

## **Need for Continuous Improvement**

**By Dean Martin**

It is becoming increasingly common for employees to become frustrated due to initiatives and instructions handed down from their employers. People in various organizations have been required to take up duties such as secondary roles, and have had many additional requirements added to their criteria for promotions or productivity. If not brought across or explained in detail to its target audience, such movements while intended to be positive in order to improve productivity and effectiveness, may have an adverse effect and cause employees to be stressed, always worried that their jobs are unstable or insecure.

In order to reflect a little deeper on this, I would like to share a story with everyone. There were two unemployed men who lived in a village located about 3 miles from a river. Thus the governor of the village decided to hire these men to carry water from the river every morning and fill up the tank such that water would be easily available to the rest of the village. He gave each man 2 buckets and paid them \$5 for every time they filled the tank. Both men realized that they could each make about 20 trips before the tank was filled, which meant they could earn about \$100 a day. They would always head down to the bar in the evening to have a drink and relax after a heavy days work.

A few months later, both of them got more muscular from all the carrying and completed the job faster and faster. Then in order to earn more, they began to compete with each other in terms of who could complete more trips and fill the tank faster than the other, and instead of taking the entire day to fill the tank are able to fill it in just 4 hours after which they rest, relax or head over to the bar.

One day, the first guy has an idea which he thinks long and hard about. He decides to build a channel which would bring the water from the river to the tank directly! The next morning, after he has completed his duty of filling up the tank, he heads back to the river and attempts to map out the best route for his new channel. He understands that it is a huge task and thus needs to find the shortest possible route to make it easier for him. That very afternoon, he returns to the riverbank and spends the rest of the time till the sun sets digging the first section of the channel.

Day after day, the same thing happens and he returns to his digging after completing his work of filling the tank. His other colleague continues to go over to the bar and enjoy himself. As the days pass, the man digging the tunnel seems to become weaker and is not able to carry water from the river to fill the tank efficiently any more. He realizes that he is now only able to carry 10 trips while his peer is able to carry 30 trips. Thus his pay drops from \$100 to \$50 a day and the colleague is paid more at \$150 a day. Seeing the additional income, the second man tells the first and he says why do you continue to dig even though you can see yourself becoming weaker every day? Stop digging and you will be able to relax at the bar and once again earn your \$100 a day. But the first man is steadfast to his concept of the channel and ignores his colleague's opinion.

Many years pass, the man comes across a portion in the land mass where the ground is rocky and extremely hard to dig. But he endures and endures until finally one day he completes his channel and is ready, at last, to test it. However, the day he completes his work is in the winter and the lake is frozen over thus, no water flows into the channel. Seeing this, the second man is unable to control his laughter and runs back to the bar and share the first's misfortune with everyone else in the town. The first man returns to find that he has become a laughing stock to all the townspeople, but he continues to believe in his plan and his dream that one day, the water will flow from the river directly into the tank and there would be no need for people to walk to the river to collect water anymore. The winter months pass slowly and every day the man walks down to the river to find no water flowing into the channel. People continue to ridicule and humiliate him and he slowly starts to despair.

Finally, it is time for the spring and the weather warms up and sun can be seen shining brightly high in the sky. The river is not frozen anymore and water flows directly into the village tank. The governor on seeing this realizes that he has no use for the two men to go down to collect water from the river anymore and gives the entire \$200 to the first man.

The second man who now finds himself out of a job, goes directly to the bar and drinks himself silly. Weeks pass and the second man has moved into a state of depression and is in a pathetic state. The first man now enjoying the fruits of his labor decides to expand his business and construct channels for other nearby villages. The first man, seeing his friend in this pathetic state, invites the second to work and assist him in the business and both men do extremely well together.

The moral of this story is actually pretty simple, while all of us view secondary appointments, reading articles and stuff an additional burden to our already taxing work life, it could actually be a good thing for all of us to do. While I don't subscribe to the thought process that we should view it as a yellow ball, like we are expected to view all other challenges thrown at us cause I feel it's just a way for the company to make us do more for less, it could well be a very beneficial duty which will not only improve our knowledge but also develop our personalities. It is about looking beyond the micro difficulties we may face to understand the importance of the macro view which would be developing ourselves as professionals.

That said, while we are constantly improving and providing higher quality service, delivering better quality programs, we need to ensure that this is not only limited to one department but actually spreads among the rest of the company as well! Again, while I do not subscribe to the idea of making this a culture, I think it's a good way for each of us to achieve more than just the work and experience we gain through our daily toils here.