



The Trouble With Assembly- Line Living

Chapter One





Trouble With Assembly-Line Living

The famous words sung by Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, “I can’t get no sat-is-fac-tion” seem to be the mantra of our times. From CEOs hitting burnout in the corporate world, to kindergarten teachers trying to meet the demands of 30 screaming five year-olds, times are tough.

As I travel across the nation and speak to businesses and large audiences, it strikes me just how many people feel stressed and overwhelmed. It doesn’t seem like there are very many people that love what they do everyday.

How about you? Do you wake up each morning, whistling a happy tune like a scene out of the Truman show? Or is your attitude and enthusiasm level more like a scene out of Napoleon Dynamite? If it is more like the latter, I’ve got news for you: Life can be better than it feels today.

Your job, your relationships, your enthusiasm level - all of these can change for the better in





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some very dramatic ways, once you get a handle on what is behind your feeling of dissatisfaction.

Let's pause for one minute. If you're skeptical like me and don't have time to waste by reading "another book that claims to be able to change your life" then you're exactly the kind of person I want to read this book! This book won't change your life, I'll tell you that up front, but I can promise you that if you put into practice even one concept in the preceding chapters, YOU will change your life.

Whether you're the business owner, the employee, the assistant, the teacher, the student, or the stay-at-home parent, this book is for you if you're willing to ask the necessary questions that follow. If you're not willing to do that then throw this book on the floor, pick up the remote control and keep watching others live out their dreams on television before your eyes! But if you're willing to ask yourself, "What's in it for me?" keep asking yourself that very question, because we're going to hit it head on.



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You see, people everywhere struggle to feel valued, needed, and appreciated. Research says that 87% of employees go to work these days with no passion for what they do. Employers have documented that in an eight-hour day, they receive approximately four hours of true productivity. On top of that, most Americans will retrain in three different careers over their lifetimes. I'm sure you've been through that yourself. Our grandparents had one vocation. Our kids may have four or five during their lives.

Productivity is down. Insecurity is up. As a nation we are struggling with an identity crisis; we don't feel passionate about our work, therefore, we aren't satisfied. We're a nation of taskmasters and workaholics but we just don't feel in the end like it's very rewarding. Why is that?

There once was a time when farmers worked the land from sun up to sun down, cultivating a crop that they could take to market. Families would work together; children would learn trades under the tutelage of their parents or tradesmen in the





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town. The sun was the timetable, and a person's skill and craft built up their self-esteem. The blacksmith took pride in his work and became known for his talent. His brand became his signature and his bond. It became his heritage and his legacy.

It was 1792 in England when the sundial was retired and the local time was kept by the upper class on time clocks. By the early 19th century, as railways began moving people from here to there, it became apparent that every train station needed to be on the same standard of time to function best. Hard to imagine a life like that - no day planners, no digital clocks, no Blackberry.

As we moved into the Efficiency Movement, the famous engineer Frederick Taylor introduced the assembly line, followed of course by the zealous Henry Ford. Instead of the sun and the rooster waking the farmer, the assembly line worker was called to the factory by a loud whistle, making sure that every man was at his station when the assembly line began.



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Even then there was high turnover and unhappy workers. As Ford built his Tin Lizzies, he'd give each worker one job - supervisors would oversee to make sure no more than 6 seconds was taken at each station in order to keep the chassis moving.

At that speed and with only a minimal impact on the end product, employees lost their vision, became bored, dissatisfied, disgruntled, and difficult to manage. Employees didn't get the satisfaction of using their natural talents and lost their passion for what they were doing. Sounds a lot like today doesn't it?

There wasn't a whole lot of room for people to be unique on those assembly lines. Can you imagine Michael Jackson in an assembly line? First he wouldn't take off his hat and sunglasses; he'd always have his pet monkey Bubbles in his arms; he'd bring in a friend to hold an umbrella over his head all day; and worst of all he'd refuse to wear both gloves! What about Ricky Martin? Can you imagine his boss trying to explain why he couldn't



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wear his leather pants to work? How about his poor female coworkers hooting and hollering to have him shake his bon-bon all day. How distracting for everyone else!

It sounds absurd and it is - only because we've seen what these artists can create outside of an assembly line life.

Imagine the difficulty in dealing with someone like Albert Einstein on the assembly line. It would be hard enough just to get him to comb his hair! You'd be lucky if you could get him to wear the industry standard hair net. These individuals stood out. Their unique characteristics became classic and legendary. Certain personalities just wouldn't lend themselves well to an assembly line life. If they had, what would we have missed in our culture, arts, and way of life?

Back in the beginnings of assembly-line burnout (between 1914-1927), as a perk to boost morale and keep employees, Henry Ford announced the \$5 dollar a day wage. Ford hoped that even if the



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workers weren't happy that the higher wage would encourage loyalty. Yes, the higher wage brought in lots of factory workers, but that didn't create happier and more fulfilled employees.

In the early 1860's the official 8-hour day became a standard in the U.S. labor movement. It was reasoned that out of 24 hours, every person should sleep for eight, work for eight and enjoy the eight hours left over. Sounds logical doesn't it? How many of you are enjoying your eight hours of free time a day? It doesn't really work out that way does it?

Living an assembly-line life and an eight-hour day hasn't given us the freedoms we originally thought. We've pumped out more products, have more stuff, but are not better off for it. We are less fulfilled individually, and less grateful collectively.

What have we lost along the way? I think it has to do with personal ownership, in using our talents,



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and having a sense of purpose. You see, as a farmer planted his crop, he had a connection with it. He nurtured it from start to finish and had pride of ownership in its creation. He had purpose and he was able to see it to fruition. On the assembly line, the steering wheel employee had 8,000 steering wheels to set in a day, and 6 seconds to do it. Hardly enough time to get connected with each steering wheel!

On that Ford assembly line in one year alone, it is reported there were 75,000 burns, cuts, and puncture wounds recorded, as well as 200 severed fingers. Nowadays most workers are concerned with carpal tunnel and computer screen fatigue! Our work is less physically demanding, but it seems more stressful than ever. Stress, not danger of injury as in Ford's time, is now the number one cause of health problems in our country.

When our lives consist of inadequate rest, battling rush hour traffic, enduring our eight-hour jobs, something inside of us is missing. When we



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push papers or set steering wheels every 6 seconds, with no connection or pride of ownership, feel little impact from our labor, we are left without satisfaction.

When we're stuck on the freeway with thousands of other drivers we get a sense of being herded like cattle. We want to stand out and be noticed, to be acknowledged for what we can offer. We feel like a number on an assembly line with others who feel hopeless. We feel invisible and unappreciated for who we really are and what we are capable of contributing.

My favorite Gary Larsen Far Side cartoon was of hundreds of penguins in a black and white cartoon. They all look alike. Above the mass of penguins is one lone penguin, identical to the others, wings spread singing out the ironic words, "I Gotta Be Me!". Hilarious!

We all long to be different, to stand out in our own way, to be appreciated in a world where we often look the same.





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Yes, getting people to stand in line and perform simple tasks produces quantities of products. Paying people to work doesn't win their loyalty; it only buys their time. Even if a manager is supervising his people, he only has their body in the chair, not their creativity, initiative, or passion.

I believe that if people are going to feel satisfied on a long-term basis (satisfied not meaning "to be done" or "the end" but "to be happy, fully and completely"), either as a leader, in a company, or on a team, we must feel successful. Three things that the blacksmith and the farmer knew long before the whistle blew were that success needs a PAL. The three important and specific things are Purpose, Authenticity and Legacy. Remember that! Success needs a PAL.

