hands of its Japanese competition unless they assumed ownership of the company and turned it around—no matter how much sweat it took."

The vision was bright, but the path was not smooth. Harley-Davidson nearly went bankrupt (officially, just seven days short) under the load of excessive loans and outstanding legal fees. With plenty of insider details, Reid walks the reader through the drama of those trying times. With infectious underdog appeal, he puts the reader in the shoes of the Harley managers. The effect is quite compelling.

More than five years later, Harley-Davidson finally pulled itself together and began making progress. By the end of 1986, Harley was a solidly financed, profitable company with revenues of nearly \$700 million. The lessons learned? Reid writes: "To survive in today's competitive world, U.S. manufacturers must make customer service their ultimate goal and must adopt

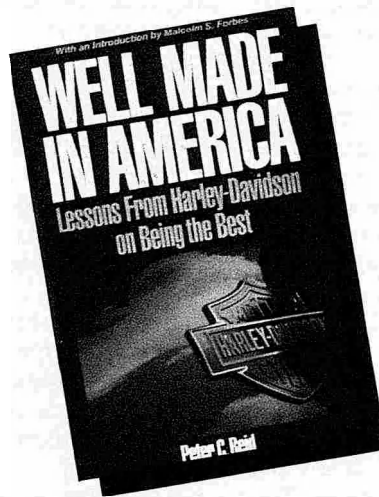
- the Productivity Triad techniques of employee involvement (EI), just-in-time inventory (JIT), and statistical operator control (SOC);

- a 'close to the customer' marketing approach;

- a 'cash is king' financial strategy."

In the second half of the book, Reid defines and outlines for managers the nuts and bolts of applying Harley's hard-earned tactics and techniques to their own business problems. He covers the how-tos of

- making continuous improvement



a way of life;

- revitalizing operations without spending big bucks;
- achieving parity with your toughest competitor in quality, cost, and productivity;
- implementing the Productivity Triad techniques;
- setting up and maintaining effective quality circles;
- facilitating constant, open, up-and-down communication;
- designing and carrying out customer-driven product development and marketing strategies.

Six additional strategies Harley-Davidson used to beat its competition are

- define your niche and stick to it;
- listen to your customers and give them what they want;
- differentiate your product;
- compete on value, not price;
- treat your dealers as full business partners;
- build on your name.

Reid's advice is specific to Harley, yet intended to be widely applicable. "Once you determine what your focus will be, stay with it," he writes. "At Harley-Davidson, they say that if something doesn't relate to improving quality, they aren't going to do it. This is a focus that everybody in the company can understand and relate to. And the quality

goal can be applied to just about any aspect of the organization's operations, not just the end product.

"For example, quality affects morale because poor quality tends to create rework and people get upset over having to do a job over again. Quality affects productivity because it eliminates scrap and rework. Quality reduces costs because doing something right the first time is cheaper than doing it over. So instead of telling your employees they must increase productivity or reduce costs, for example, you make quality your stated goal. This goal is not only less threatening to people, but it also appeals to their pride in turning out a better product—and it works."

Through Harley's extended refocusing and belt-tightening, the company was able to boost market share by 97 percent, reduce inventory by 75 percent, and increase its international revenue by 177 percent.

"Most people believe that Harley changed because it was a matter of survival. The choice was to change or to die. Unless everybody got involved in trying to solve Harley's tremendous problems they would all go down the tubes together. Management made a strong commitment to that, and people responded, as they always will when they believe management is really serious.

"Most important, perhaps," Reid continues, "Harley has dropped the concept of white-collars *thinking* and blue-collars *doing*, a notion that has plagued American business but is anathema in Japan. The goal now is to have everybody thinking *and* doing. The color of their collars is irrelevant."

Today, Harley has learned enough about what works and what doesn't to offer its own management-training seminars. Reid's underdog account of what it takes to survive a brush with corporate death in America may help other companies learn how to become world-class competitors in a fierce global market. *Well*

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Made in America is just that—well made in America.

The author is an avid motorcyclist, a writer, and an editor specializing in business topics. He is the author of several books on motorcycling, business, and management.

Well Made in America: Lessons From Harley-Davidson on Being the Best, 226 pp. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 800/2-MCGRAW, \$19.95.

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Managing Chinese Baseball

Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change, by Peter B. Vaill.

The classroom will soon overflow with fresh-faced and fuzzy-checked

M.B.A. grads about to embark on managerial careers. Your job: to facilitate the workshop for new supervisors-to-be.

You will lead them through their first days, orienting them to your organization's operations and ways of doing business. You've prepared the standard spiel ("Welcome to the company. . . our mission is to serve. . . we live and die by the words. . . our corporate culture values. . ."), but you're still searching for a text you can give the rookies to reinforce management basics.

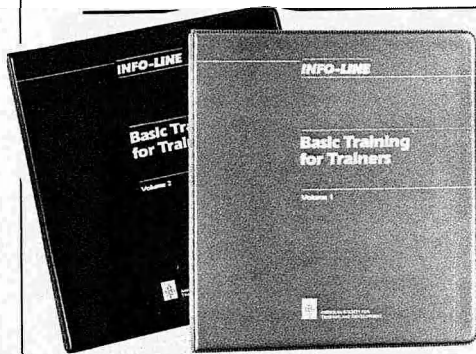
Do not give them this book.

At least not yet. *Managing as a Performing Art* contains information best appreciated by those who have been scalded a few times in the corporate caldron. Purposely short on the kinds of guidelines and commandments that characterize most

management treatises—and that new practitioners often need—the book instead is a text-based touchstone for seasoned veterans of the organizational wars, examining the managerial art in squishy, hard-to-get-a-handle-on, and ultimately revealing terms.

"*Managing as a Performing Art* is a book of ideas, not of how-to-do-it prescriptions," writes author Peter B. Vaill, a professor of human systems at George Washington University's School of Government and Business, and a former editor of the American Management Association's *Organizational Dynamics* journal. "Too many of the recent books for practicing managers have been how-to-do-it checklists. This book takes the real situation and concerns of the practicing manager much more seriously."

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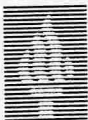
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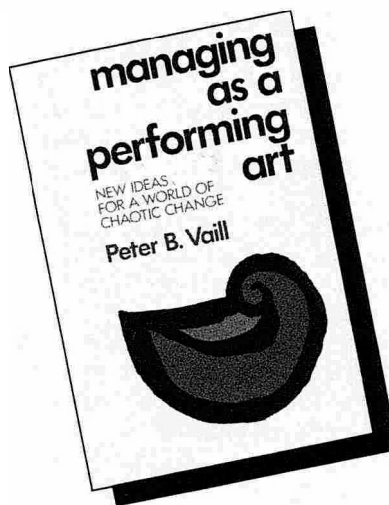
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For Vaill, a serious look at management requires stripping the profession of its day-to-day garb, revealing through introspection a process more responsive to intuition than to analysis. Thus, one reads about the "faith" and "spirituality" managers must bring to their work, how the tragedies of Antigone and Creon illuminate organizational dilemmas, and why Louis Armstrong's famous admonition "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know" might just as easily have referred to management.

As Vaill presents it, managing is an ineffable experience—the rush of stimulus and response that characterizes management today precludes procedural explanation. "Intelligence, experience, and skill are being exercised, albeit in ways that we hardly know how to perceive, let alone describe," Vaill writes. Instead of explaining, he offers metaphors to suggest the chaotic nature of contemporary business:

■ "Everyone these days seems to be talking about the need to handle substantial amounts of change, uncertainty, and turbulence, but seldom do we find people talking about the possibility that we may be approaching some kind of red line of the psyche, some state where it is all just too much to cope with."

■ "'Most managers are taught to think of themselves as paddling canoes on calm, still lakes,' [a seminar participant] said. 'Sure there will be temporary disruptions during changes of various sorts—periods when they'll have to shoot the rapids in their canoes—but the disruptions will be temporary, and when things settle back down, they'll be back in the calm, still-lake mode. But it has been my experience,' he concluded, 'that you never get out of the rapids! No sooner do you begin to digest one change than another one comes along to keep things unstuck. In fact, there are usually lots of changes going on at once. The feeling is one of continu-



ous upset and chaos.' . . . [We] live in a world of permanent white water."

■ "The mythical game of Chinese baseball is just like American baseball in all respects save one: in Chinese baseball, whenever the ball is in the air, anyone is allowed to pick up any base and move it—anywhere! . . . It is fascinating to consider how one would actually play Chinese baseball. The game would make an interesting recreational activity for an off-site executive development meeting."

Vaill states the problem eloquently: "More and more, executives cannot count on the presence of markets; the availability of technologies; the likely actions of competitors, foreign and domestic, and of legislators and regulatory bodies; or the reactions of employees, of their families, and, indeed, of their own bodies and minds to the kinds of actions they are contemplating."

What, then, are managers to do? Vaill refuses to spell it out. Instead of following workplace recipes, he asserts, managers need simply to give careful thought to the work they do.

Managing as a Performing Art serves up food for thought in chapters with such titles as "Winning is the Only Thing You Think Winning Is," "Reflection and the Techno-

holic," "Satchmo's Paradox," "It's All People," "Taoist Management: 'Composedly They Went and Came,'" and "Management as Snake Handling." Throughout, Vaill proffers quizzes, puzzles, fables, and illustrations. His approach is indirect, focusing on the nature of management and the forms it may take. That approach also explains the earlier caution that *Managing as a Performing Art* might not suit the needs of newcomers to the managerial profession. The book requires a certain amount of reflecting, comparing, and contrasting—activities for which neophytes may be ill-equipped. Many experienced managers, on the other hand, will relish the chance to think so deeply about their profession.

Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change, 236 pp. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: VAMP. \$20 for ASTD national members; \$27 for nonmembers. **Circle 182 on reader service card.**

Additional Reading

A Guidebook to Rehabilitation and Human Services Management: Fine Tuning for Excellence, by Steven E. Simon. 282 pp. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 217/789-8980, \$47.75.

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Managing Differences: How to Build Better Relationships at Work and Home, by Daniel Dana. 177 pp. Wolcott, CT: MTI Publications, 203/879-3579, \$7.95.

Circle 184 on reader service card.

Organization Development in Health Care, by R. Wayne Boss. 186 pp. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 617/944-3700, \$19.15.

Circle 185 on reader service card.