

# **THE PARABLE OF THE TAIL WITH NO TEETH**



(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

**Reprinted from *Cryptologic Quarterly* by  
The Center for Cryptologic History  
May 1996**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

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Beginning with the Spring 1988 issue and concluding with the Winter 1992 issue, *Cryptologic Quarterly* ran a series of articles by [redacted] on management. The articles used a mythical and whimsical medieval setting to present morals about general and particular aspects of management. (Some readers think the articles just may describe situations which have arisen at NSA.) The articles proved to be very popular, and many *CQ* readers asked if we had plans to reprint them. This volume is a response to that question, and we hope that the lessons contained in the original printing of [redacted] articles will be as relevant to present and future managers as they were the first time the articles appeared.

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**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. The castle hadn't always been a castle. Once it had been only a stable, but operated by some very young and very smart people. In fact, many of them were geniuses – eccentric but good at what they did. What they did was very specialized and complicated. A keen intelligence, rigorous training, and lots of experience were necessary to do the jobs well. The people who did these jobs were called technicians.

Everyone worked hard in the stable producing horses for the military forces in the kingdom and manure for the neighboring farmers. Business was good, and the demand rose for more horses and more manure, so more people had to be hired to become technicians.

The new people – who came to be called “vassals” – didn't share the common background and experience of the original technicians – who came to be called “lords” – and had to be trained or retrained to do things in the time-honored ways of the stable. Soon it became clear that the running of the stable couldn't just continue to happen in a purely democratic way. It needed a hierarchy.

Since a hierarchy needs managers and supervisors, and since these worthies are supposed to know the most about the hierarchy in which they operate, all the new managers and supervisors, the lords, were chosen from the technicians who had been in the stable the longest.

The lords were also the best technicians. They were the best because they possessed a unique nature: they were the most comfortable dealing with the horses. More accurately, they simply loved working with the horses, to the exclusion of almost everything else. Unfortunately, they were almost as equally uncomfortable dealing with people. Working with horses was not the same as working with people, or worse, being lords over people. People who loved working with horses didn't often like working with people. Being a lord meant one should know how to work with people and make people work. But there was no one to teach the old technicians how to be lords. All of their peers were in the same boat – they preferred and understood horses but not people.

They also preferred being around people who liked horses and were good at working with horses. So they surrounded themselves with people just like themselves. They promoted people just like themselves and replaced themselves with people just like themselves.

Soon the stable became too crowded because of all the new vassals, so the lords decided to build a castle. They needed a castle to house all the scribes and scribe supplies now necessary because they had a hierarchy and many vassals. They also needed the castle to impress the increasing number of visiting military officials and farmers who were their customers. They also needed a castle because lords shouldn't have to work in stables.

Borrowing jargon from the kingdom's cavalry, the people who worked in the stables came to be known as the "teeth" of the stable, because they were the business end of the endeavor, and those who worked in the castle became known as the "tail," because they were as far away from the business end as they could get.

A castle needs a prince, of course, and the lords (well aware that the military was their strongest and richest customer) asked the military to send them a general-prince. They hoped that the prince would be only a figurehead and not try to tell them how to operate the stable. The real leader (they thought) would be the prince's counselor, elected by them from within their own group. Thereafter, they always elected one of them who exemplified all the characteristics of a lord, but who could safely be ignored. The prince, however, soon took control, kept it, and the prince's counselor thereafter had very little meaningful work to do.

After the castle was built and the lords moved in, many of them realized that they weren't comfortable there. These lords continued to spend much of their time in the stable working on the horses with the vassals. They didn't teach the vassals now responsible for taking care of the horses but simply joined the process themselves. They led by example and monitored progress through constant participation. Of course, the vassals had to perform the tasks the same way the lords had always done, or they weren't promoted.

The lords continued to show the talents that made them such great technicians. They invented new styles of horseshoes to be used according to the terrain upon which the cavalry expected to fight. They bred horses according to the attributes necessary to the intended function of the horse. They even discovered that they could vary the qualities of the manure according to the fodder used. In this way, the stable grew and prospered but mostly it grew. And as it grew it became harder and harder for the lords to continue in a participatory mode. More and more they had to rely on others and trust others to do the work. The people who reported to them soon had people reporting to them in turn, and then those people had people reporting to them.

The lords then had to change their ways slightly. They did so by creating, and participating in, study groups and task forces that worked on specific horses: those that the lords understood and loved and whose manure they enjoyed smelling the most. All other tasks required to operate the stable – many of which were necessitated by improvements in the art of warfare as well as a revolution in agronomy – were left to subordinates to accomplish on their own, with little or no support from, or interest shown by, the lords.

Since the stable was still relatively small, the lords were able to manage in this way relatively effectively, and the supply of horses and manure continued to burgeon. The

stable became very popular because of both the quantity and the quality of its products. It cornered the market for the entire kingdom. When customers came to the stable to ask for product improvements or even something entirely new, they were told that the stable was already producing the best and that the lords knew best what was good for the customer. And that's what the customer got – nothing more, nothing less – no matter what he said or did.

The stable continued to have to hire more and more people. Since there were only so many geniuses in the kingdom and only so many of them that wanted to be vassals in the stable, it became necessary to hire ordinary people – people who required much more training and experience.

The lords could not help very much because they were already busy doing vassal work themselves and because they had not been trained to lead vassals like real lords should. So a school was set up to teach the new people. The teachers were people of lesser caliber than the lords and were able to impart only a pale imitation of the knowledge possessed by the lords. Partly because the students were generally not geniuses and partly because of the nature of the human mind, they could grasp only a percentage of that which they were presented. So it was that it became ever harder for the stables to obtain vassals capable of caring for the horses effectively.

In the good old days, the lords had worked closely with their vassals and learned through daily contact who was better than whom. Now this was no longer possible. They also had to pay more money to the vassals who possessed the unique skills needed to raise horses and meet the ever-increasing demand for manure. Solutions had to be found for the problems arising from these and other factors, and the prince had to buy the services of several wise men from a neighboring kingdom to help him do so.

The wise men developed a concept called "transubstantiation," for which a program was instituted to identify the best among the vassals for promotion and possible ennobling as lords. They also created a new hierarchy to administer the program so that the lords wouldn't have to waste time getting involved in the process.

The wise men then invented an arrangement, called the indenture program, designed to ensure the training of vassals chosen for transubstantiation. Naturally, after a while, the indenture program settled into a normal bureaucratic expediency. Lack of attention from the castle eventually resulted in a certain diffidence on the part of the administrators of the program – not to mention disillusionment among the indentured. Less and less oversight was given and the program lost its luster.

Transubstantiation became a matter of passing a written examination with no personal evaluation by the lords. More and more vassals became transubstantiated, and soon one certificate wasn't enough any more. A new automatic way of discriminating between vassals was necessary, so the need to diversify was invented. Vassals with two certificates became more sought after than vassals with only one. Many vassals became professional students and spent more time in the pursuit of certificates than in doing any real work. The lords were finally forced to decree that it didn't matter what or how many

certificates a vassal earned, only that he had one. Possessing a certificate was no longer a matter of benefit so much as it was a detriment if one did not.

The wise men continued to think of new programs and functions. None of them had anything to do with raising horses or distributing manure, but they sounded good in the castle and justified more people, which in turn justified more lords and more wings on the castle.

Meanwhile, the old stable had to be expanded and new stables built. Each new stable also meant another new wing on the castle. The wings were built higher and farther away from the stables, as the "tail" of the stables grew longer. When the lords got used to the castle, they lost their taste (and smell) for the stables. They no longer had anything in common with the vassals, and it was hard to make the trip down to the stables now that they were physically and psychologically so far away.

So many horses had been obtained that it became difficult to dispense the resultant manure. The wise men once again came to the rescue. Realizing that the problem could be solved by better handling and packaging methods, they called for the automation of the stables. The wise men convinced the lords that they needed machines to do the most simple tasks and the preliminary operations in the process. They predicted not only that the product would improve, but that it would do so with no increase in the numbers of vassals.

So the lords bought machines and built another new wing on the castle to house the hierarchy created by automation. Then the realization dawned, slowly but inexorably, in the stables and in the castle, that the wise men had been wrong. Automation didn't hold down the number of vassals, it actually greatly expanded the jobs that needed to be done to support the machines. In the stables, the only people available were vassals. So vassals were encouraged to work with the machines and not with the manure. Eventually the average stable which had had ten vassals caring for the horses and processing the manure, now had only five doing those jobs and ten more vassals caring for the machines. The people caring for the machines were given more gold than those caring for the horses which, of course, didn't make it any easier to obtain and retain vassals to care for horses.

The "tail" became bigger than the "teeth." The lords hired as many people as the king would allow, but now they had to settle for vassals from surrounding kingdoms. These vassals were not familiar with the different ways of the kingdom and didn't always fit in very well.

Simultaneously, farmers cried not only that they needed more manure, but that they needed it much faster. There weren't enough vassals to process so much manure so fast, and there was no way to acquire more since the king, in disgust, had refused to give the prince any more gold for people. The wise men responded to the crisis by devising a system of pipes that transmitted the manure directly from the horse to the farmer's fields. Now the stable was unable to do any preprocessing of the manure, so it fell to the farmer to do so.

The universally accepted answer to the growing lack of sufficient manpower was to acquire more machines. So, many more were bought. Soon the castle was filled to capacity with machines, and all the new ones had to fit into the stable areas. The only spaces available were those which the vassals occupied, so they had to be moved into smaller and smaller cubicles.

More and more money was spent on machines, and less and less was available to pay the vassals. Vast staffs had grown up to help the lords try to solve the ever-increasing problems. Large numbers of specialized vassals, called artisans, had to be hired to run the newer machines, and an almost equal number hired just to do the hiring and the buying. Less and less attention was paid to the stable vassals, the best of whom began to desert the stables in alarming numbers and joined those already in the castles.

The wise men, ever anxious to justify more of the large amounts of gold they received, devised a new scheme under which the lords were rotated among the castles regularly and often. They never stayed long enough to learn the associated stables and left before the consequences of their decisions became obvious. The lords generally coped with this system by either avoiding decisions altogether or making decisions that promised short-term gains in order to avoid actions that, no matter what the potential long-term gain, possessed the potential for short-term loss.

The prince could not admit he had mistakenly raised a lord to the purple, so all were either promoted regardless of achievement or promoted to jobs in the corners of the castle close to the stables, where they were promptly forgotten. No lord was ever openly beheaded or demoted. In fact, the prince adopted a new system within the kingdom wherein he could designate certain lords as members of the Senior Nobles' Order of Bosses, or SNOB for short. These were very special lords and soon were considered to be much better than the run-of-the-mill lords.

The prince also decided to implement a program attempting to match the right middle-level vassals to the right jobs. He called it Universe, but the vassals called it "The Lottery" because the odds against a vassal playing and winning were astronomical. The lords didn't like the program and immediately set about subverting it. The program evolved into a process whereby the lords continued to make personnel moves as they always had but informed Universe. This made the lords happy. Universe then published the personnel moves as a result of Universe's efforts. This made the prince happy. The name eventually was changed to a meaningless bureaucratic phrase, which at least reflected its real status.

The staffs in the castle outgrew its walls, and other castles were built or rented to house all the people and machines which were considered to be absolutely necessary. The stables were torn down to make room for the new castles. The horses died or were sold, and the manure supply dried up. There were no horses for plowing and food became scarce. The barbarians became aware of the weakness, and the kingdom became less and less able to cope with their inroads. The king, finally understanding that the end was near unless he did something quickly, sent for new wise men. These men proved to be truly wise and,

after a brief tour of the kingdom, quickly realized that the problem was that there were hardly any "teeth" left. All the energy of the stable was needed to maintain the 99 percent of it that was now "tail," producing nothing but consuming all.

The new wise men thereupon advised the king to behead all lords who had not enjoyed measurable success in the last two years. Doing as they advised, the king also wisely cut all staffs to ten percent of their former strength and reassigned the remainder to the care and feeding of horses. The horses and the vassals were moved into the castles, and the remaining lords were forced to move their offices to the stables. New lords were ennobled based on an objective evaluation of their demonstrated abilities to lead, organize, and take risks . . . and nothing else. Soon everyone was doing what he was best at; they were happy, and production rose sharply and quickly. The kingdom was saved.

The moral of the story is that management is a full-time endeavor. It requires the full and constant attention of the manager. The nobles were not bad people, merely men thrust, through ignorance into positions for which they were not prepared, and in many cases for which they had neither aptitude nor interest. Good full-time managers don't need large staffs because they keep their own eyes and those of the work force steadily focused on the main purpose for which the organization exists. That which does not contribute directly or indirectly to that purpose is simply not tolerated – and certainly not encouraged.

The management function is no more important than the technical function, and one should not exist without the other. The lords forgot what it was like to be a vassal, then forgot about the vassals altogether in their manic castle-building. Managers must spend most of their time supporting the work force, not themselves. Management needs cannot be ignored, but they should take second place to workplace needs.

Ill-bred and ill-trained horses may look like other horses, but they don't function like them. Poor-quality manure received quickly is still poor-quality manure. The customer and his needs must always be uppermost in the minds of management. Considerable effort should be expended by managers to find out who are the customers and what are their real needs.

Finally, managers should be chosen because they want to help people and the organization function better, not because they want to be nobles or because they were good technicians. Good technicians and good managers are two different kinds of people. The lords functioned exceptionally well as technicians. Pick a manager because he or she has demonstrated management aptitude, not just technical aptitude, and you'll avoid the stable's predicament of losing good vassals while simultaneously gaining bad lords.



# The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth

## Part II: Into the Teeth of the Tale

**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. It was a large castle, and because it was so, many people were employed to operate it. The French had a name for the function these people performed: bureaucracy; but because the king of the castle wasn't French, he called it his castle staff. Whatever the name, the effect was the same: the staff always grew in numbers but without any relationship to the actual needs of the castle. The peasants referred to the king's staff as *the plague* because there didn't seem to be any way to stop its spread. Also, like all bureaucracies, the king's staff was self-serving and hard to move to action.

On this staff was a vassal named Thomas a Bucket. Thomas was new to the castle, having recently been brought in from the hinterlands where he had been in charge of marketing manure produced by an outlying stable. He noticed that the castle could benefit by acquiring some of the manure handling tools used by the stable he'd just left. So he worked out the details of the acquisition and, like all good staff vassals, developed a briefing to convince the lords in charge of the castle's treasury to issue the needed amount of gold. This is the story of what happened to Thomas.

Thomas briefed his plan to the Lord of the Purse in the Grand Hall of the Treasury. The reputation and opulence of the hall were intimidating (not to mention the reputation and opulence of the nobles who gathered to hear him). Thomas remembered the rumors that a considerable part of the treasury had been used to decorate it . . . and them. He contrasted the scene in the hall with the conditions of the stables, and the vassals in them, and decided the stories could be true.

Thomas finished his briefing and stood expectantly before the round table leaning on the broadsword he'd used as a pointer. His master had given it to him saying that no vassal of his was going to use one of those effeminate epees that so many briefers liked to use as pointers. "Besides, who was going to argue with someone with a broadsword in his hands?" the knight had said with a wink. Thomas was also pleased with the charts he'd used. They had been painted by a visiting Italian; what was his name again . . . Angelo? Yes, that was it: Michael Angelo. He really liked the chart that showed an arm thrust from a cloud toward the king, a state-of-the-art pitchfork hanging by its handle on the tip of the outstretched finger.

It was all worthwhile now, he thought: the long hours of acrimonious argument; the grueling fact-finding trip to several stables; the disappointments when other parts of the castle didn't respond with their contributions on time, if at all; and the several delays and

cancellations of the decision briefing. In truth, he had to admit, those cancellations still rankled a bit. The frantic last minute preparations and the lost sleep and stomach aches all going for naught when the page brought the message, often at the last minute, that once again the briefing would not be taking place as scheduled. No reason was ever given, of course, and it was difficult for Thomas to accept the lack of consideration given for the project . . . and him.

Then there was the horror of experiencing the baron in charge of the tower in which he served walk out midway through the first of the many prefatory briefings he had to make before finally reaching the Lord of the Purse. The baron had berated him at length on the presentation of the first few charts (this was before Michael Angelo had operated on them) and refused to listen to the content of the presentation. The baron still didn't know what Thomas was recommending and, what's more, was complaining about the fact that he didn't!

Thomas fretted nervously while the Lord of the Purse conferred with his personal staff. He could catch only a word or phrase here and there, but it seemed that the Lord of the Purse was asking for opinions from them. It also appeared that, although none of the staff had ever seen the equipment Thomas was proposing to buy and had never seen the operation the equipment was intended to improve, they were acting as though they knew all about it. Even more amazing to Tom, they were questioning the wisdom of his recommendations.

Holy hatchet, thought Thomas, now they were suggesting that the problem needed more study! As if the subject had not already been studied for what seemed to be forever and by the best analyst vassals available. Well, surely the Lord of the Purse will see the wisdom of my recommendation, will understand that more study will mean only more delay, and he will realize that more delay will only risk the potential failure to be competitive with other castles. Surely . . . .

Presently, the Lord of the Purse drew himself up and addressed Thomas for the first time since the briefing had begun. "Well, young man, that was a very interesting briefing," he said. Uh oh, thought Thomas, I'm in trouble now! "Very interesting" in the jargon of the castle was a pejorative phrase.

"Yes, very interesting." The Lord of the Purse shifted uncomfortably in his chair at the head of the table. "Uh, well, of course, you, uh, know this is a very important project -- one that has my full attention. Uh, what's its name again?"

"Project QUICKSAND, sir!" Thomas spat it out with the military precision that he knew the Lord of the Purse loved.

"Ah, of course, QUICKSAND," spake the Lord of the Purse, "a quite unusual name . . . and hard for me to remember sometimes," he concluded lamely. (And I'm beginning to think quite apropos, thought Thomas.) "Yes, Jonas," the Lord of the Purse prided himself on his ability to remember the names of all the vassals in his organization, "well done. You've obviously done some very useful initial work here, and I believe that we need to

consider it as we transition (the Lord of the Purse loved to use nouns as verbs) to the formal study phase on this very important purchase. In fact, I want you to be the special advisor to the study group that Sir John here will head up."

The Lord of the Purse turned to the Deputy Lord of the Purse and made a gesture that implied he had handed over the problem. He then quickly shoved back his heavy imitation wood and leather minithrone and, gesturing to his aide, hurried from the room. He left in his wake a bustle of horse holders fumbling with their chairs, in various stages of trying to rise before the Lord of the Purse disappeared.

Thomas busied himself with gathering up his charts, pointer, and pride and tried hard not to meet the eyes of anyone else in the room. In fact Thomas was alone in the room, except for his master, the knight Sir Lancelot, who was looking at him sympathetically. "Welcome to the Tower of the Powerful, Thomas," he said as he beckoned Thomas to follow him from the room.

"I can't understand it, Sir Lancelot," Thomas said to his master's back. "I had all my maces in line, the decision was clear. The urgency of quick action was clear! How can he just turn away and leave things hanging like that?"

"You don't understand, Thomas," said his master as he turned down the hall leading back to their office. He pulled a walnut from his purse and began shucking it gratefully. "A pox on those busybody Anti-Wal-Nuts! I hate being able to grab only these quick nuts in the hallways. The next thing those court jesters will do is ban walnut eating in the halls, then I'll really be in trouble!" Walnut eating was an anathema to a majority within the castle. Although the citizens of the kingdom had engaged in the habit for centuries, recent *revelations* by sorcerers indicated that walnut eating caused the pox, and in fact, mere contact with the shells meant eventual doom. The acorn lobby, of course, was in the forefront of the campaign to obliterate walnut eating.

Thomas glanced at the trail of shells streaming after Sir Lancelot and at the "No Walnut Eating in This Hall" sign on the wall and walked a little faster.

"Look, Thomas, you have to understand the situation. This project costs a lot of gold and is very controversial because the other towers fear for their own budgets. The king is the only one who is for it 100 percent . . . and he's dying. Nobody knows what the new king will think about it. The Lord of the Purse didn't get where he is by making decisions that might anger a king. In fact, he got there by making no decisions at all. He never left his fingerprints on anything important, ever."

"But I still don't understand, Sir Lancelot, isn't he being paid to make decisions, to in effect make sure the castle is prosperous?"

"What he's being paid to do and what the culture of the privy council tells him he *must* do are two different things, I'm afraid." Sir Lancelot stopped to ladle water out of one of the many buckets dotting the hallway. "The castle functions as well as it does because of vassals like you. Servants who know what needs to be done, and because you're not politically attuned, do it because it's right without regard to whether or not it will bother a

lord off in some corner of the castle somewhere. Or, and this is common also, because it *will* bother another lord. Nobles, like the Lord of the Purse, have a lot more to worry about. He probably worked hard to get where he is; he had to compromise a lot in the process, and now he thinks he owes it to himself to hang on to what cost him so much to achieve. He knows he's not well prepared for his position – the system is designed to enhance privilege, not encourage altruism – and he has to protect himself as best he can from criticism or the worst of all eventualities, sacking, loss of his self-esteem. He's just a human being trying to get along in a hostile environment he didn't make and can't change. He has to go along to get along."

They reached their chamber, but Sir Lancelot hesitated to enter. "I'd like to go back to my cell, but I really need another walnut. Let's stand here in the hall awhile. Besides, the scenery is pretty good, eh?" Sir Lancelot's eyes were following the undulations of a lovely young serving wench receding down the hallway.

Thomas reluctantly returned his attention to his supervisor. "Sir Lancelot, what you're saying sounds awfully cynical to me. Are you seriously telling me that our nobles are more worried about themselves than they are in doing a good job?"

Sir Lancelot threw a mocking look at Thomas. "Well, that's really only true in the exception, but I admit, it often looks that way. You've heard the expression 'If it wasn't for bad management, we wouldn't have any at all', haven't you?" Thomas nodded.

"In this most exalted castle," Sir Lancelot continued, "it often seems like we don't have any at all. True, we have management positions, and lords in them, and we have management programs, and princes running them, but the actual process of management itself seems alien, even arcane, to many vassals. Much of what our nobles claim to be management seems to many to be just the normal bureaucratic responses to stimuli. That is to say what often happens is a reactive response, not programmed action resulting from long-range planning. The lord sits on the status quo until forced off by fiat or unforeseen circumstance."

Sir Lancelot finished his walnut, immediately reached into his purse, and discovered he had eaten his last one. Seeing the stricken look on Lancelot's face, Thomas suggested they begin walking to the nearest walnut stand.

"Let me tell you a little story," Sir Lancelot said wearily. "I once had a lord tell me, in frustration over my badgering to make what I considered to be an overdue decision, that his philosophy was to make as few changes as possible in any tower he was in charge of. His goal was to do only enough to maintain the status quo. He didn't want to make waves because that was too risky. He wanted to avoid failure at any cost because the rewards for improving a tower were no better than merely avoiding catastrophe. The potential for hurting his career increased the more active he became, and the more he became identified with whatever the tower was doing."

"I just can't believe it, Sir Lancelot! You mean to tell me that this knave wanted to get ahead – knew he could get ahead – by doing NOTHING!" Thomas had the sudden and unfamiliar desire to eat one of Sir Lancelot's walnuts.

"That's what I'm saying, Thomas. The guy was no dunce. He'd been around a long time and knew how the joust was played. He knew that his prince thought the same way. What could he do? If he tried to make changes or improvements, inevitably he would have to ask a prince for a decision . . . ."

"But how does anything ever get done?" Thomas was incredulous. "If you don't try to improve, to make progress, don't you eventually fall behind and fail anyway?"

"True, but that only affects those who are in charge when the day of reckoning finally comes. Our lords have figured that one out. They never stay in one place very long. They move on as fast as they can. That way the odds of being in the wrong place at the wrong time are minimized, and in any case, blame is so diffused that it's pretty much impossible to point the finger of guilt at any specific lord. A noble can make decisions resulting in short-term gains, regardless of long-term consequences, because he knows he need only look good now and the future will be someone else's problem. In truth, it's not all bad, Thomas. Look at it this way. The vassals actually have a lot more power as a result. All you have to do is figure out a way to get the job done that doesn't involve a noble too closely. You must be willing to put your own neck on the block and deflect the risk away from the lord. Give him an escape valve. If you take the onus, you can often get your own way. Adopt our army's philosophy: consider a nondecision to be a yes decision and forge ahead until a noble actually says no. In this castle you receive very few nos . . . because that in itself is a decision and therefore a risk."

"Gee, I don't know what to think right now. I feel like you just kicked me in the codpiece. Guess I'm pretty naive, eh?" Thomas was looking at the floor, noticing nothing, not even the lovely maiden who had just passed by.

Sir Lancelot did, though, but he quickly returned to Tom's question. "Well, don't make the mistake of turning the situation into a we/they syndrome. Too many already do that. Lords are pretty smart and mostly are quite happy when what happens turns out to be good for the castle. They aren't bad people. They don't go home and beat their families . . . any more than vassals do, at least. Mostly they dote on their children and kowtow to the Queen of the House just like vassals do." Sir Lancelot smiled. "The same way that you insist that they try to understand you and your problems, so should you try to understand their world and how they have to cope with it."

"But what do I do now? How do I handle this new study group? Getting that equipment now is important. Any more delay could really hurt us, and I can't seem to convince the lords of that."

By now they had checked two walnut stands – out of the many still, rather perversely, prevalent despite the growing no-walnut rules – only to find them out of Lancelot's favorite

size. Sir Lancelot grimaced, shrugged in resignation and led the way back to his office. He closed the door and they both sat down.

"Look, Thomas," Sir Lancelot resumed, "I don't have THE answer to your question. You'll just have to feel your way through it. You'll have to keep pushing and maybe you'll have to compromise in the end. But don't give up and eventually you'll find a way."

While Sir Lancelot was talking he was also urgently searching through his desk for a bag of walnuts. With a look of elated triumph he suddenly pulled an obviously old and very crumpled sack out of a drawer.

As he contentedly began his routine with the walnut, Sir Lancelot offered, "I guess you're thinking I'm doing a pretty good job of quadrilling around your question, but think about this: this castle is a unique management challenge. It's not only a bureaucracy but a highly technical activity. Classic management philosophy as applied to our mercantile world is inadequate at best. The only formal training the lords receive is only partially relevant – and replete with things of dubious value like team building exercises: climbing mountains and exploring caves, for instance. A key motivational force, the ability to hire and fire, is basically denied them. They have to learn to use the people the Lord of Levies hires for them which, unfortunately, is more of a numbers game than a talent search."

Sir Lancelot stopped again and started working on his tenth walnut since the briefing. "You know," he mused, "something like over 90 percent of all of our vassals receive top performance appraisals every year. I don't remember exactly, but I think those receiving deficient appraisals are less than 1 percent. My bet is that one reason for that is that you can't get someone else to take the sluggards off your hands if you establish that kind of negative paper trail. So, instead, you give them a good appraisal, and maybe a promotion to boot, and increase your odds of passing the problem off on some other unsuspecting lord. I've seen it happen all too often."

Sir Lancelot paused, shook himself in realization of his digression, and returned to the point. "You want a solution from me, don't you? Well, here's my tuppence worth. I believe that a process of renewal is needed and has to start from the top . . . with the recognition that there really is a problem and that the lords have to take an active part in solving it – not leave it up to the *social reformers* in the ivory tower who, as far as I'm concerned, are part of the problem to begin with. Our nobility has to realize that not to move forward is to fall backwards. The status quo quickly becomes the status quo ante. Another thing is that we can't continue to move in all directions at once. We need to prioritize, attack in a concerted manner. And we have to clarify that people, not machines, are really the most important cogs in this cart's wheel . . . and treat them like people, not axles. We need to use care in hiring them, care in training them, and a lot of care in promoting them. Finally, and this is very important, don't allow our people (and for Merlin's sake stop encouraging them) to move around the castle willy-nilly from tower to tower, without connection and no linearity of purpose."

Sir Lancelot picked up a parchment broadside from the ivory tower that lay on top in his in-basket. He sighed and spoke again, almost to himself, "Stress management!

Another presentation on stress management!" He slammed the paper into his chamber pot. "What I want to see is help in *avoiding* stress, not *managing* it! A concerted attempt to remove the *causes* of stress!"

Sir Lancelot looked up to see that Thomas was leaving. "Now that would be cause for optimism, wouldn't it!" he yelled at the closing door.

Outside, Thomas was deciding to buy his own sack of walnuts.

**MORAL:** He who works for himself has no master.

**The corollary:** He who would be master must make decisions.

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

**corollary:** He who would be a master must have people working for him.

## **The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth**

### **Part III: The Training Tail That Wagged the Teeth**

**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. It was a huge castle with land ranging far and wide beyond its portals. The castle employed many vassals and peasants because, although its single most important product was manure, a great variety of tasks had to be accomplished to assure a steady supply. Within the castle were several stables and many horses. The castle was surrounded by fields and farmers who provided fodder for the horses. Although many workers (the teeth of the castle) were necessary to carry out the functions of the castle, an even greater number of people (the tail) seemed to be necessary to keep the workers functioning.

The castle became very successful as the demand for its manure grew. The production tasks became more plentiful, more intricate, and harder to teach to the many new peasants who had to be brought into the stables to do them. Thereupon, the wise men were asked to devise a solution, which became the program they called "DOLT." DOLT stood for "Drudgery on Location Training," and the trainees came to be called "dolts" by the lords and the trainer vassals. The process was very time consuming, and production suffered as stable hands turned into trainer vassals ineptly tried to teach the peasant dolts how to do their jobs. Of course, something was lost with each successive transfer of knowledge. In this way, the stable vassals began really to resemble dolts.

Finally, the king decided that another way had to be found to teach peasants the duties of the castle, particularly in the stables. The new way could not require those already doing the jobs to teach the new people. So it came to pass that the wise men applied their attention to the problem. They labored hard to bring forth the idea to create a school and to staff it with vassals dedicated only to teaching. In this way the passing on of knowledge could be separated from the day-to-day business of the castle. Named the Institute of Very Organized Readying of Yeoman, the school's spaces quickly came to be referred to as the Ivory Rooms.

The king loved the idea and hailed the wise men as, once again, the saviors of the castle. The first student peasants were given instructions on how to handle manure in classrooms located in an old, unused Tower far away from the stables. Eventually, the king had a pristine new tower – named the Ivory Tower – built even farther from the stables than the old rooms. Thus, training was also physically removed from the manure as far as possible.

The king assigned educated vassals in the castle to the Ivory Tower as Transmitters of All Learned Knowledge or "TALKers." The TALKers were mostly vassals who were too



old to execute their production duties adequately. Some had even been pensioned off for years (the Lord of the Purse was happy to see these return; he was often heard to say that they were now "earning their pensions"). The original cadre of TALKers passed on quickly and had to be replaced by other vassals from the castle and stables. The replacements were chosen by the lords of the other towers who, of course, always tried to select the least productive in their work forces (those that weren't already shelved on a staff). Fortunately, these personnel decisions weren't any better than their other decisions and some fine TALKers were acquired quite by accident. Nonetheless, the "replacing down factor" gave rise to the idea of class participation. In some classes the vassals taught themselves, which took the pressure off the TALKers "teaching" them.

Since a tower without a lord made the king very uncomfortable, he named one of the nobles "Lord of the Ivory Tower." The king said to the noble, "Go forth and teach manure." This lord and succeeding Lords of the Ivory Tower were not chosen for their knowledge of the training needs of the castle, but because they were very good at producing manure. This, of course, did nothing to endear them to those who were in charge of the TALKers. The masters of the instructors, known as DEANs (Defenders of Education and Needy Schoolmasters), usually spent most of their time trying to obfuscate the efforts of each new Lord of the Ivory Tower to introduce improvements in education and training. The lords were not allowed to stay in the tower very long, so the DEANs (who always did) inevitably won these battles. Their repeated success became known in the Ivory Tower as "the hegemony of the DEANs," and each successive Lord of the Ivory Tower had to spend much of his time unsuccessfully trying to overcome this obstruction.

Lords of the Ivory Tower also spent many hours in royal council meetings exhorting the king and his privy council to give up more "fodder" both to teach and to attend classes. These lords insisted that, given the opportunity, they could help solve most of the castle's production problems. For the Lords of the Ivory Tower often adopted the attitudes of so many educators in the world. They became idealists. They saw things before them in terms of what they wanted to see, not necessarily what was. For instance, they would look at a young vassal just from the fields and see a tabula rasa of opportunity – a being in search of knowledge and training. A youth's lord, being somewhat more misanthropic, might see a pimply-faced ex-juvenile delinquent peasant whose only purpose in requesting training was to get away from work.

The lords often did not see immediate results from sending students to the Ivory Tower. Lords moved from tower to tower so often that a lengthy overlap between incoming and outgoing was very unusual. Thus, a lord made his decisions based on what provided the best short term advantage. Doing without a good vassal for several days or weeks for training in order to become better sometime in the indefinable future was not something that attracted very much lordly sympathy. Since the lords seldom considered the school, except when forced to, they made no effort to keep the school informed of the latest

developments. This allowed the lords to complain about the school because of its backwardness and failure to keep up with the times.

The supervising lords were even less enthusiastic about letting their best workers go to be TALKers in the school. The lords were too busy trying to augment their vassal force to make up for the many vassals in the wrong job. They didn't understand that few people are totally incompetent, more often they were simply mismatched to their job. The lords seemed incapable of creating a system that could match people to function.

The Lord of the Ivory Tower also developed a liaison with the kingdom's military services and became, at least in name, Director Underlord of Military Preparedness. Although the lord held the title, he soon found that control was not easily yielded by the military lords. Courses were created in the military schools that duplicated courses in the Ivory Tower and vice versa. However, the military lords refused to acknowledge equivalency; therefore, if a soldier student took an Ivory Tower course, there was no way for the soldier to get credit. This led to an inability to match training to the job environment at best and at worst the duplication of training to fill the proper squares.

So it came to pass that the Ivory Tower acquired a metaphorical odor not unlike that of its main subject matter. The king was forced to agree with the Lord of the Ivory Tower that the tower needed an enhanced image. Another "Wise Men Brainstorm" caused the Ivory Tower to be declared something akin to a university, and each floor in it was run like a college. Unfortunately, the DEANs were chosen to watch over each college. Because the DEANs had always been outsiders who had never worked in the stables, they did not understand its culture. And because their great educations tended to make them elitists, they didn't try. They set out to change the castle, not themselves. They provided education for education's sake, not for the castle's good.

The DEANs had not a clue how the castle operated or what the jobs were like. They didn't know what it was like to be a peasant or vassal. So they created and offered courses that bore little, if any, relation to the real needs of the minions of the castle. For instance, the DEANs worked closely with the Vocationally Equal Tradesmen Opportunity (or VETO) Tower. This relationship often got the Ivory Tower into even more trouble. Lords were enraged by such threatening courses as *Communications Skills*, which, in the small print, was advertised as instruction on how to give and receive criticism and improve communications with lords. The lords didn't mind giving criticism to vassals, but receiving it from vassals was completely unacceptable.

Naturally, they weren't any more thrilled with courses that implied abject failure by the lords. Consider: *How to Play the Game*, advertised as the development of personal plans to pursue career goals in the face of the king's or the lord's tower policies and procedures! This course announcement seemed to say that the whole castle was out to get you, but if you come to the Ivory Tower course, the Ivory Tower (also part of the kingdom!!!)

would prepare you to fight the system more effectively. Now what king or lord is going to be interested in allowing a vassal to be away from his work for two weeks and suffer the loss in productivity, only to be looking forward to the increased disruption and pain caused by a vassal turned opponent?

Finally, a series of stress-related courses was offered regularly – possibly required to handle the stress induced by all the other courses. One was *Bicultural Stress*, a course designed to induce stress all by itself. It sought to encourage two diametrically opposed processes: assimilation into the castle's culture (although no reason was given as to why one should want to do so) and how one could simultaneously maintain one's identity (which most didn't want to do anyway; they wanted to become lords). Obviously, this course was a major contributor to the *Stress Management Workshop*.

**Stress Management!** What a meaningless phrase! The vassals had problems with this one. They wondered why anyone would ever want to manage stress. They believed it was better simply to avoid it. *Stress Avoidance*, now that had a ring to it. Of course the DEANs never asked the question of why there was stress in the castle in the first place. *Stress Identification* would have been useful, but the idea was anathema to both the DEANs and the lords. The DEANs – who were nearly lords – probably had an idea what caused stress but could not have been interested in calling attention to them since part of any solution would have involved the removal of the DEANs and many lords. The vassals were expected to bend to fit the bureaucracy, and if they didn't, well then, they could always get out. The vassals (but not the peasants) could leave the castle, although many didn't because they refused to be beaten and would not let the lords save the gold they'd have to pay them in retirement. Most vassals intended to get as much of that gold as possible, and many didn't work very hard, saving themselves for that alluring conclusion to their association with the castle.

Filling classes that the Ivory Tower wanted to teach, but to which the other lords did not want to send vassals, was one of the problems the DEANs "solved" for the Lord of the Ivory Tower. Their solution was awesome in its simplicity and mind boggling in its cynicism. They simply declared all unpopular courses to be prerequisites for the other, more popular, courses. The other lords, busy with what they considered more important matters, didn't notice. Such courses were easy to teach because so many TALKers were available to teach them. They were offered many times a year. Courses that vassals needed and wanted were offered much less often. Courses such as *The Castle and the World* (CW-600) were very restricted, virtually closed, given only to a select few. Of course, this was never admitted, but nonetheless, additional classes were not added to the schedule despite the large waiting list. The vassals drew their own conclusions, and the lords remained unaware of the effect this state of affairs had on their subjects.

When the wise men invented the Indenture Program, designed to ensure the proper preparation of promising vassals for Transubstantiation (ennobling as lords), they

inadvertently struck pay dirt for the Ivory Tower. Vassals began to take every class they could, whether or not it had any relationship to their job. They justified the need to attend them by claiming a right to be allowed to qualify for transubstantiation. The DEANs saw the advantage of not looking the gift horse in the mouth, and the numbers of classes grew quickly with a commensurate need for more TALKers. One unfortunate and unrectified result was that because the indentured had priority, fewer others could attend the classes they needed for their current or next level job.

The king's Privy Council, made up of the princes and the most senior of the lords, decided the Ivory Tower should be responsible for the transmission of other knowledge besides that which the vassals needed. These courses relieved the council of responsibility in preparing lords for their various jobs. When the Senior Nobles' Order of Bosses (SNOB) program was begun, the king ordered the development of a new curriculum of courses only for SNOBs. This led to a series of very silly courses such as *Crisis Management*, in which a crisis was defined as any time a SNOB was forced to make a decision.

The council worked from the premise that SNOBs could be formed and molded into being, regardless of the leadership potential. They spent a lot of gold trying to make SNOBs; although the vassals working for these new "leaders" could see clearly that this gold was wasted. Courses were offered in how to get along with one's secretary (made necessary by the SNOBs themselves, who were so hard to work for), how to bond with other SNOBs (talk to one another civilly), and how to explore caves and climb cliffs (supposed to build trust but rather gave the lords better ideas of their rivals' weaknesses). The most fatuous of all, however, were those courses that purported to teach management but actually taught only the techniques. Dangerous in the hands of amateurs, its only use was to get the SNOBs out of their cells so that the vassals could get some real work done for a change.

The management courses were faddish in nature, developed by the DEANs of the Ivory Tower who had no practical experience in management and largely without relevance to the castle's demands. Some of the SNOB's courses were even exact duplicates of the courses for vassals, such as *How to Return the Breath of Life to Lords Who Have Expired*.

So it came to pass that the Ivory Tower and the other towers of the castle stopped working together entirely. No common goals or understanding existed between them. The Ivory Tower simply went off into a never-never land in which its perception of reality bore little relationship to actuality. The lords of the other towers had no inclination to try to rectify the situation. Instead, they sought the advice of the wise men on how to solve their training problems without recourse to the Ivory Tower. The wise men thereupon created the process that came to be known as "dumbing down." That is to say that instead of matching training to job, they chose to match the job to training. They concentrated what little effort they were willing to spare for investment in the future into a program of breaking each task down into the simplest of all activity. Thus *decomplicated*, the

training period was brief, without challenge, and acceptable for even the most dense of DOLTs.

Thus, the Ivory Tower earned a well-deserved reputation for transferring ignorance instead of knowledge. The Ivory Tower's major problem was, of course, that while all concerned understood that education and training were necessary, no one could agree on just what was education and what was training and how necessary was each. Those in the Ivory Tower with their own livelihoods and self-esteem at stake invariably believed that formal training was absolutely imperative. The main arguments went like this. One side said education could help the peasants understand the nature of manure. The other side said that it didn't prepare them for the reality of manure. The one side said the peasants had to be taught how to encourage its formation. The other side said they needed "hands-on" training in how to handle it and how to love the "smell" of it. The differences between pictures of manure in a book and the real article were considerable.

The gulf between the actual jobs and what the Ivory Tower taught about those jobs grew increasingly wide. The need for the Ivory Tower became increasingly slight. The Ivory Tower became a useless appendage of the castle, totally ignored by the other towers, and existing only to fulfill internally generated goals. The castle had turned full circle - except now the king had another place in which to "lose" people.

#### **MORAL:**

This experience of the castle exemplifies that training cannot be separated from job requirements. All training must be predicated on well-documented and understood descriptions of the targeted jobs. Physically separating the training establishment from the work environment leads to a metaphysical separation as well. When a constant and close linkage is lacking between classroom and office, the training inevitably becomes irrelevant, existing only in a sterile vacuum. The office must intimately direct and control the operation of the classroom.

Picking the right people for the job, then giving them the best possible training, is essential to effective and efficient work. Training plus patience and long-range planning with flexible staffing must be encouraged. The bonding of supervisor and supervised must be allowed to occur. Supervisors must be held responsible for the quality, not just quantity, of output by subordinates. In this way the vicious circle of inefficacy can be broken.

Bureaucracy itself also breeds course requirements that are generally unrelated to the reasons the office exists. They tend to blur a school's focus, averting its concentration on the essentials. To the extent that they need to be taught at all, courses should be prepared,

enacted, and paid for by the sponsor, not a training school. Let the training school stand as an enhancer of the workplace, not as the bureaucracy's all-encompassing source of adult education.

**They whom the gods will destroy, will first be made ignorant.**

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***Acknowledgment***

I would like to thank  for helping me write this paper.

# **The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth**

## **Part IV: The Tarnished Teeth of the Golden Tail**

**O**nce upon a time a castle stood in the midst of fertile fields in the land of Red Tape. The castle prospered greatly, and the number and size of its towers grew majestically. No tower, however, benefited more than the Tower of Gold. The king added floor after floor to that tower to accommodate the steady, positive gold flow into the castle. The lords of the castle vied with one another to build higher towers, but the Tower of Gold always towered over all the other towers.

The presence of so much gold acted as a magnet for ideas on how to trade the gold for goods and services the other towers wanted. As a defense against overzealous raids on the "Golden Hoard," the Lord of the Purse created a gauntlet of bureaucratic vassals that had to be negotiated before receiving any gold. This lord had a very simple strategy. Each time a new floor was added to the tower, he created a new form and a new office that had to be dealt with when attempting to obtain any of the castle's gold. These vassals came to be known as "watchers," because they were good only at seeing the form of the forms. They watched parchmentwork passing over their desks, watched for rule violations and superficial format aberrations, but were unable to evaluate or rank the worth of the ideas on the parchment.

At the time of our story, the tower consisted of twenty-one floors, twenty-one hoops to leap through. This is the account of how our hero, Thomas a Bucket, stormed this bullionary bastion and its watchers.

Thomas, with herculean effort, finally received permission to acquire the equipment with which he sought to modernize operations in the stables. The permission was, not uncommonly, less than clear. Actually, it came more in the form of the lack of a firm negative. Thomas followed the advice of his lord and mentor, Sir Lancelot, and simply kept moving forward absent any firm direction to the contrary. Eventually, he created that egregious bureaucratic anomaly, the *fait accompli*. *Accomplis* occurred because either no one understood a project but was disinclined to reveal the fact, or the cost of it was too low to break the attention threshold of the parchment watchers.

Thomas was aware that he was in a race – a race that pitted his progress through the budgetary mine field against the acceleration of technological creativity. He had heard many tales of expensive purchases of equipment that were already relegated to the ash heap of progress by the time the equipment arrived in the castle. This was particularly true of sophisticated scribe tools. Thomas was aware, for example, of the abacus, which had arrived from the East a few years before. The castle had at first rented abacuses, an

arrangement that worked very well. As improvements were made to abacuses, the Lord of Rentals had only to turn in the old for the new. Unfortunately, the Lord of the Purse convinced the king that the castle could save large amounts of gold by buying abacuses, which then could be amortized indefinitely. Not only was the decision poor, but so was the timing. Soon after the castle bought all the abacuses it had in its possession, abacus technology exploded into a fecund period of rapid-fire change. If the king wanted to keep up with the state of the art, which he did, then he continually had to buy the newest abacuses, which he tried to do. He never caught up because the lengthy budget cycle created too much time between deciding what to buy and actually getting it. By the time the new abacuses arrived in the castle, newer, better abacuses had already appeared in the village markets.

Because of these and other problems, like the complete lack of configuration control in the castle, the vassals were always behind the technological power curve, unable ever to catch up, it seemed. The lords and vassals of each tower acquired what they wanted, without regard to what the other towers were doing. Many even ignored what other parts of the same tower were doing. Thomas set out to avoid these problems in his acquisitions for the stables.

Thomas developed a teeth-to-tail concept for the stables. He wanted to modernize the feed handling and its serving to the horses. He visualized a conveyor belt of leather stretched over wagon wheels upon which peasants shoveled food for the horses. The belt would run past the muzzles of the horses, which would be able to eat from it as the food on the belt passed by. Removal of the digestive results also would be by conveyor belt, although not by the same one (an idea a budgetary bean counter had suggested to save gold).

Thomas's first step was to begin the "25-5" process, a mainstay in the castle's "fudget" (the term the vassals used to refer to the budget) cycle. It was named 25-5 because twenty-five was the number of towers that had to affix their seals on the statement of work, and five was the number of years that usually took. Thomas's next step was to enter into the "munificence cycle" by submitting his idea to the Tower's Fiscal Dreams of the Year package. The "Dreams" met reality first in the form of the Prince of Towers' procedural guidance. This year the prince decided to list all "Dreams" in reverse alphabetical order. The year before they had been in alphabetical order, so this seemed to the prince to be a very sensible thing to do. Sadly, the immense effort to make this, his only important decision of the year, forced him into a sickbed for a month.

The prince already had issued his planning guidance. Thomas was in luck: the prince had declared that year to be the "year of animal husbandry." His idea sailed through the Tower Program Development, Inter-Tower Castle Review, and Tower Re-review phases. His first setback occurred in the "Ranking of the Dreams." His program was ranked behind a new suite for the Lord of the Flush in the Plumbing Tower. Nonetheless, it was ranked high enough to escape the budgetary axe and continued through the winnowing wallow.



The ranked list received the Prince of Towers' approval, and Thomas's tower submitted his program. Following the second Inter-Tower Review, the programs underwent the prince's Review Group process. Again, his idea survived, but by the time a third Inter-Tower Castle Review and the Prince's Re-review took place, six months of the agony of constant rewrites (which changed the idea not a whit) began to take its toll on Thomas. He became very nervous, lost sleep, and began to imagine axe-bearing lords behind every column. Finally, the Fiscal Dreams were submitted to the Tower of Gold, one of the toughest of the hoops. The Lord of the Purse carried out a Forecast Review and a Fiscal Dreams Realization Plan was produced. Here the programs were assigned to different pots of gold located in the Tower of Gold (according to purpose and tower); Thomas's was assigned to the Rework and Diddle pot. At this point, the entire package of Fiscal Dreams was subjected to the "New Guidance from the Prince of Towers" process. This was where the prince could change his mind, as he was often wont to do. As usual this process wreaked much havoc within the towers, but again Thomas was lucky; his program survived, although changed a bit to specify cheaper materials: cowskin versus goatskin for the conveyor belts.

Following the fourth Inter-Tower Castle Review, the costs of the Fiscal Dreams were submitted and suffered the second review by the Lord of the Purse. At this point, the Lord of the Purse complained about a "wholesale and unjustified raid" on his precious pots of gold and ordered restraint during the fifth Inter-Tower Castle Review.

The results were submitted to the king, who, much to the surprise and relief of Thomas, accepted his program. The king passed the Fiscal Dreams (many of which had turned to nightmares by this time) to the Lord of the Purse with orders to hand over the requisite gold to the towers with surviving programs (the game winners). The Lord of the Purse, unhappy but powerless at this point to change the plan any more, turned to the Lord of Debentures and his Tower of Debt to authorize the disbursement of the gold and went into seclusion with a severe case of despair.

His share of the tower's pot of gold assured (so long as he spent it before the Lord of the Purse changed his mind), Thomas set upon the third challenge of the budget contest. He entered the arcane world of procurement.

Thomas's first step was to fill out a Profit Raid (PR for short), a term the Lord of the Purse had coined in a psychological attempt to keep usage of the pots of gold to a minimum. Thomas had never seen a PR, so he went to the tower's keepers of the gold to ask them for advice. On the way, he reflected on a recent report he'd read that said that the castle was running out of the source of its parchment. The husbanders simply could not raise enough sheep to make the parchment needed to feed the growing bureaucracy. The "sheep gap" was of growing concern, amid charges that the Lord of the Pasture was trying to "pull the wool," so to speak, over the eyes of the king by blaming the Lord of the Hoard for not warning him of the burgeoning need. Calls for a "parchmentless" office went unheeded despite an alarming spate of mysterious disappearances of all sorts of animals which, strangely, were often last seen entering the Tower of Supply.

Thomas entered the cell of his tower's parchment watchers. It was an opulent room by castle standards, proving that being close to the pots of gold could be a pleasant experience. The desks and accouterments were mahogany, the floor rug covered, the walls hung with the finest tapestries depicting axe-wielding "fudgeteers" fending off the avaricious denizens of the towers, dressed as Vikings.

"Ah, yes. Ummm, of course. Uh, I'm sure we can help you . . . I think," he was told by one of the parchment watchers. "You must understand these things change regularly, so I must take care to give the right details."

"Let's see," said his peasant helper, "we received the latest guidance just the other day." He pulled out a huge folder. "Yes, let's see, these are the changes we've received in the last month or so. The latest one should be in here. Ah, yes, here it is! Here you are, Master Thomas. You can use this guidance to fill out your PR."

"But I thought it was your job to fill these out. I have the information, you can worry about the format." Thomas began to back away.

"Well, yes, of course. Normally we would do that, but we're a little short of hands right now and haven't the time." The peasant thrust the paper into Thomas's hand and began cleaning his nails with his lord's broadsword.

Thomas returned to his desk, pulled out a large jar of ink and his strongest set of quills, the ones made from eagle feathers, and set to work. Two weeks later he was finished. He took the results of his labor back to the parchment watchers.

"Ah, Master Thomas, you've returned . . . already." The watcher seemed to be amazed. "Uh, I see you've got your PR. What a shame! We've received six more changes to the format since you were here last. Here they are. Good Luck!"

Thomas grimaced in resignation and returned to his desk. Quick learner that he was, he decided not to risk a repeat of this problem. He stayed up all night and returned to the watchers early the next morning. No one was there. A passerby explained that all the watchers were in class, learning the whole new format for PRs that was to be initiated the next day. Unfortunately, there would be no one available to take care of him this day, so he'd have to wait until tomorrow . . . and the new format.

Thomas wasn't about to give up that easily. He took the PR to the Tower of Gold himself. Luckily, a friend of his was there and accepted the PR, promising to have someone look at it before the new format went into effect.

Thomas waited three weeks. During those weeks, no one would, or could, tell him the status of his PR. He waited impatiently with increasing frustration. Finally, one of his tower's parchment watchers sent a page to Thomas with the PR and a note. "Unfortunately," the note said in a tone that suggested the writer didn't think it was really all that unfortunate, "Line 2 has an error in it. It will have to be redone and, of course, resubmitted in the new format."

Thomas sighed but got out a new jar of ink, and another bird's worth of quills, and set to work. Two days later, he returned to the parchment watcher with the new PR in the new format. "Looks good to me," the watcher said while throwing it into his outbasket without a look. He dismissed Thomas with a "We'll get right on this and let you know as soon as possible."

Thomas waited two more weeks before the page returned with the PR and a note of apology. "Sorry it took so long, but, you see, there was an error in Line 3. Please redo and resubmit as soon as possible. Time is getting short, you know." This continued through Line 17, although the time spent on each line got shorter each time. At Line 17 Thomas finally broke, and lost his temper. He hastened to see his master and friend, Sir Lancelot.

Thomas burst into Sir Lancelot's office and stood, shaking, before his mentor's desk. "What can it be, my boy? You seem very excited. Here have a walnut, sit down, and relax. Can it be all that bad?" Lancelot retrieved his old and worn walnut bag from a drawer and passed it over to Thomas. The walnuts were now illicit since walnuts had been banned from the castle by a king who didn't like them and didn't think anyone else should either. Life in the castle was becoming less pleasant all the time as the self-proclaimed saviors of everyone else grew stronger. Even drinking mead in the castle's dining room was banned after an Elector had written disapprovingly to the king.

"I want to call someone out for a joust, sir, but I think I'd have to take on the entire Tower of Gold. It's taken more than three months to get my PR done. It's been sent back seventeen times, one small error at a time, by seventeen different parchment watchers in the Tower of Gold. I'm angry and frustrated and beginning to wonder if it's all worthwhile." Thomas took a walnut and began to calm down.

"Ah, I see! You've been caught in the quite vicious budgetary circle for the first time. This could be quite serious. There is no cure for the Budgetary Blues."

"Please, don't jape me, sir, I'm in no mood for it. What I need is help. How do I break out of this circle." Thomas had another walnut. He began to get hold of himself. "What is going on? Don't these people realize that this is an important project, and they're going to destroy it with their silly rules? There are so many different levels that must affix their seals. Each one has different rules. No tower, or floor in a tower, talks to any other tower or floor, but each refuses to put its seal on until everything meets its complete approval according to the latest rules, which change regularly and without notice. The next level then won't accept it because the parchmentwork doesn't agree with their latest rules."

"Well, you're partly right. They are silly, but I'm not sure that any set of instructions that change as often as these do can be called rules. Besides, they don't exist to help the process but rather to give the parchment watchers something to do that makes them feel important. In many ways, they are the ones who run this castle, which is too bad, because they are also the ones least able to do so. They cannot understand what we're trying to do from their distant perspective. They only know parchmentwork and numbers. They can add and subtract and use an abacus, but they have no idea what's important and what's not. They have no idea of priorities, except those that are made for them by the prince or

the Great Lords. And those men think that only that which they themselves are doing is important. Consequently, the watchers can only watch the parchmentwork go by them and find unimportant things to complain about. They, and their process, have taken over the castle. The mere lords have lost control of their own budgets. Nameless, uninvolved bureaucratic watchers make the important decisions: how much money a lord can have to spend, what he can spend it on, and when he must spend it."

"Then it's out of control," exclaimed Thomas.

"Almost, Thomas, almost. The parchment watchers have succeeded in making the whole process so complex, so hard to grasp and keep up with, that most lords quickly lose interest in trying to understand it. They turn away, let their vassals run it with little supervision. There is precious little rationality left. Even if you're successful enough to have a pot of gold assigned to your particular project, the rules force you to spend it irrationally. You must try to guess at the sums you'll need far in advance. You have to decide what kind of pot of gold you'll be using and if you guess wrong, too bad. You can have a full pot there, but you can't use it to refill your empty pot here. Even if it would be cheaper to go out and buy something yourself, you can't do it. You must use only the suppliers approved by the parchment watchers, even if it means spending much more gold. The rules they insist upon contribute to our unreasonably high costs. Remember the chamber pots that cost the castle eighty pieces of gold each? And God help you if you wait too long to spend your gold. Even if you have a good reason to hold it for a while, if a parchment watcher finds your pot of gold, he can take your gold and give it to someone else without even asking you. They tell you how much you can have, for what, when you have to spend it, and they can change the rules and the size of the pots anytime they want to. So, yes, there is control, but it's in the wrong hands."

Thomas's agitation was obviously returning as he had gotten up and was pacing Lancelot's office furiously. Finally, he asked, "So what can be done? Surely we can't go on like this indefinitely. What's the answer?"

Sir Lancelot shifted on his stool and reached for a walnut. "It seems to me that the lords have to be given control over their own affairs. After all, we pay them a lot of gold, and they have many perquisites. They are considered to be important people, but they're not allowed to make important decisions. One important decision they ought to be able to make is how to spend their own gold to do the things in their towers for which they are responsible. Besides, it gives the prince something to evaluate them on. How well they spend their gold to run the affairs of their towers. Give the pots to the lords."

Sir Lancelot jumped up from his chair. "And never, never give the service towers money of their own," he exclaimed. "It only allows them to operate programs of their own, which always take precedence over those of the towers they're supposed to be serving."

Sir Lancelot quickly scooped the walnut bag into its drawer as a scribe hurried in with the latest important parchmentwork for him to look at. If the scribe noticed the telltale remains in the shucktray and on the desk, then he was bright enough not to show it.

"You know, there is another step we need to take," said Lancelot, scraping walnut husks from his desk into a specially made tin. "We need some means by which to determine the relative importance of what the stables produce. I have believed for a long time that we need to charge the farmers directly for every ounce of manure they receive. The idea to charge for the output of the stables is very appealing. The castle provides manure from its stable to the realm's farmers free of charge. The castle then receives some of the resultant farm produce. With no direct relationship between the manure and the produce received, the stable receives no real feedback on the value of the manure it provides. Furthermore, farmers request, and usually receive, as much manure as they ask for, which is a lot. Some suspect that the farmers are reselling the excess manure on the Brown Market. But it isn't true. I've been around a long time, and I know that the amounts are excessive solely because the farmers have no reason to take the trouble to plan more accurately. They don't know in advance how much or what kind they need, and, since it's free, they simply order everything.

"So I say make the farmers pay for the manure directly. Theoretically at least, the farmers would then order only what they needed. They could also be made to be more careful if the manure was graded according to quality and priced accordingly."

"It sounds great to me, too, sir," said young Thomas a Bucket, "so why don't you recommend it?"

"Well, I once succeeded in having a study initiated. One of the first actions was a conference to determine what the grades of manure would be." Sir Lancelot was now visibly exuding disgust. "The meeting was attended by representatives from the Towers of Gold, Rubble, Animal Husbandry, Tidings, Farmer Relations, Ivory, and the Joint Chiefs of the Knights. But not from the stables. The staffs of the other towers didn't believe the expertise of the stable was either necessary or useful since, in their minds, this was a financial question pure and simple. So they weren't invited. In keeping with the time-honored ways of bureaucracy, the conferees first determined what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it, then set about justifying the newly recognized outcome of the effort. This was easy; they merely wrote a new requirement to be satisfied by it.

"What they wanted to do (in the end) was maximize profits. How they determined to do it was to grade the manure in three qualities: new improved, improved, and superblend. Being bureaucrats not constrained by the laws of economics, they also decided to price in reverse of availability. The most abundant was to be priced high. This was called the new improved variety, the name picked to increase demand. Superblend was whatever happened to be left on the floor after normal collections were made. This was priced the highest to create the illusion that it was the best, so they could get rid of it all. Improved was the highest quality, that which would be used within the castle itself. Although priced lower than the others, improved would only be made available to farmers when the Castle felt like it."

Sir Lancelot shifted stiffly in his chair, reached once again for the much-abused walnut bag, then continued. "A committee was formed to decide the best way to sell the

manure directly. They discussed a manure market wherein the farmers could come every day to see the previous day's output and bid on the piles. But they had trouble settling on the size, mixture, and freshness of the piles. There were some who wished to charge more for the freshest regardless of quality which, of course, was generally lower. Others claimed the older, more mature piles were worth more. There were even some who said that the castle shouldn't provide fresh manure at all, that the farmers' own animals should be able to do it better. It went on like this until they finally gave up and dropped the whole idea."

Thomas decided it was time to leave. He quietly laid the walnut sack on Sir Lancelot's desk and, just as quietly, left the room. He had decided to continue no matter what and to win the battle.

Then he discovered another "Vicious Circle." He needed to purchase extra parts that the vassal in the Tower of Shopping, who handled the acquisition for Thomas's project, failed to realize were necessary. This often happened – sometimes in epic proportions – because project managers, like Thomas, were not allowed to control what or from whom, materials were acquired. Once the project was approved, someone totally removed from the sponsoring tower took over. One had to take what one got. Unfortunately, they each cost less than 500 pieces of gold and had to be paid for out of his tower's General Pot. Sadly, the General Pot was empty. He had gold left over in his own pot but couldn't spend it because of the General Pot Rule. He wasn't allowed to transfer his gold to the General Pot but had to wait until the Lord of the Stables decided to take it. Although the gold was in his pot (and he could even go to the Tower of Gold and see it there), he couldn't buy the articles he needed.

Finally, when the equipment arrived, he ran into the bureaucratic law of nonjuxtaposition, also known as the "you can't get there from here" syndrome. He needed to make room for the new machinery by moving stalls in the stables. He was not allowed to do it himself; only peasants from the Tower of Stalling could do that. All the men of the Stalling Tower were busy renovating the Lord of the Flushes suite and were not available. Thomas was told that they would not be able to get to his project for many months, if ever.

Thomas gave up, compromised, and completed the project with half the efficiency he'd originally envisioned. Bureaucracy won, the castle lost. Once again.

**MORAL:** An oft-watched pot and too many cooks foil the broth.

## **The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth**

### **Part V: The Tale of the Rearranged Tooth and Tail**

**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. The castle sat amidst verdant fields that produced fruitful fodder that fed the plump animals that yielded the manure that was the castle's main source of gold. The castle was very rich in manure and gold, and its lords spent both very inefficiently. The lords of the castle didn't have to worry about how they dispersed the wealth of the castle because there was so much of it, particularly manure. The manure had a special aura about it, born of the mystery of its sources (the lords kept much of the process a secret from their customers). The procedure of production was prosaic, but the manure did seem to work better than that from other castles, so the peasants were willing to give up more gold to use it.

That is, the peasants were willing until the market changed. Some of their best customers changed their habits. New kings were beginning their reigns on nearby lands and imposing new gastronomic tastes on their subjects. The peasants to whom the castle sold manure found it necessary to change the crops they grew. They soon discovered that the castle's manure was not as effective for the new crops. The peasants turned to other castles whose manure worked better.

New crops required new farming techniques. It was clear to many in the stables that the castle had to adopt new techniques in manure processing. The old "get it out the stable door as fast as possible no matter what the quality" way of doing business no longer worked. The old adage "manure received quickly is still manure" was never more pertinent. The lords not only needed new processes but also needed new animals to generate different, high-quality manure.

Then came the pestilence. Crops died in the fields, fodder became scarce and was of poor quality. Gold also became scarce in the castle and spending had to be cut back. The lords were reluctant to change their spending habits and refused to admit that the problem existed. They continued to build new towers, though that meant less gold with which to fill the towers with useful objects. Only when the Lord of the Purse took the lords to the treasury room and showed them all the empty gold pots, did they finally seriously address the castle's gold deficit.

The lords had developed a consensus approach to administering the castle. They did nothing important, or painful, without complete unanimity. Despite desultory attempts

at bonding the lords, they remained individuals who seldom completely agreed to any decision of import. Thus it was that lordly-level decision making ground to a progress-retardant halt. The king and the princes formed hundreds of study groups to decide what to do. Soon it seemed as if everyone were studying the problems of the castle, instead of producing manure, but no one was solving them. This then was the predicament into which our hero, Thomas a Bucket, was thrust one otherwise very fine day.

\* \* \*

Sir Lancelot, Thomas's friend and mentor, beckoned him to the Tower of Power, where the princes and Lords Patriarch kept their chambers. "Welcome Master Thomas," roared Sir Lancelot, as he heaved up from his seat scattering walnut shells all about him. Lancelot was a large, athletic man with long sandy hair and a full beard from which walnut shells were likely to fly when it shook.

Lancelot led Thomas over to the overstuffed pallet in the corner. "Sit, sit, make yourself comfortable, my lad," said Lancelot unctuously.

Lancelot quickly sat closely beside Thomas in a cacophony of crunching walnut shells. "Thomas, my boy, how good to see you. How have you been? It's been many a day since you've graced my humble chamber. How, pray tell, have you been?"

Thomas, feeling Lancelot's hot, walnut-flavored breath upon his cheek, shrugged. "Not so well, sir, it's very hard on us in the stables right now. The peasants are disappearing, the vassals looking for work in other castles. Everywhere we look there are problems that we can't solve without help from at least the lords. The gold crisis is causing the stables to die the death of a thousand cuts. The Tower of Hearsay is working overtime cranking out new rumors. Morale is at an all-time low."

"The wise men have come up with another wonderful rubric," answered Lancelot. "It's called 'perception management.' You have to understand that lords do not understand low morale. They've either not experienced its causes or they've forgotten what it was like to be a vassal. Those who rose from the bottom began their careers during times when few worked in the castle. Take the horse parking problem, for instance. They didn't have to worry about it then, and, of course, since they have their own horse stalls now, they still don't have to worry. They just don't have any empathy with problems like those caused by the famous decision to have small horse parking lots. Since the small lot was farther from the castle than the large horse lots, many parked their small horses in the large horse lots. People arriving later with large horses had to park in the small horse lot where their saddles were dented from the restless horses in the small spaces. It didn't work out, and the Lord of the Hitch had to call the whole thing off. Now they are trumpeting horse pooling as the answer, another thing they don't have to worry about, since they don't have to arrive before matins to find a space within walking distance of the castle."

"You're absolutely right, sir, too many such 'little' things add up to big morale problems," exclaimed Thomas.



"Yes, my son," said Lancelot, patting Thomas on the head, "but complaints don't solve our problems. You know how it is around here. We lords simply cannot agree on what to do, so nothing is done." Lancelot smiled and, looking Thomas directly in the eyes, said very slowly and distinctly, "But now, you Master Thomas, have a chance to do something about it."

Now Sir Lancelot laughed. "Oh, ho, you think I'm going to ask you to do some more dirty work for me, don't you? I'm shocked and devastated that you could think so ill of me." Lancelot turned away a moment, then looked back with a sly smile upon his face, "But, of course, you're right!"

Suddenly looking serious, Lancelot began to explain. "Thomas, the Prince of the Piles wants to save us from an almost certain catastrophe if we don't do something soon. He is forming an extraordinary cohort to be made up exclusively of vassals who can still think and act and look ahead. Vassals who have much experience . . . and the willingness to apply it for the good of castle. We even have a name for it: the Special Advisory Vassal Element, or SAVE for short. Neat, eh?" Lancelot looked at Thomas for agreement. Finding none, he hurried on.

"Thomas, I want you to lead this cohort. You've a head on your shoulders, you care, and you're not afraid to twiddle lords when they are twaddling. You're young and inexperienced, but I can help you there. In short, I want you to represent me with this cohort. It will last only a short time. In return, I promise you an elevation and position here close to me. What do you say, my boy?"

"Of course I will, Sir. But then, you knew that, didn't you? I have tried too hard to make a difference, to improve things in the stables, to deny this opportunity . . . however dangerous it might be to me personally."

"Yes, I knew that, Thomas." Lancelot got up and began to pace the floor as anxiety drained from his heart. "With your help, my boy, I'm going to make a difference, too."

\* \* \*

So it was that Thomas found himself leading the vassals chosen from the four stables of the Tower of Feculence. Each stable had its own lord, its own stables, and its own way of producing manure. The East Stable – each had an unimaginative, though geographically accurate, name – specialized in putting out large piles of semiprocessed dung without regard to the needs expressed by the peasants. The South Stable put out some highly processed and much hardly processed manure according to what the peasant said he wanted, not necessarily what he needed. The West Stable delivered small piles of highly processed excrement (almost to the point of sterility) to peasants who were happy to get anything they could have from the castle. The North Stable had to serve many different peasants so, not surprisingly, it assembled the most versatile manure.

The East Stable sent Master Gather, a crack rear-end collections expert. The South Stable sent Mistress Win, who specialized in the processing of manure, Manureology. The

West Stable provided a production line artist, Mistress McMethod. Because of its multipurpose manure manufacture, the North Stable sent a generalist, Master Ironbottom. The prince also commanded the Lord of the Purse and Lord of the Pasture to send a vassal each from the Tower of Gold and Tower of Collections, Masters Tarnish and Extort.

In their first meeting together, Thomas gave them his (and Lancelot's) philosophy on princes and lords. "The lords," he said, "derive their power from the legitimacy that comes from being aristocrats. That power must be used wisely or it is lost. As a class, our lords stopped leading, suffer from failing 'vision,' and cannot agree among themselves on anything that is important. Our job is to help them regain control."

"Furthermore," said Thomas, gesturing recklessly with his arms as the other vassals edged their stools out of range, "their legitimacy was a matter of perceptions – the perceptions of the vassals and peasants. The lords must balance their power, through mutual concern and respect, with that of those they rule."

"Yes, I know what you mean," exclaimed Mistress Win. "We are different from the inhabitants of the castle when the lords were young. But not in the way they think. I have been told that they think we don't care about manure as much as they did . . ."

Master Gather, the resident guru on governing the castle, shifted his considerable bulk on a stool that did not look like it could last much longer and said, "Yes, today's peasants are different. For one thing, they are not tolerant of the old culture; they just don't relate to it. Their whole life does not revolve around the castle; they have other interests and want more time to spend with their families – or whatever they spend time with. More of them are women and people from other lands. They don't accept and wish to ignore the old ways of doing things. They do care about the castle, but they have a different perspective than the lords."

Master Extort remarked, "The sense of mission of the average lord seems to stop at the end of his desk. We all have that perception, whatever the truth may be."

"We are now in competition," continued Thomas, ignoring the remark, "competition with the rest of the kingdom. Competition requires creativity, responsiveness to our customers, the knights and the peasants, and the best use of our resources, especially our human resources. There is a chasm in perception, expectations, and communication between the lords and us. We spend too much time and energy on internal warfare, both between horizontal units and vertical classes. We need to work together, to learn from each other, to synthesize the two cultures into a better castle. We need a revelation statement on what the tower (and the castle for that matter) should become. The lords must agree upon it. Then the statement must be sold, not with a perfunctory proclamation but by presenting it repeatedly at every opportunity. The lords must believe in it and communicate that belief to the rest of us. The revelation should be an active reference point, a benchmark against which to measure all that we do."

"Well, it seems that the answer is near at hand," said Thomas, looking facetiously at the group around the long, thin table they had jammed into their cubicle (once everyone was seated no one could move, unless they all did). "The lords have discovered the panacea and it's called reformation."

"Bulldroppings!" cried Master Tarnish. His roar echoed around the table. "It shouldn't surprise us that we've come to this point. The lords take to reformations like our king takes to every fad diet that comes along . . . and with the same result. They just won't admit that any organization needs strong leadership and good governing; any organization will work well with those attributes, and any organization will fail without them."

Thomas stood up and looked earnestly from one to another of his compatriots. "Reformation is not a panacea!" he spat, "It does not bring with it fundamental change. Our behavior does not grow from rules, laws, and structure. No, the truth is exactly the opposite. We must change ourselves before the elemental nature of the castle can change. Previous reformations of the castle have been superficial. The lords shuffled the pieces around but didn't fundamentally change what the pieces were."

"One thing is clear: either we govern change or change will govern us."

\* \* \*

The SAVEiors met with the Prince of the Piles and his lords. They met in the prince's private meeting room, which was called the Hall of Martyrs. The hall was named for the many Princes of the Piles that reigned one after another in highly visible battle with the lords of the stables. The hall contained a long table, around which were arranged the lordly stools. The SAVEiors arranged the nameplates placed before each lord to show him where to sit, to try to account for which lord was mad at which other lord at the time of the meeting. The only other item on the table was Mistress Win. The winsome Win sat on the middle of the table, parchment, pen, and a huge pot of ink ostentatiously arrayed. Mistress Win recorded every word spoken at these meetings, to avoid the confusion of poor or selective lordly memories.

The lords always vied with one another to be the last to arrive. They did this to prove that they were busier than the others. Some meetings started very late. All having arrived, more or less at the appointed hour, the prince bleakly motioned for the proceedings to proceed. Thomas started the meeting. "I will begin with a 'commercial'." He gestured to Mistress Lorelei, the SAVEiors' secretary, to hold up a large placard upon which she had inscribed in bold letters: **HE WHO DOES NOT PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, HAS NONE.** The lords looked at the words, then at each other in embarrassment. Most did no long-range planning (it was very hard to do and, if not done castle- or at least tower-wide, impossible to do).

Thomas hurried on. "Our first presentation for you will be given by Master Gather, who has been studying the effects of reformations on other castles. He's in charge of our touchy-feely studies and will tell you of traps we must avoid, if we are to succeed." SAVE

was now working on identifying the issues inherent in the comprehensive reformation of the Tower of Feculence and the resulting upheaval to its workers.

Master Gather heaved his bulk to its feet. Beard trembling in his earnestness, he began. "Reformations cause people pain. No matter how necessary they are, or how much the people want them, there is an inevitable apprehension. Sometimes they become so upset that they can't work as well. They need to be helped, cared for, considered." As he continued, the eyes of some lords glazed over; others began to look increasingly impatient.

Seeing this reaction, Thomas leapt up to change the subject. "Thank you, Master Gather, but we need to move quickly on. Next we'll hear from Mistress McMethod, who will tell us about the opportunities that the reformation will hold for our Technical Trap program." Thomas urgently gestured for the mistress to begin at once.

Casting a baleful glance at Thomas, Mistress McMethod reluctantly got to her feet to address the agitated lords. "The reformation is our opportunity to revitalize the Technical Trap . . ."

"What's wrong with it?" a lord broke in, "I think it's doing an admirable job of keeping the vassals in their place – er, I mean, giving them good places!"

"With respect, sir, the Technical Trap is an admission of failure, failure of the castle to sustain an atmosphere in which those who handle manure could grow and be rewarded. The lords get status and gold; the vassals in the stables get only more manure."

Master Ironbottom jumped up and hurried to the head of the table. He was a very brave vassal and now resolved to rescue Mistress McMethod. "We must show a clear change of direction! No business as usual, I say! Clearly, the East Stable must give up everything." He looked challengingly at the bemused lords. The peasants and vassals of the castle found it hard to believe that any lord would want to make real changes in a system that had benefited them so well personally or that they were interested in making big changes to a hierarchy in which they were so well situated. But the prince and some lords seemed committed, and the planning had continued.

Pacing back and forth in front of the table, Master Ironbottom intoned, "Yes, my lords, the reformation requires flexible efficiency; adaptive dynamism; proactive consolidation; reduction, combination and augmentation of everything; shifting improvements of developments; and, most of all, reconstruction and preservation to ensure the . . ."

"Excuse me, young man," interrupted the Lord of the East Stable, "what the devil are you talking about?"

"He's giving us the general situation," explained the Lord of the South Stable.

"Well, I want specifics."

"The last time they gave us specifics you turned them all down," remarked the prince, looking at the lords disgustedly.

"That's why I want him to get specific, so I can know what I'm turning down," asserted the Lord of the East Stable.

The Lord of the West Stable spoke for the first time. "I might only be a little lord of a little stable, but I think what we need is a fused report putting all the elements of activity together. The whole picture, you know. Furthermore, we must decide what our manure requirements are to make sure that we're shoveling the right, er, uh, stuff."

"We already have," said the prince. "I approved the list just the other day."

"Yes, my liege, but it was not the list we made for you, you know, the one you approved two months ago," interjected Master Extort.

"But you agreed to my list a month ago," cried the Lord of the East Stable.

"What happened to my list," asked the Lord of the North Stable.

"Um, yes, of course, gentlemen, I know you all have your different lists. But no matter, I decided not to rank this latest list. I took off all the numbers. Now it's just an alphabetical list." The prince looked about triumphantly. This, indeed, was a decision worthy of Solomon, he thought. The lords obviously didn't.

"One man's number one is another man's number last," continued the prince, "so we've got to find another way." Seeing no change in reaction, the prince changed the subject. "What we really need to do is move parts of the stables around. Shake things up. Get, what is that word, efficiency. We need efficiency."

"What about Smoke and Mirrors?" asked a lord.

"Who?" someone asked.

"Smoke and Mirrors, the two wise men. Smoke and Mirrors always have an answer."

Thomas jumped up to continue and waving another chart in the air, he pleaded, "Gentlemen, our time is short. We must move on. Master Extort, who has been studying the dynamics of castles, will now address us on the results of his efforts to find the causes of the bloat and excessive layers of bureaucracy we have in the castle."

"My lords, I have read all there is to read on the subject," declared Master Extort, holding up a thin sheaf of parchment sheets, "and it is obvious that we have too many horse holders" - the lords began to smile - ". . . and too many nobles" - the smiles disappeared.

Master Extort spoke very fast, while furiously holding one placard after another. "What I mean, my lords, is that we don't need more lords; we need to increase the span of control of the existing lords," said Thomas to an increasingly quizzical audience.

"What's a 'span of control'?" asked a lord.

"That's when you have more vassals working for fewer lords," answered Thomas.

A few of the lords looked completely flabbergasted. "But how can we run every last detail of the manure production that way?" they asked in unison.

"That's the point, my lords," responded Master Extort. "You don't, you shouldn't. You should be giving the vassals more responsibility – and the authority to go along with it."

"Well, I must be off," said the prince, cutting off any further discussion by standing up. "I must inspect the south fields. Is there anything else, Master Thomas?"

"My lord, we have presented many important points, many of which we did not have a chance to discuss but are in the parchment work we are passing out to you all now. We need decisions on them and tasks assigned to carry them out."

"Write them up in an Inaction Memorandum, Master Thomas, and I will sign it next Wednesday," the prince spoke over his shoulder as he left the room. The prince was a realist. The memorandum was aptly named: it was distributed and never seen again.

\* \* \*

As planning for the castle reformation continued, it became clear that the average lord's view of new ways of doing business was to take someone else's manure production. The predicament was an age-old one: who was to be in control of what. Everyone agreed that *something* had to be done and leaped upon every idea for more study, but no one could agree to any specific proposals to do anything.

Sir Lancelot visited the SAVEiors in their dungeon in the Catacombs. As always it was cold and damp – water constantly dripped from the ill-fitted stones – and stank of the oil lamps the SAVEiors used to fight back the gloom. Lancelot brushed aside an incipient mushroom, sat down, and came right to the point.

"We have lost," he said wearily. "We have failed to change the direction of the reformation enough for it to really change anything. The lords, who didn't want the reformation for their own reasons, have not been able to agree and cooperate among themselves on an alternative. So it has come to pass that, despite the unresolved issues, the reformation has come to pass." The SAVEiors groaned.

"Furthermore," continued Lancelot, brushing dust from his velvet jacket, "the prince has decreed that the reformation will occur along functional lines. Thus, all care and feeding of the manure producers will be consolidated in a single stable. All collections and processing of the manure will be placed under one lord in another stable. All packaging and delivery of manure will be done by another stable. He also plans a fourth stable, the purpose of which is to supply the Knights Temporary. The prince thought he had agreement for this from the lords of the stables, but the lords began to fight the renovation of the fourth stable when they discovered they would lose parts of their own stables to do it. Nevertheless, after many heated battles, the lords have finally worked out a series of compromises that allow the reformation to continue." The SAVEiors groaned again.

"On top of everything is the slow pace of change. Why the castle across the river has already finished their reformation, while we continue to dither." Thomas could feel everyone nodding his head in the murky chamber. He didn't expect Sir Lancelot to comment and wasn't disappointed.

Lancelot flicked a cockroach from his britches with a look of utter distaste. "Further even more, the manure graders, who as you know engage in a very specialized class of work requiring a very unusual class of vassals, insisted that they needed their own tower. The prince acquiesced and will build them the Mini-Tower of Manureology. The manureologists have immediately and naturally set about building their own empire. They insist they know better than anyone how to grade manure and will not allow the stables to interfere. It's obvious to me that eventually they will become totally independent."

"I'm afraid you're right, sir," said Thomas, crushing the offending cockroach beneath his slipper, "and we're beginning to see other manifestations – as opposed to the infestations we suffer in this 'work space' of ours – we see already that the lords are taking advantage of the movement of people to rid themselves of 'deadwood'."

"That's the term they use for everyone who doesn't agree with them," interjected Mistress Win.

"Most really weren't dead, of course," explained Mistress McMethod, "just unhappy, mismatched to job, and disaffected."

"The lords are complaining about receiving castoffs even as they are vigorously engaged in casting off their own 'undesirables'," finished Thomas.

"We are calling this period of the reformation the FADE, the castle's Free Agent Draft Enactment," wisecracked Master Tarnish.

"Yes, and the many fights occurring over vassals and their billets will engender ill-will that I'm afraid will become a permanent fixture of the new stables," declared Sir Lancelot. "As you all know, the prince has rightly insisted upon a strong body of mini-lords and vassals to reside in the Tower of Feculence and protect him from the lords of the stables. They are called the Special Taskers of All Fiefdom Silliness or STAFS for short."

"Right," said Thomas, "and to protect themselves from the STAFS and to carry on the infighting with the other stables, the lords of each stable are building their own large STAFSs. They are called the Hidden STAFSs because the reformation is supposed to avoid the necessity for them, and they were forbidden by the prince."

"The problem is," said Master Extort, "no parchment work, no matter how insignificant, will leave the Tower of Feculence without every lord and every lord's hidden STAFS having touched it first. Soon there will be so many different points of coordination, all of which can say no, only one or two of which can say yes, that nothing very important will ever happen."

"So what is new?" asked the cynical Master Tarnish.

"Most of the hidden STAFS will exist only to give every lord power over every other lord's actions," concluded Master Extort.

"Success had a thousand lords, failure only one lord scapegoat," sighed Thomas.

Sir Lancelot coughed. "The air is very bad in here. You need fresh air." He sighed, "I am angered that the king can outlaw walnuts and the Lord of the Ductwork can claim he's solved the pollution problem. The problem is much bigger than walnuts! I've got to leave this space," he said as he rose to leave. He paused at the door, looking at each SAVEior meaningfully in the eye, and said, "And I think you should, too."

\* \* \*

They based the reformation on premises dealing only with things. They did not affect at all the culture of inefficiency. Much of that inefficiency stemmed from the lack of decision making in the whole castle. Decisions were made late, inconsistently, or not at all. The vassals were forced into much extra work, most of which was wasted, providing alternative and contingency plans while awaiting outcomes that they could not predict. Nowhere was the wasted time more evident than in the Gold Rationing of the Munificence Cycle. Half the work done was directly because of the lack of clearly stated goals and strategies. The reformation changed none of this. On the contrary, it exacerbated the problem in the stables, because the entire process had been fractionated, and the overarching need for corporateness could not be achieved within the castle's culture of every man for himself.

A major reason for the castle's past inefficiency was its low lord-to-vassal ratio. As vassals were forced to leave the castle and the number of lords remained the same, the ratio continued to worsen. Lords fought duels with each other for the few remaining lucrative sinecures. Adding to the mess was that, more and more, the Knights Errant filled the lordly positions in the Horse Stable, leaving many lords without chambers. Soon, lords were pushing mini-lords out of their lesser chambers, which were better than nothing at all.

The supporting towers of the castle – towers such as Plumbing and Stalling – had long been "taxing" the production tower on everything they did for production. They not only got their own pots of the castle's gold from the gold ration process but would charge the Tower of Feculence for anything anyone asked it to do. They could then spend their extra gold on their own desires. Inevitably the Mini-Tower of Manureology caught on and became even harder to deal with. The manureologists did just what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it, and cared little for the needs wistfully expressed by the stables. In this they followed the course of human nature, in the absence of contrary force. (The abacus engineers (the abacusists) tried the same ploy but were too late. The lords forced them to accept only a small, insignificant tower for their mini-lords, while the abacuses and abacusists remained in the stables where they belonged.)

Many vassals lost their place in the castle hierarchy and had to accept lesser positions. The reformation plan called for many vassals from the East Stable to move to other



stables, since it assumed that there would be little need for its manure in the future. Many vassals from all the stables and towers controlled by the prince had to move to the new stable serving the Knights Temporary. They named it the Horse Stable, since the knights were interested only in horse manure. The Knights Errant – the manure collecting arm of the Knights Temporary – took all the good jobs (i.e., governors and staff) in the Horse Stable, and ambitious vassals refused to go there.

Every stable insisted on collecting its own fodder. Despite a primary reason for the reformation being efficiency by centralizing fodder collection in the Horse Stable, no lord trusted the Knights Errant to supply the right fodder at the right time. Many fights broke out in the fields around the castle when foraging parties from the stables ran into each other trying to reap the same grain. Because the prince could not impose central control, the internecine fighting continued ever more bitterly.

The struggle over which stable could spread what manure to the peasants and Knights Errant reached epic proportions. The denizens of the South Stable claimed that all manure that resulted from processing fodder from their fields must be spread by them alone. The East Stable, which used everyone else's fields as it wished because the king had always favored it over the other stables, insisted that all fodder suited for its type of manure was its to process and spread, no matter whence the fodder came. The manure was fractionated beyond its integrity and often worked over so often by so many stables that it became sterile.

The idea of organizational standards had not attracted much attention during reformation planning. Moreover, the functional approach allowed each stable to claim to be unique. So they grew independently and acted independently. Everyone had authority over the walkways that linked the stables, but no one had responsibility for them. The grass grew high and the underbrush encroached. Negotiating these connections became very difficult, and few tried. Before the reformation each stable controlled its output from tail to teeth. Now they always had another stable to blame for failure. Personal and organizational accountability atrophied. Finger pointing became the favorite exercise of the stables.

The lords also rid themselves of the SAVE, something many of them had been trying to do for some time. They convinced the prince that they had jobs for the SAVEiors even more important than planning. They sent Master Thomas off to a foreign country, then made the remaining vassals Stewards of the Stalls. The prince had promised them all "responsible service" when they left SAVE. The lords were happy to keep this promise for him; all the former SAVEiors were responsible for keeping the stables clean. Only Thomas a Bucket was spared this ignominy. Sir Lancelot kept his word and brought Thomas back to the Tower of Power as his personal valet. (His "elevation" turned out to be geographic only.) Sir Lancelot had decided to lie low for a while, awaiting another opportunity for "revolution." In the castle it seemed, planning for the future had no future.

The final blow landed when suddenly the farmers needed the manure from the East Stable again. The prince found that he had gotten out in front of the peasants and the

knights, and they weren't following. They needed more not less East Stable manure and complained to the king when they couldn't get it. The king, who had originally agreed to the cutback, demanded to know how the Prince of the Piles could be so stupid to run out of East Stable manure. Governing the stables was impossible, implementing new controls at this juncture even more so.

In desperation the prince called upon the wise men, Smoke and Mirrors, for the answer. "What can I do?" he said glumly. "My principedom is in shambles and is threatening to cease functioning altogether. It's obviously time for another solution."

Smoke and Mirrors thought for a moment, then replied brightly, "It's obviously time for another reformation."

**MORAL:** Any organization, whatever its makeup, needs to inculcate a sense of participation in its workers. Primary ingredients of a well organization – trust, mutual support, and the sense of total mission cannot be acquired through reorganization alone. Unless the organization changes the culture also, dysfunction will follow. There is absolutely no substitute for strong leadership and good management. They are the essential ingredients of any "solution."

**We must manage change or change will manage us.**

# **The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth**

## **Part VI: The Tale of the Tested Tooth and Tail**

**(Crisis Management or Management Crisis?)**

**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. It was a very large castle, lying in the verdant fields of the Land of Red Tape. Bureaucracy, which was always a threat to consume any of the castles of the Land of Red Tape, had thoroughly engulfed this one. Laborers built the castle's foundations with layer upon layer of parchmentwork. The strength of those foundations was about to be tested by the Barbarians.

These were not good times for the castle. A pestilence had wiped out a whole generation of vassals; leaving the castle peopled with mostly very young vassals and very old lords. Those between were rare and in great demand. The young vassals didn't respect the old lords and believed these lords were no longer functional. The old lords doubted that the callow vassals could work as well as the lords did when they were young and tested in war. No one looked forward to a trial of these deeply felt beliefs, but still it came.

The kingdom was about to be attacked by the Barbarians on its southern frontier, the area served by the South Stable. These Barbarians were a particularly cunning and ferocious race of people from the edge of the world known as The Middle Muddle. The Middle Meddlers, as those who lived in The Middle Muddle were known, were led by a little, Napoleon-complexed and mustachioed man known as Saddamn the Insane. He was diminutive in size, except for a very large head, which unfortunately was made up mostly of fat.

Saddamn was evil and cruel in full and equal measure; his capacity for jealousy and covetousness often overflowed. He loved to drench his salads in salad oil, and, despite having plenty of salad oil seeds in his own lands, he wanted more; he wanted the seeds that the castle's vassals grew on the Land of Red Tape. They derived a pleasing sweet fluid from these seeds, because of the special manure that the stables produced for use on its special plants.

He began his grab by sending small forays of horsemen into the fields to bring him enough of the special salad oil seeds. This was his first mistake, because it gave the king's martial knights, the Paladins, warning and time to prepare for the war. They needed time, and so did the castle's stables.

The Paladins needed more manure than their own manureologists, the Knights Errant, could produce. As often occurred in these cases, the stables – and particularly the South Stable – had to provide the Knights Errant with manure to make up for their shortfalls. Saddamn's second mistake was to believe that the castle didn't have enough manure. On the contrary, this castle was awash in it.

The Paladins consisted of discrete components: those who rode horses were preeminent; those who could travel and fight only on foot were esteemed as low as their physical location. Then there were the Shock Paladins, those who led every charge and carried out the most dangerous tasks of war. They kept to themselves, a reality that the other Paladins did not contest since they were not sure on which side of the fine line between heroism and foolhardiness the Shock Paladins might be. Paladins who fought from ships were elitist, and the other Paladins disliked them intensely. Thus all the kinds of Paladins planned and fought separately and, unless forced to do so, did not cooperate.

This situation also prevailed among the Knights Errant, who served separately each kind of Paladin. The knightly separateness meant that all Paladins and their Knights Errant believed they needed very different kinds of manure. The Paladins wanted to receive their manure from the Knights Errant, whom they believed would do their bidding without the cavil of the stables, but the Knights Errant weren't so able to produce as the stables. The king made sure that most of the animals – and all the most prolific producers – were kept in the castle, where they would be safer. Furthermore, because all the Knights strove mightily if foolishly to be different from all the other Knights, their accumulation and uses for manure were incompatible.

The Paladins organized a military command post at the southern boundary of the Land of Red Tape, from which to prepare to repulse the Barbarians. The Joint Chiefs of the Paladins picked the Lord of the Horde as their commander of the Knights' expeditionary force. The Lord of the Horde, knowing the value of manure to his endeavor, quickly created a Joint Uniformed Manure Bringers Liaison Element, or JUMBLE, to make sure that all the manure of the kingdom arrived expeditiously and was used correctly.

Into this critical situation strode our hero, Thomas a Bucket. This is the story of how he – and the castle – fared during the Great Salad Oil War.

\* \* \*

Thomas was the son of an earnest, therefore poor, lord who was a lifelong friend of Sir Lancelot. Thus, Lancelot had agreed to be Thomas's mentor and watched over him carefully. The crafty Sir Lancelot often used Thomas as a surrogate for his surreptitious fight against the castle's bureaucracy. Thomas was tall and handsome and possessed of pleasing voice and facile tongue. He took pride in his dress and was always neatly turned out. These traits alone would have been enough in this castle to help him get ahead, but he also owned a brilliant mind. He was doing well in his career, thanks to Lancelot, who had manipulated castle incompetence to become an important lord despite being a renegade. Their success together – what little they could expect against the glacier strength of

bureaucracy – could be measured by the growing degree to which both were viewed with increasing suspicion and bafflement by the other denizens of the castle.

\* \* \*

Thomas rapped hard on the door of Lancelot's huge cubicle. The resounding cracking of walnut shells often prevented the good lord from hearing sounds beyond the cavernous chamber. Sir Lancelot would try to throw the shells into his chamber pot – only the most important lords could have them in their chambers – but more often missed than hit the elusive receptacle.

"Come in, come in, whoever you may be," shouted Sir Lancelot, quickly moving the chamber pot out of the way of the swinging door. "Ah, my good vassal, 'tis you," he exclaimed delightedly. "I haven't seen you in a long while. How was your trip to investigate the JUMBLE, my son?"

Thomas gingerly entered, threading his way across the walnut-shell-strewn stone floor. He glanced at the chamber pot and chose a seat at some distance from it. "Not good, sir, not good."

"What happened, my boy?" interrogated Lancelot.

"It was a mess. Manure everywhere but no one knew how to use it. All kinds of excrement jumbled about in the JUMBLE. The various Paladin forces needed manure from other forces, but they had no way to exchange the stuff. It was a nightmare, but I got it straightened out. So here I am and glad to be back."

"And how did you succeed?" asked Lancelot with wonder in his voice.

"It was simple actually." Thomas pulled his chair closer to Lancelot's parchmentwork and walnut-shell-strewn desk. "I set up a farmer's market where the manure could be received, sorted, and made available to the JUMBLERS no matter the kind of Paladin they were. They could easily pick up what they wanted when they wanted it. Remember the conveyor belt I invented to feed animals, then carry away the inevitable results to the shipping area? Well, I just reversed the process: shipped, conveyed, sorted, and stored in marked bins. Sort of one-stop shopping with all-knight service."

"Well done, me boy," laughed Lancelot. He rose from his chair, cleaned a corner of his desk and, perching in the vacated spot, continued seriously, "Now I want to see if you can do it again." As usual when Sir Lancelot wanted Thomas to do some dirty work for him, he was very solicitous. "Are you well rested now? Feeling well?"

Thomas groaned. "Yes, I guess so," he replied quizzically. What I really need is at least a fortnight of continuous sleep, he thought.

"We are preparing the counterattack on Saddamn and his Barbarians," said Lancelot without further preamble. "The prince has charged me with readying our manureological support to the Paladins. It won't be easy because each tower, each floor of every tower,

each stable, and each stall of every stable has already set up its own Watch Tower, from which to *control* everything.”

“What can they all possibly be watching – much less controlling?”

“Each other, my son, each other. And they create new positions in each Watch Tower almost daily. Each to watch the position invented just before. Thus the fat of bureaucracy envelopes the castle and each Watch Tower in turn.”

“Thus giving each lord a piece of the action and glory,” interjected Thomas. “Yes, I know all about it. It was a problem I couldn’t fix for the JUMBLE. We never knew which Watch Tower to talk to in the castle – they changed almost daily. And when we did find someone, the answers were different from those given by the last Watch Tower we talked to.”

Lancelot nodded vigorously. “We are dealing with rank amateurs here, Thomas. And not only are they amateurs, but they won’t admit it, ask for help, or cooperate. As usual. Did you know that the lords ignored a pact they’d made only a month before? To use the Watcher Tower only in just such a case as this. It was forgotten in the scramble for glory. Deferring to the Watchers would mean giving up their chance for place in the Castle Hall of Fame.”

“Well, obviously we may need more than one watch tower involved but certainly less than a hundred. The Paladins need to know who is in charge.”

“Agreed, Thomas. But the king likes many watch towers because then he can feel in charge . . . since no one else can be in the circumstances,” sighed Lancelot.

“Everyone in charge and nobody in charge,” Thomas grimaced. “We’ve seen it before, sir.”

“Yes, Thomas, no central focus, a diffusion of authority. No castle can last long under those circumstances, and we owe our Knights better than that. So, you and I are going to try to change the situation and do so quickly.”

Lancelot looked at Thomas earnestly. “I want you to inspect our stables and their preparations and make recommendations to me about what can be done to make them ready for the counterattack.”

\* \* \*

Thomas wasted little time going to visit the principal watch tower of the castle, the Watcher Tower. He went straight to the cubicle of the Chief Watcher, Master Minder. Master Minder was behind his table looking out the window with a telescope.

“Can’t have too many watchers, especially in times like these,” he said, looking embarrassed as he swiftly hid the telescope from sight. His table was clean, his waste receptacle empty; it looked like Master Minder was not very busy.

"Thank you for seeing me. I know you must be very busy." Thomas looked around dubiously as he pulled up a stool in front of Minder. There were faint but continuous groan-like sounds seeping into the room from beyond the door behind Master Minder.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I've been busier. I've been busier on a Sunday during Christmastide." Master Minder looked at the closed door, hesitated, then appeared to make a decision, "The whole truth is that I - we - have absolutely nothing to do."

To Thomas's look of incredulity, Master Minder continued. "With all the manure going to the JUMBLE from the new watch towers, there's not much left for us to delve into. Most of it goes through the South Tower instead of us and . . . well, you can see the result." Minder threw open the door to the Watcher Center. The multiplied sounds of industrious snoring filled the room. "The Watcher Center usually is like that only in the wee hours of the morning," he expelled, as he propelled the door shut again.

"The prince, under pressure from the king and probably from the Lord of the South Tower, simply reacted. Instead of consulting his usual advisors and using the operations and procedures that already existed - had been tested and worked - he abandoned them to embrace the perilous advice of Ibn Ad Hoc, his Moorish golf partner. We Watchers have dubbed everything that followed the Ad Hoc Approach." Master Minder looked furiously disgusted.

Sir Lancelot would call that *undervaluing good management practices*, thought Thomas as he asked, "Are you saying that all plans, all procedures, all previous experience, and the experienced, were just ignored?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Minder as he crashed his fist onto the table. "That's exactly what I mean." He slumped back into his chair and visibly calming again, began to yawn. "Well, I have to go back on duty now, Master Thomas, so if you'll excuse me . . . the plans were hard to find anyway, everything is lost in Tower of Plans and Bans these days . . ." The last words trailed off into barely audible eddies of sound. Minder laid his head in his arms crossed on the table. Almost instantly his snores joined the chorus from behind the Watcher Center door.

Thomas shrugged, put away his notebook and folding quill with its portable inkwell, and quietly let himself out of the room.

\* \* \*

Thomas next visited the South Stable. Those buildings were located on a high bluff not far from the Tower of Power. An aide to the Lord of the South Stable met him as soon as he arrived. The aide obviously wanted to control what Thomas saw and to whom he talked.

The first thing he noticed was that, despite the vassals looking and dressing like those in other parts of the castle, they did not think the same, act the same. The difference was most pronounced in the attitude toward the customers of their manure.

"Who are our customers?" asked Thomas of a supervising vassal he'd just met named Clod of Clyde.

"Customers?" The vassal looked suspiciously at Thomas. "I don't know and I don't care. What difference does it make anyway? We just produce what we want to and shovel it out the door. What anyone does with it after that is their problem, not mine."

"Um, yes of course . . .," responded a suddenly nervous Thomas. And I didn't believe it when Sir Lancelot told me what it was like here, he thought. He tried again, "But surely you must know what they want, when they want it, and how they want it, eh?"

"Oh yes, of course," replied Clod. "I receive the TESTs from our Special Taskers of All Fiefdom Silliness . . . but I never look at them. Probably couldn't find them. Silly anyway. Filed by our STAFS in the Deep Cave. When what they want is different from what we want to give them, they don't get it. So, you see, it really doesn't matter what they put in the TESTs."

"What are TESTs?"

"Total Empire Specification Tables, of course." Clod of Clyde looked even more suspiciously at Thomas. "Say, where have you been all your life, young man?" Clod turned to leave in disgust.

"I knew that, just checking you," croaked Thomas to cover his embarrassment - he hadn't heard the term since he took the test for mini-transubstantiation. "But, but," he called after Clod, "what's the point of the TESTs then?"

"Look," spat Clod over his shoulder, "it's not my fault that the Paladins don't always want what we're willing to give them. They don't understand our manure; only we do."

"But you don't understand their needs," called Thomas to the rapidly disappearing Clod of Clyde.

Clod stopped, turned around, and yelled, "Look, it doesn't matter; they mostly want our best manure. And plenty of it. I ask you, if we gave that to them, the manure from the special horses we keep in the back stalls, then what? All the Paladins would find out about it and want it. Soon our foes would find about it and steal our special horses. Loose lips sink manure!"

"But what good does the manure do if the Paladins can't use it?"

"It's enough that we have it for the castle, isn't it?"

Thomas turned in disgust and stalked off to the next bank of stalls. There he met Arno the Lamé, who was in charge of quick manure deliveries for the South Stable.

Arno greeted Thomas cheerfully enough, "Direct from the rear to the front still warm! That's our motto. Welcome my good lad."



Grinning, Thomas shook hands with Arno. As he did so he noticed several vassals he knew to be workers from the North and East Stables. "I see you're using loaned-in vassals. How are they doing, Arno?"

"Oh, pretty good actually . . . after we train them in the ways of the South Stable, replied Arno. "It's difficult – they come here thinking they know better than we. We have to convince them that we don't want their ideas, just their hands and backs."

Thomas, looking around the stall, asked, "Where are your usual vassals from the South Stable? All I see are those from other stables."

"Ah, they're on holiday." Arno looked sheepish. "We didn't want to taint them with contact with the *foreign* vassals who simply don't understand our much better way of packaging manure."

"Um, yes I see, but surely it's useful to have at least some experienced South Stablers here?"

"Not really," said Arno. "We have consistently refused to allow experienced South Stablers to work here – anyone with experience for that matter, we don't care how much they beg us. Their experience in other stalls of the South Stable isn't relevant to us. Besides, we're saving them to take care of other stalls not involved in the war with Saddamn."

"How much experience have you and your staff had in supporting the Paladins during war?"

"None, absolutely none. That's the beauty of it, we can proceed without any of the preconceived notions the others would have brought to this effort." Arno smirked.

Thomas left without saying good-bye.

On the way out Thomas met a vassal he knew from the East Stable. While shaking her hand, Thomas asked quickly under his breath, "How do you stand it here?"

"Oh, it's not so bad. Take that one, for instance," she said pointing at Arno. "He only thinks he knows what's happening here, but when he gives us his plans, we quickly see that they are totally unworkable and go ahead and do things in the East Stable way. Our way works so much better than his that he doesn't dare change anything. He just decides to take credit for it. Everyone is happy that way."

Thomas nodded his head knowingly, and, smiling to himself, he returned to the Tower of Power to seek out Sir Lancelot.

\* \* \*

"Well, I've met the enemy and he is us," quoted Thomas as he strode into Sir Lancelot's chamber. "As the great philosopher, Bureaucraticus of Bloat, once said, 'If Horizontal Layering is the rock, then Lack of Corporateness is the hard place'."

"That bad, eh?"

"Worse. Every STAFS in the castle wants a piece of the action, but all they can think of to do is make sure that they must be consulted on every action, every decision. They have placed themselves in the central place of glory but only slow down everything – they add little of value to the effort."

"Have you met the answer?"

"Yes, sir!" Thomas was now excited, as he always was when allowed to describe his ideas – it didn't happen very often in this castle. "We need to build a new Super Watcher Tower, bigger and much more comfortable than those now existent – one that is kept free for only crisis, but where crisis is practiced and vassals can get used to working in it. With a place for the prince, and even the king, to sit and meddle, er, I mean, lead. It would be a place where the vassals would be sensitive to crises, on the lookout constantly and trained to detect them *before* they occur whenever possible."

Thomas waved in the direction of the old Watcher Tower. "We should stock the Super Watcher Tower with the best of everything: stools, tables, the best abacuses (all of a kind) and the comeliest *chambermaids* to do the parchmentwork. The best possible manure. Soon the vassals will prefer working there, and then the Lord of the Watcher Tower with the best vassals and best manure will be able to draw upon the best of the Knights Errant. The other watch towers will crumble in neglect."

"Very good, Thomas, I like it." Lancelot then turned glum. "But that's another reason why it probably won't happen."

\* \* \*

In the end, the Barbarians were repulsed by the Paladins using the castle's manure to good advantage. The vassals eventually completely took over the supplying of manure to the JUMBLE and did a splendid job while the lords continued to dither. The castle was successful, not because of the way it was organized or managed but because of talented vassals concentrating only on the job at hand. The vassals ignored politics and bureaucracy and personal fortune to concentrate single-mindedly only on the war with Saddamn the Insane.

Finally, after a lengthy period of argument, the lords decided to award pieces of gold to everyone who spent even one minute working – or in some cases just thinking about – the war. They gave the same number of coins from the Tower of Gold to everyone of certain common endeavors, whatever the quality of his or her work. Thus, no vassal was entirely happy, each believing either that he had received too little or that another vassal had received too much. One point upon which they could agree was that the lords did not deserve the much larger number of gold coins they had received from the king for their part in the war.

## EPILOGUE

The king ordered that the usual Transitory Comprehensions be identified as lessons to learn, as they always were after large efforts such as the Great Salad Oil War. The prince transferred the onus to Sir Lancelot, and Lancelot transferred it to Thomas a Bucket saying, "The result of skill or luck is often imperceptible but with luck, maybe you can show us the difference." Thomas reflected on his experiences during the war, talked to many lords and vassals and even some Paladins, and returned to Lancelot with the following.

### The Lordly Crises Transitory Comprehensions

1. *Do not* make a decision; it will come as a surprise to the vassals and cause disaster if one of them actually implements it out of consternation.
2. *Do not* take any responsibility; you might have to make a decision.
3. *Do not* plan; any plans in existence will quickly be scrapped in favor of an ad hoc operation fitting the personality of the lord in charge.
4. *Do not* volunteer; you likely will find yourself working in a Watch Tower instead of another lord, who will join a STAFS and be awarded more gold because of his better visibility to the king and his princes.
5. *Do not* give anything to the vassals you send to other towers; they are in the company of enemies and no longer trustworthy.
6. *Do not* put experience and knowledge in control; they will only confuse and distress you.
7. *Do not* do Transitory Comprehensions, unless you love reruns.
8. *Do* pile on as many layers of lords as possible; in case one makes a decision by mistake, no one will know who did it.
9. *Do* change policies often and drastically; this will confuse your critics and protect you from specific blame.
10. *Do* change tower names and addresses regularly; this will keep the workload to a manageable level.

Thomas also advanced the idea of a Super Watch Tower in charge of all war support by the stables. The king didn't like the idea – he liked being able to visit the many centers of Ibn Ad Hoc to pretend that he was in charge. Since the war had been won, he found it easy to forget the chaos that had reigned along with him. When asked about it he would exclaim that the Watcher Tower was too expensive, a waste of space. The Transitory Comprehensions learned during the war were codified, approved, then assigned and reassigned to lower and lower levels of the castle for rectification, while the lords eventually forgot them altogether. The chances weren't very good that the castle would be

any more ready for the next crisis. But at least the next time they could save the expense of drawing up new lessons; they could simply brush off the old ones.

#### MORAL

The stables lacked the essential ingredients for good crisis management – predetermined procedures, universally agreed upon, commonly understood, and enforced; clearly defined structure and accountability; and a fully equipped center for operations, manned by experienced or at least fully trained management and work force. The vassals, through hard work and the fortunate gift of time, succeeded in making up for most of these shortfalls.

The king made the mistake – common among kings – of expecting common, complete and absolute fealty from his subjects. What he ran into were factions competing against each other and unwilling to share or cooperate as fully as the king expected. The typical human mind boggles in contemplation of difficult, often expensive, decisions prompted by mere possibilities. The resultant planning, if any, is heavily pockmarked with holes that are filled only in the event. The holes are then filled with reactive, too quick and ad hoc decisions, which are more palliative than curative. The organization starts out behind and has a devil of a time catching up.

*They who would make crises manageable must first plan and then be disciplined in executing the plan. Digression from this approach can mean chaos or even failure in the extent of the deviation. Planning, especially long-range planning, is an unnatural act in our American culture. But we must try because if we fail to plan, then we should at least plan on failure.*

## The Parable of the Tail with No Teeth

### Part VII: A Tale of Teeth Decay Prevention

**O**nce upon a time there was a castle. It was a very big castle with a huge stable. The stable produced large amounts of manure – rare manure. Castle manure was uncommon because the king did not allow anyone else to own the kind of horse raised there. The food the horses ate, even the process by which the food was transformed into manure, was kept secret. All the people who worked in the stables of this castle were vetted by the Tower of Power. No one else was allowed into the barns.

Inevitably, because of the inbreeding of both horse and lord, the quality of the manure began to wane. As customers began to complain, the princes and then the king became alarmed. After trying but failing to gain any progress through his Privy Council, so named because they met in the king's water closet, the king finally consulted his Wise Men, Smoke and Mirrors.

Smoke immediately saw the solution. He went to his Trunk of Trigraphs and pulled out the first sets that caught his fancy. He showed them to Mirrors.

"Hmmm, let us see. WOE, Wipe Out Ennui? No, too French. PVH, Push Vassals Harder? No, too hard. Ah, here is one: TQM! Tower Quality Manure?"

"Yes, that is it," cried Smoke, "Tower Quality Manure. Nothing like a catchy abbreviation to give the illusion of progress until the ill wind changes direction. Let us repair to see Sir Guy of Good; he will help us convince the king."

\* \* \*

Months after the Great Reformation, as the king called his reorganization of the towers of the castle, the placement of vassals and peasants still had not been nailed down. This afflicted period became known as the Billet Ballet, because every tower in the castle was supposed to have a fixed number of cubicles, which were called billets, and the lords danced them around repeatedly as they sought to gain *billetal* advantage.

During the Reformation, which affected the Towers of Feculence most, new stables were built and the stalls were changed around in the old stables. All this meant that the

allocation of billets to each stable differed. The old stables were reluctant to give up their billets to the new stables and resorted to all sorts of subterfuges to hide and thus keep them. The new stables had trouble finding billets for all the horses and vassals they were supposed to house.

Soon vassals and peasants were moving about and working in stables without regard to how many billets there were. Many swore allegiance to one stable but worked in another because there were no billets in the right stable. Large stables lost billets and had plenty of room; smaller stables gained inhabitants but not billets or stall space and were crowded. The prince and his lords exerted no effort to fix this sorry state of affairs, since they knew they could never achieve a consensus on what to do. Besides, they all had billets and very nice ones at that.

Although self-restraints were anathema to the lords, they had no difficulty applying very severe rules of behavior on others. Rules had become the lifeblood of castle commerce. The entire castle subsisted on rules, or so it seemed to the king and his Privy Council. The years of improving production had coincided with dizzying growth in the number of regulations promulgated by the king. (The same era was known as the "Age of Excess" because a munificent emperor had kept the castle well supplied with pots of gold. The members of the Privy Council ignored this factor, because they could make rules but not gold.)

Faced with imperative change, the lords naturally chose to meet the challenge the only way they knew, with more rules. Thus it came to pass that castle culture and TQM clashed in titanic struggle for the rights to castle management: who would lead, who would follow and who would have to get out of the way.

The peasants and many vassals joined the TQM camp at first. They wanted to believe the smell of change in the air would not dissipate into the stench of disappointment, so they enthusiastically pitched in to make TQM work. The lords, who wanted only to see pitch forks in the hands of peasants, not suggestions, were dismayed by what they had loosed. They didn't have to worry long. The inept, almost contemptuous, implementation of TQM soon killed all enthusiasm and progress . . . except in the Tower of Plumbing.

Quality in the Tower of Plumbing's product was easy to measure. The pipes and the cisterns either leaked or they did not. Poor quality induced an immediate reaction from customers, who, often damp and brandishing sodden mops, gave voice to their disappointment in the tower's handiwork. In contrast, the stables of the Towers of Feculence could produce manure of widely varying quality, the blame for which results could be easily blamed on poor application or bad weather. The Lord of the Flush had nowhere to hide and therefore embraced TQM, and was the only lord to do so for very long. The king put him in for the Emperor's Quality Improvement and Productivity Award for, if little else, the castle was well known for its excellent plumbing.

\* \* \*

As lords other than the Lord of the Flush began to suffer organizational agonies, the king resorted to the Bureaucratic Police Force to solve their problems. Bureaucratic Police consisted of the lowest level of the peasantry, who worked in the shadows of every corner of every tower of the castle. They were lackeys who could achieve self-respect in no other way than to insist on their bureaucratic prerogatives. They enforced the Dicta Bureaucratica. The king, princes, and lords wasted no respect for these misanthropic minions, but regularly used them to do lordly dirty work. The Bureaucratic Police took over the TQM process in the end.

A torrent of TQM flowed from the top to the bottom like wine through the press, until it hit bottom and splashed any unwitting peasant and vassal in the way. The pace was so fast that none of the juice lingered above, not even a stain. Few princes, or nobles of any kind, were tainted by the idea. Most of the lords breathed a collective sigh of relief when it was clear the king would actively push TQM no further, missing the unintended effect of the emptying of the TQM pitcher: the nobles could hold the vassals responsible for TQM while continuing business as usual themselves.

\* \* \*

Our hero, Thomas a Bucket, withstood the onslaught of TQM for as long as his *bureaucratics* threshold would let him, then repaired once more to the chambers of his friend and mentor, Sir Lancelot.

"Hello, my son," cried Lancelot as Thomas crossed his threshold, through the door and into his attention. "Come in, come in. To what (let me guess) do I owe the honor of your company, lad? It would not be the latest trick of Smoke and Mirrors, would it," winked Lancelot.

"Right as usual, sir," sighed Thomas as he picked his way through the shells of illicit walnuts and Bureaucratic Police-approved straw on the floor. Sniffing the air and pointing to the straw, Thomas asked, "What in Merlin's Name has been going on here?"

Lancelot smiled ruefully and explained, "For a while there the Billet Ballet caused me to have to share my chamber with a horse. We got that straightened out in a hurry, I can tell you."

Thomas shrugged, "The Billet Ballet was another problem TQM could not fix."

"Ah, but you misunderstand, my boy. TQM does not *fix* anything. People must do that. TQM is common sense, but more than that it is a process that seeks to improve process, a structure upon which to hang common sense principles. It is a mechanism to accomplish what one hopes to do, plans to do, trying hard to do the best he or she can."

"Sort of people pulling together, toward common purposes, helping each other. No wonder it does not work here." Thomas winced to think what people could accomplish in the castle if they were not so worried about getting the credit themselves so that they could be better off than anyone else.

"There are exceptions. Exceptional people. Even lords, me lad," mused Lancelot. "Remember how all the lords in all the towers helped vassal Harold the Halt through those rough times when his wife was so sick? The inclination is there, we just have to find how to turn the exception into the rule. For all their other faults, most lords are not bad people."

Thomas nodded dubious agreement as Lancelot shook himself out of the reverie. He slid the walnut bowl across his desk to Thomas. "Now we have another glitch in the saga of TQM in the castle," he grimaced. "While the king and Prince of Production both pepper their speeches (when they think about it) with references to TQM, clearly they do not picture the same idea when they mouth the acronym."

His fingers wrapped around a large (and rare) "TQM" walnut, Thomas looked a question at Lancelot.

"When the king speaks TQM, he uses all the words the wise men invented. He also repeats what his two closest aids tell him. I mean His Eminence Grise, Cardinal Wooly, and the Royal Factotum, Sir Guy of Good, the godfather of TQM in the castle. Unfortunately, the king grew up in another castle. He doesn't mean the same thing the words he is given mean. Confusion, not the king, continues to reign."

Thomas, mouth full of walnut meat, could only vigorously nod his knowledge of these two most famous and influential figures of the Tower of Power.

Lancelot added another degree of grimace to his face and said, "These gentlemen, Sir Guy in particular, are enthralled by the ideas of the Wise Men and translate their every utterance immediately back to the king. They have the best in their hearts for the inhabitants of the castle; but they cannot control the nobles between them and the peasants, who are not so willing to share their power and perquisites with 'rabble'."

"The princes, on the other exquisitely manicured hands, understand perfectly well when Smoke and Mirrors prattle on about acceptable manure quality levels, customer requirements and expectations, error detection or prevention (usually applied as prevention of error detection), and the like," explained Lancelot. "They are just convinced that they have better ideas."

"Yes sir, we have noticed in the stables," agreed Thomas in recognition of another of the human foibles. "The princes were groomed from birth to be princes. They have taken turns as lords of many of our towers but have never actually had to shovel manure or deal directly with peasants in anything other than a master-slave condition."

"Yes, I have had many a conversation with them, Thomas," said Lancelot beckoning for the walnut bowl. "They are increasingly sapper educated and believe producing manure is easy, requiring little more than the application of an abacus to make things



come out well. They regard making manure as a science needing only enough gold, instead of the art it is, needing talented vassals.”

Sir Lancelot fished out an especially large walnut and smashed it on his table with his gold nut cracker with the castle’s flag emblazoned in silver upon it. “And the princes are simply viscerally unable to admit any other ideas into their minds without first stamping *my idea* on them. Very much a lordly trait. Thus, the ideas of TQM – especially empowerment of the commoners – are anathema.”

Lancelot rose from his special issue lord’s mini-throne, complete with permanently attached flag pole. Fiddling with the folds of the dun-colored castle flag, he continued, “Once our prince commissioned a group of vassals (the king forced him to it) to investigate a problem and report recommendations back to him. According to the tenets of TQM, they were called a PIT, a Primarily Inactive Team. They were supposed to be empowered to fix the problem, too. But according to the tenets of the lords, all vassals by definition require *adult supervision* from a lord. So all they could do was recommend, nothing more. Lords can be empowered sometimes, never vassals.”

“None of their suggestions comported with what the prince thought was proper. Despite TQM’s dictum to accept one of their offerings, he summarily refused, summarily had the group executed and, in summary, never tried it again.”

Sir Lancelot looked up as Thomas made ready to leave. “You have picked an excellent time to travel away from the castle, Thomas. Mayhaps all will be well when you return.” Lancelot smiled at Thomas’s incredulous visage, “Well, maybe just a little better . . . .”

\* \* \*

It had come to pass that our hero, Thomas a Bucket, was to travel to other castles – to bring word of his new conveyor belt-aided manure handling to the castle’s envoys. He had known that his first hurdle was the finite amount of gold available and lords who liked to travel. Of course, journeys by lords had first priority; vassals could use only the gold that was left over. Thus, lordly junkets always took precedence and necessary journeys by vassals often could not be made. As always, Thomas visited Sir Lancelot for advice on how to proceed.

“Well, Thomas, my good lad, they will probably turn you down automatically. Will not even consider how necessary the trip is. You see, we are now in that period at the end of the Castle Year when the importance of a trip is directly proportional to the rank of the traveler. The higher the rank, the more likely the approval will be given.”

“On the other hand, the real importance of the trip is usually inversely proportional to the rank of the traveler,” remarked Thomas.

Ignoring this impertinence, Lancelot shifted in his chair, sending a shower of walnut shells flying to the littered floor. “Our tower also is being penalized again for having

managed its travel funds in a responsible manner," he said. "We controlled our travel gold carefully, spread the journeys out over the whole year, and saved some back for any important journey that might come up at the end of the year . . . like yours."

"Others, who spent profligately, without thought or planning, are now in need of more gold. They will be given ours. We will be punished, in essence, for having followed the king's guidance to spend carefully. Those who ignored him, and continued to spend as fast as drunken lords on anything they felt like, will be rewarded – by receiving our remaining gold."

"Is it true that if we do not use up all travel gold the Lord of the Purse allots us for the year, then the lord thinks we do not need as much the next year and shortchanges us," asked Thomas.

"Yes, it is true. And not only that, but if we plan to use so much gold for a particular journey, and tell the Tower of Gold, then do not use that much – perhaps because we found a way to save gold (usually at cost to our own comfort) – we do not get to keep the gold we save. We have to give it back to the Tower of Gold, which then saves it for other lords to use."

"Some day we will give up and join the problem instead of fighting it. Then we will spend just as fast and wastefully as the other towers. The king and his princes will not be able to understand why their commands to save are not followed." Lancelot slapped his fist on the table, wincing as shards from the walnut shells there bit into his flesh.

"This state of affairs is ripe for an approach by TQM," said Thomas, trying to ignore Lancelot's obvious discomfort and embarrassment. "A quality approach would dictate that incentives to save be instituted. Perhaps by promising that all gold saved by a tower will return to that same tower to meet future travel needs."

"It will never happen," gasped Lancelot through pain frozen jaws.

"Why on earth not?"

"Because the money now saved is placed in a slush fund pot for the exclusive use of lords."

"But if I go to a rent-a-horse counter and accept a nag at less gold than the Tower of Gold allocated, the stable ought to get that money back for another trip," insisted Thomas.

"I did that once . . . when I was young. The Lord of Boondoggles' minions in the Tower of Tours erred and did not make the promised reservation for me or my two traveling companions. Only a tiny, broken down old nag was available – all three of us rode on it to save money. It was the last time I did that when I found out that another lord had upgraded his horse to a stallion using the gold we saved."

\* \* \*

Thomas, against the odds, did make his journey and when he returned, he immediately returned to Sir Lancelot's chambers to learn what had transpired in TQM during his absence in the hinterlands.

Lancelot was talking with Sir Louis Fitz Tails, the king's Keeper of the Coin. Fitz Tails was a very busy man for, under the rubric of Tower Quality Manure, he facilitated decision-making conclaves of the lords. He always carried The Coin with him in a velvet purselet hanging around his neck like a badge denoting his decisive importance to the castle; he even slept with it – nearly choking to death on a number of occasions.

Fitz Tails was recounting his most recent bout with lordly judgment-making as Lancelot motioned Thomas to enter. "... so the prince and the lords of the stables argued over the three-stage improvement of the stalls in the West Stables. They proudly announced agreement (The Coin came up heads) on the first stage – only to plan, but spend no gold, of course. The problem is that was all they could agree upon. Even The Coin could not overcome their reluctance to commit themselves to helping one stable over any other."

"That is a fine example of the paralysis consensus decision making can cause," said Lancelot as he shook hands with Thomas. "But you may not have heard the latest, Fitz. The Prince of Production, shortly after his ruling to do it, followed up with the new decision not to do it. Coincidentally enough, he did so right after giving the Lord of the South Stable a singular audience."

"Yes, 'The last lord heard, is the successful lord'," muttered Fitz Tails as he left the chamber.

"Sit down, me lad," cried Sir Lancelot as he simultaneously waved good-bye to Fitz Tails and welcome to Thomas a Bucket. "We have no time to chat today. I have an important job for you, one which you must begin immediately."

"Yes, sir," nodded Thomas.

"This is what you must do. I am giving you my warrant to take TQM to the lords of the towers. I call it a 'Quality Council' and you will be the facilitator. Matters are going from bad to worse in the castle – not just in the stables – and we have to do something swiftly."

\* \* \*

So it was that Thomas found himself at the head of the very large meeting table of the king. Occupying the many chairs around him were minilords representing each tower. Minilords, not the lords that Lancelot had hoped for. As soon as the lords found out the subject of the conclave, and that the king would not be there, they all sent their profound regrets that their own attendance would be impossible. But, of course, they said they

would send their closest associates – lieges well-versed in the thoughts and intentions of the lords themselves.

Thomas had explained to the lieges, these minilords, why Lancelot had called the Quality Council. He had listed a number of the problems that cried out for attention, TQM or otherwise, anything but inaction was appropriate.

He talked of the eight elements of managing Tower Quality. When he offered the idea that lordship must be replaced by leadership to achieve quality improvements, their reply was, "Are you implying that the lords are not providing the best possible leadership now? How can we tell them they have erred? Not us!"

When he explained how they needed to organize for quality improvement, they said in unison, pointing at each other, "But that would mean my lord would lose autonomy, would be forced to consider others and be more disciplined in approach. The other towers may need to do that, but not us!"

When he said that tower quality education was at the heart of the drive for quality, they said, "But who will be working while so many vassals are in school? And anyway, you cannot expect lords to go to school. The castle would fall apart. Lords already know everything important there is to know. Maybe a few peasants can go, but not us!"

And when he spoke of customer expectations, conformance, communication with and between the towers, they scoffed, "Our customers do not know anything. The only conformance we need is for everyone to do as the lords say. We will communicate their orders and that will be that. Change the way we are doing things? Not us!"

Finally, he appealed to them to take action and to begin by developing a plan. They readily agreed to planning, for they knew that planning was – and still is to this very day – a perfect excuse for inaction. There isn't enough information; we need to look at another angle; the right people haven't seen this, we need to include them (thereby starting a new round of meetings). Such are the cries of the progress busters.

Thomas had already concluded that the lords had not prepared the minilords they had sent to the Quality Council. None were empowered to make any contribution except "No!" The lords continued to substitute "emasculate" for "empower." Nonetheless, he persevered.

The stable employed many vassals and peasants to package and distribute the manure. Some had to live in other castles because the manure was so unique that its use required special techniques. These individuals – known as the Fielded Authorized Remote Manurists, or FARMers, because they were experts in the producing and using of manure – had to work with the peasants of other castles to make sure that the manure was used correctly in the best possible way.

Vassals were posted to other lands for a few years by means of Horizontal Extra Realm Transfers (pronounced by the vassals as "hurt," which is what happened to them when they returned. The problem of reassimilation was caused by the vassals losing their places

in the tower pecking orders while away. The FARMers were often completely forgotten by lords who had no use for what these vassals might be doing – helping knights to use the castle’s products, for instance. They also didn’t care about the experience the vassals accumulated while doing it. Lords preferred only one culture at a time.)

Tainted by foreign dung or coming back believing such hideous abstractions as “the customer is always right,” the returnees were nothing but trouble in the eyes of the lords. The first thing they did to each one was to have them redipped in the castle’s manure. Most then walked the stony halls of the castle, begging friends, acquaintances and just about anyone who would smile at them, for a position.

“This seems to be a prime subject for a Tower Quality Improvement Project for the vassals,” said Master Thomas. “Our objective would be to reclaim one hundred percent of the reassimilees into useful employment within the castle, and to plan so that we do so as soon as they cross the moat.”

“That has already been tried,” interrupted Sir Hal the Heedless, from the Tower of Plans and Bans. “It was the Universe Program and it degenerated into a rubber-stamp of whatever decision on people placement the lords wanted to make. We called it ‘The Lottery’ because the odds against a vassal winning a good position through the program were astronomically against him. It competed with lordly prerogatives and failed. What can we do now that would be any better?”

“The Project will tell us that,” ducked Thomas.

“Ha! Bunk, my dear vassal,” exclaimed Lady Barbara of Banal, from the Ivory Tower, “and who will listen to mere vassals when they are done?”

“You will,” rejoined Thomas, grinning in triumph. “You all will as members of the Tower Quality Steering Team that will lead the effort.”

The mini-lords around the table looked at Thomas in incredulous alarm. “Not me!” resounded separately and in unison around the wooden rectangle. Sir Gillis of Gumshoe, from the Tower of the Peek, standing and making ready to leave, expressed the reaction of all with, “If you think any of us is going to risk a promising career by telling the lords what to do, you can guess again. You vassals need more, not less, adult supervision,” he flung over his shoulder as he joined the throng emitting into the hallway.

What a fine fettle of kish Sir Lancelot got me into this time, thought Thomas. We do not have any quality to manage in this castle. TQM is doomed.

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Thomas’s pessimistic and cynical appraisal proved – as always – to be accurate. As soon as the lords saw what a threat Tower Quality Management was becoming to their privileges, they quickly set out to consign it to the offal pile of history. The old king had

died and the new one wasn't believed to be as keen on TQM, but still they had to be careful. The lords were greatly helped as TQM was gradually discredited through inappropriate and incompetent application. The vassals chosen to facilitate its inculcation often were chosen by their availability, not necessarily appropriate qualifications. When competent, dedicated vassals were chosen, they soon lost heart in frustration. The general lack of discipline – top down and personal – also insured failure: TQM assumed it was there already and did not encompass the theory to create it.

Tower Quality Manure inadvertently became the catalyst for increasingly vocal expressions of dissatisfaction from the lower ranks of the castle. The king and the nobles had envisioned a bottom-up effort to carry out top-down commands; they had not counted on the depth of unhappiness TQM unleashed. The lords feared insurrection and wanted the TQM process stopped immediately.

A small group of lords hired their own wise men, Fog and Smog, and asked them for a way out of conundrum. The wise men thought for a while, grunted, and gave birth to a new acronym, CIM (Castle Information Management). The lords loved the sound of it, managing information (they knew that knowledge was power) was what they were very good at.

Thus it came to pass that the new king was moved to declare that Tower Quality Manure had been a complete success. He thanked everyone for their unstinting efforts to make it so. He announced that he was propelling the castle onto the next plane of operations through the *quadruple distilled quintessence* of TQM, CIM.

The lords were thrilled, the vassals yawned.

**MORAL:** He who would lead a bandwagon must first gain the agreement of his horses.

TQM (meaning Total Quality Management nowadays) was a bandwagon: the king was the driver, the lords were the horses, the vassals followed behind with the peasants. The bandwagon was poorly designed and built, and when the driver dropped the reins, allowing the horses to amble off in the direction they, not the leader, chose, the other wagons ceased to follow.

TQM required attributes the lords of the castle would not supply: sympathetic understanding, enthusiastic acceptance, disciplined application and patience. But, of course, if these attributes had existed in the first place, the castle might not have needed TQM.

The king needed to communicate his vision to his lords, work out goals and strategies with them, then closely monitor fulfillment of the plan. He had to be willing to chastise, even severely punish, those who failed. He had to be willing to "execute" those who refused his leadership. But he was unwilling or unable to follow through, which by itself guaranteed failure.

Another failure factor was that TQM, like all such perceived nostrums, appeals to kings more than peasants. The peasants wanted results – satisfactory working conditions. They didn't care very much what the process was called, as long as it benefitted them. The king liked TQM because he thought he could start it, pay lip service to it (fit it into his schedule every Thursday afternoon), but not have to change fundamentally what he did, or how he did it. He and the lords treated TQM as an outside force exerting pressure on vassals and peasants alike, without the need for close and abiding leadership attention.

The vassals grew to dislike and deride TQM because the poor implementation did not impart the improvements they were promised. To them it was soon clear that the behavior of vassals and peasants was the target of the modification, not the lords, who in fact were not changed by it one bit. The king lost interest when he realized that progress was imperceptible and further movement demanded more of himself than he was willing to give. Thus, albeit for different reasons, no one in the castle was happy with TQM.

Moreover, the castle was a quintessential government bureaucracy. Governments react to imperatives differently than commercial enterprises and are not held to the same standards as the private sector concerning such fundamental issues as accountability, equity, fiscal integrity and efficiency. The idea of quality products can be hopelessly diffused in the face of stringent regulations on conducting government business.

Did TQM ever have a chance?

Attaining classical efficiency in terms of output is a hopeless dream. Bureaucracies, especially governments, are by definition slow movers. They have to preserve the process, be as concerned with how to achieve the goal as with what to achieve. How do we measure efficiency, which I define as the ratio of the value put into the value that comes out? Governments have many outputs, including subjective consequences such as reputation, confidence of the people served, and the support of special interest groups, especially Congress.

Most importantly, bureaucracies are sustained by rules – the Dicta Bureaucratica of the castle. Rules are the vitamins of bureaucracies: the more rules they ingest, the larger they grow. Bureaucracies seek to improve effectiveness by applying new rules; the more they try to improve, the more rules they pile on. Unfortunately, just as too many vitamins are inimical to humans, so too many rules cause bureaucratic paralysis and failure. The king and his lords sought to bring their problems – and their subjects – under control through TQM; they did not use TQM as they should have, creating a process in which all members of the castle's enterprise shared in the creation of new, better way of operating.

TQM aspires to the release of the whole individual to achieve a greater common good. Bureaucracies seek to be more proficient by fettering the individual in rules and regulations, also for the greater good. Bureaucracies feed on successes that happen now; lengthy gestation periods are anathema. None of this creates a propitious environment for TQM.

TQM was born and raised in the private sector. Transplanting the process to the public sector is perilous, and it should be done carefully and judiciously. But since it is really only common sense dressed in a new and fancy costume, TQM can be at least partially relevant in the public sector. However, its success must be measured differently, with lowered expectations. It is not a panacea. Although there is nothing quick about TQM – it requires patient application and experimentation over years, will it be remembered only as another in a long line of failed "quick fixes"?

As always, the potential for progress lies in people; the definition of progress lies in leadership. The successful bonding of the two occurs through shared values and goals. Was the gulf between lord and vassal too great to allow the bond? Is our bureaucracy the modern day manifestation of medieval organization within the castle? You be the judge, dear reader.

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