

pened to have statisticians on staff in this facility. Someone from maintenance got to the statisticians. They did a study with the old system and the system I designed. They “proved” the old system was more reliable—the old system with all the moving parts and the surfaces where the leaflet could stumble.

This experience was in the pile of “final straws” that pushed me to seek my fame and fortune elsewhere.

And left me suspicious of “scientific” conclusions for the rest of my life—right up to this very day.

I still ponder this old experience every once in a while. I still cannot figure out how they manipulated the statistical data to achieve the outcome desired by some. This was, after all, a very simple system, when compared to the more complex processes we have in mills (and don’t get me started on the global warming computer models).

The point, however, is this. Scientific results and engineering results must be studied carefully and analyzed many ways in order to ascertain their veracity. I fear in the world of today, we capriciously slap the words “science” or “computer analysis” on endeavors which need much further study. Sometimes this is done through ignorance, sometimes maliciously.

Additionally, I think many scientists and engineers are the worst culprits in these deceptions. Being of a scientific or engineering mindset, I believe those in these professions never consider the human element that affects analyses. We (I am an engineer after all) derisively dismiss the politics of a given situation. This is a mistake. Often the politics and I am simply talking the politics within a company, nothing grander than this, decide the outcome of the day. Unfortunately, in too many cases the decision is wrong for it was not consider carefully enough.



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A Different View

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Attitude (23 Jun 2014)

By Jim Thompson

I have decided the most important attribute to consider when evaluating employees is to divide them into “givers” and “takers.”

The takers are characterized by their attitudes and the characterization they use concerning others. They speak of “rights” that have no basis in fact or tradition. They worry about who has the bigger office, who has the most toys. They are often clock watchers.

Givers on the other hand, are fairly easy to manage. Sometimes, however, they need a bit of management protection for they can be easily exploited by the takers.

Corruption follows the takers. Sadly, most of the corruption I have seen in mills is regional, in the “old South” in the United States. It follows a study recently released by Cheol Liu of the City University of Hong Kong and John L. Mikesell of Indiana University. They studied corruption in state governments in the United States. Their top ten most corrupt states, from most corrupt to least corrupt is Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Alaska, South Dakota, Kentucky and Florida. Sadly, my mill experiences mesh with their state analyses quite closely.

There is one mill in one state on their list that I will not even bother to call on. I learned many, many years ago that if you were not towing a new bass boat to drop off at the chief engineer’s home, there was no reason to think you would ever be favored with any business from that mill. Interestingly, I have kept tabs on that mill and have seen the purchasing and engineering department turned over many times for the same reasons--still, the attitude returns.

You can’t fire a person for being a “taker” but you can work on managing them. I would say put them in the purchasing department, but the danger with that concept is they will likely become corrupt (or more corrupt) and shake down your suppliers, costing you money, lawsuits and criminal investigations. Better to isolate them until a good excuse for them to “seek opportunities elsewhere” can be found.

I do think the attitude of taking can be contagious. In



believe it). The big one, however, is cancer. Surviving twice myself (in 2000 and 2006), I have seen many people lie to themselves about cancer. Sadly, in most cases it has killed them when they lied to themselves about it. My thoughts on cancer are simple—you don’t have a cold, you must treat it as aggressively as it is treating you. Get yourself to the best cancer center on earth for the kind of cancer you have.

Yes, I think more people are harmed by lying to themselves than are harmed by lies told by others.



People vs Science and Engineering (14 Jul 2014)

By Jim Thompson

I received my first rude lesson in the reality which people play in interpreting science and engineering when I was 27 years old. I had been assigned to optimize the performance of a piece of converting machinery—in this case a machine that folded and inserted an instructional leaflet in a box of tampons.

This piece of equipment was a “Rube Goldberg” monstrosity if there ever was one. One of the main features of this torture rack was a slotted table through which pins, attached to chains below, protruded. These pins were supposed to guide the leaflet along as it was inserted in the box. It was a maintenance and operational nightmare. I looked it over, thought about it, and replaced this entire section of the machine with a smooth plate and two belts, set at an angle, which gripped the leaflet and inserted it in the box. I replaced about twenty moving parts that could stretch, cause stumbles and so forth with a smooth stainless steel plate and two moving parts.

It worked perfectly—except maintenance liked to play with the old system. And when they were playing with it, they weren’t doing more arduous jobs. We hap-



Signs you are lying to yourself. You change jobs often because you think the problem is the work environment. Couldn't possibly be you, could it? You are perpetually late to work while telling yourself you love your job (you may love your paycheck and your benefits, but you don't love your job). If you love your job, you will be there early and eagerly. You'll stay late.

I have watched a number of young people join a volunteer organization to which I belong. Folks in their 30's with small kids. This organization is demanding—it will take at least one weekend day a month from you as well as a three to four day annual exercise. These thirty-somethings are predictable. They come in full of enthusiasm, declaring this is the greatest thing they have ever done. In twelve to eighteen months they quietly slip away, never to be heard from again. They discovered they love their families more (a good thing).

This happens to people going to college, too. Compare how many start, again declaring what a great thing this is in their lives, to those that finish.



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Lying to yourself is part of the folly of a balanced lifestyle. There is no such thing as a balanced lifestyle. We have discussed this here before. Something is always priority one.

Lying to yourself starts with mild fantasy. It progresses to active fantasy and some specific actions. It completes with a full blown move to whatever it is you really want to do. I have seen people complete all these steps while fooling themselves into thinking they were not moving in whatever new direction their actions took them.

Lying to oneself, I think, has three possible sources. The first and most dominant is unhappiness. One is unhappy with a set of conditions in their life or believes they can be happier in some other set of conditions. The second is boredom. Many will take action because of boredom—they want to do something exciting. The final is curiosity—the more one's nature has a curious bent, the more one is likely to lie to themselves about an action they are taking.

Many a marriage, career and life have been destroyed by self-delusion. Yes, in nearly thirteen years of writing this column about the pulp and paper industry, I don't think I have ever given marriage advice before, but you have seen it now.

And the final area of caution is health when it comes to lying to one's self. Obesity is one form of this (don't write to me about your glandular problem, I won't

particular, young people, early in their careers, can be moved from a somewhat neutral attitude to one of being a taker by embittered senior folks. So, care is in order when assigning mentors and others to young employees.

I should further state that I don't think an attitude of being a giver or taker is necessarily associated with being a "go-getter." I have seen people with a "can do" or "go-getter" attitude in both the giver and taker camps. Givers and takers are more closely aligned with those who have a sense of entitlement than anything else.

So, if you have been having management problems with your team, I suggest you look at their individual attitudes, and divide them into givers and takers. If you are having trouble deciding, one clue is to determine if they are chronically happy or angry. I have never seen a giver that is chronically angry.



That can't be (30 Jun 2014)

By Jim Thompson

I have never seen an attitude that has led to so much failure in so many fields as that reflected by the title of our column this week. Life, love, career, home, you name it—an attitude of refusing to believe a sequence of events that might happen is responsible for a great deal of personal and corporate misery.

A few examples may illustrate the issue.

Take the newsprint industry of the late 1980's. If you would have told anyone at that time what was about to transpire over the next quarter of a century, they would have laughed you out of the room. Yet, it did happen. Companies, blind companies, as recently as the mid-2000's (around 2005), were still buying newsprint mills from those who had seen the light.

Families, who think the mill that supported great grand-



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parents, grandparents and parents, think it will continue on just as it has in the past. They wake up shocked that conditions changed.

The sweet little lady that sat in front of you in church each week turns out to be an embezzler. The car you bought does not achieve the gas mileage the salesperson told you it would achieve.

As a salesperson or director of marketing, you just can't believe no one wants to buy your product.

A few years ago after one more experience beating my head against the wall attempting to help a person see that the way things were going was not the way this person thought (Dreamed? Imagined? Wished?), I sat down one day and developed a set of principles that is taped to my computer screen's edge:

"Always remember:

"People are not creative nor do they have much vision—you always have to spell it out.

"People are selfish with their time and money.

"People like praise and inquiries about themselves.

"People do not want to hear about you.

"People are lazy when it comes to being altruistic.

"People react to fear and their own ego."

Now, you might think some of these are not very nice. I wrote them as my own reminder. A few "somes" and "maybes" would soften them up a bit. However, the full, unedited version I just gave you may be more effective.

Now, you can use these two ways. You can think of them as being about you, or you can think of them as being about the people with whom you interact. Either way will help you understand and better prepare for the balance of your life, whether it ends this afternoon or a hundred years from now.

We make the mistake that the world as we knew it yesterday is the world we will know tomorrow. We make the mistake that what we think of as common sense is bestowed upon all. We make the mistake that most people will act in a civilized manner most of the time. Nothing could be further from the truth—no one

knows fully what tomorrow brings or what another person is thinking.

Does this mean we should develop a stance of continual fear and suspicion? No. What it does mean is that we need to stop being lethargic in our thinking. Observe people, events, nature and then act on what you have observed and studied by applying rigorous thinking.

I think more surprises are caused by lazy thinking than nearly anything else. Some call energetic thinking "critical thinking"—I prefer "deep thinking" myself. If you want to make tomorrow better than today, you have to think about all the possibilities. It is a simple as that.



Lying to yourself (7 Jul 2014)

By Jim Thompson

We all do it. However, I think you have to have a number of years of maturity to catch yourself at it.

You don't think you lie to yourself? Match up your actions and your thoughts. When they are out of sync, your actions are the truth, not your thoughts.

Most people confine their lying to themselves to issues concerning their careers and lovers. Those really good at it expand this to other areas of life.

Why do we lie to ourselves? It makes difficult situations more comfortable for a while. Eventually, however, lying to ourselves tends to turn out badly. Eventually, the truth has to come out and when it does it is often ugly.

This starts as a child with fantasy friends. Most generally grow out of it, but many don't.

