

Live Bait & Ammo #110: The Expectation Stick

Management did away with rates in my workplace. The new standard is “Expectations”. No need to explain what that means. Everyone who works for a living is familiar with the short end of the expectation stick.

The switch—from rates to expectations—bars unbiased evaluation by quantifiable results (production rates) and legitimates arbitrary judgment by unqualified assessors (supervisors).

Expectation is not a valid standard of measure; it’s a bully whip, a forty inch yard stick, an optical illusion which leads us to an overwhelming question: when has management ever met our expectations?

By every standard of measure General Motors has failed the expectations of shareholders, dealers, customers, and workers.

Can hard work and hurry ever make up for bad management?

I work in a GM warehouse. Storage space is not only under utilized, we store empty containers. How can workers make up for the decision to stockpile empty containers and reward executive failure? For that matter, can any amount of concessions on behalf of labor ever make up for the decision to build products based on the diminishing expectation of cheap oil?

Incompetence and mandatory redundancy isn’t unique to GM. Everyone who labors rather than speculates for a living feels the relentless pressure to work harder, faster, and longer to make up for bad management. Teachers and nurses are as understaffed and overtaxed as lineworkers. The drive for profit justifies every excess but intelligence.

Capitalism disdains all rules and regulations, but everyone is familiar with its expectations. For example, business expects to transfer all increased costs to the customer and expects workers to absorb all increased costs without a raise because (according to conventional expectations) even a minimal raise in the minimum wage will cause inflation.

The premise of this unrealistic expectation is counterfeit. Wages don't cause inflation, they chase inflation. That's how the economy is planned.

The basic maxim of business is "buy low, sell high", yet workers are expected to sell themselves short and pay top dollar. Management expects workers to sacrifice the profit from their labor in order to ensure the profit of speculators. The pundits of expectation deem self sacrifice the patriotic duty of every red blooded American worker. Or else.

Professor Mark J. Perry, a shill funded by the anti labor Mackinac Center for Public Policy, stated in his blog, Carpe Diem [6/22/08], "Flint's manufacturing sector is dead, and it has now officially become a service-sector economy."

Who killed manufacturing in Flint?

Perry, citing unspecified "economic theory", blames unions for "losses of market share, employment, and output." According to Perry and his associate shills in the business press, if we were willing to work in subservient conditions for substandard wages we could have all the manufacturing jobs we wanted.

But Mark Perry, David Cole, and Sean MacAlinden, among others, conveniently ignore the fact that management never ceded the right to manage. GM's unilateral right to manage is not an unidentified "economic theory", it's Paragraph 8 of the GM-UAW National Agreement. Management determines the designs, the technology, the process, the marketing, and the cheap non union suppliers who drive up warranty costs.

Unions didn't undermine the success of North American Operations in the auto industry. Productivity gains exceed compensation. We make twice the product we did thirty years ago with half the workers. The value added labor we contribute adds less than 10% to the total cost of the vehicle. The other 90% belongs to management.

Profits generated from North American Operations funded investments overseas and carried those foreign investments when they lost money throughout the 1980's and 1990's. GM didn't treat those losing investments like red headed step children. GM protected and nurtured those foreign investments because they

were part of a long term plan to divest in the US and throw legacy obligations overboard.

What did you expect? Patriotic capitalism?

Ford, GM, and Chrysler are preparing to delphi North American Operations. The post bankruptcy plan has already been agreed to by the UAW Concession Caucus just as it was with Delphi. Two tier is in the dugout and ready to take the field.

The Con Caucus traded the prospects of the next generation for the security of a VEBA, a health benefit for retirees that was underfunded 50% from the get-go. Now the UAW is loaning \$1.7 billion to GM from VEBA money it hasn't yet pocketed. Do they expect us to believe this swap is on the up and up? GM did not made a binding reciprocal commitment to secure union jobs. We see the give, but where's our take?

In 2007 negotiations the UAW had the opportunity to compel the auto companies to advocate a national single payer health care system as the only viable means of survival for manufacturing in the US. (All of our foreign competitors have single payer national health care. Shouldn't US companies have the same competitive advantage?) Instead the Con Caucus let them off the hook with the VEBA scheme. Rather than acting like a social movement union for the benefit of all workers, the Cons chose to behave like a business.

Trouble is, the auto companies won't honor their debt to the VEBA unless the UAW agrees to more concessions and plant closings. Via VEBA the Con Caucus has become full partners in the exploitation of workers. The corruption engendered by union cooperation with management is spreading like a socially transmitted disease.

Buzz Hargrove, the president of the Canadian Auto Workers union, negotiated concessionary contracts with the automakers prior to the Canadian Auto Workers national Bargaining Convention. Before the ink dried on the fast track deal GM announced it would close another plant represented by the CAW.

Should the Canadian Auto Workers have expected something different from a president who brokered a deal with Magna Corporation to set up a company union

which would operate without the nuisance of elected union representation or a grievance procedure?

In the wake of a new UAW contract Ford is closing plants in the US and expanding in Mexico. Both Ford and GM will import small fuel efficient cars from South America and Europe as they close plants in the US. Chrysler has signed a deal with Chery Automotive in China.

Those who have observed how history unfolds in the present know the future isn't a wild guess. We're going to get the short end of the expectation stick— broken promises and legal excuses.

The social contract is in shambles. All the rules are broken. Now is our chance.

From the ashes of the old, from the scrap of heaps, from the scream of a free market economy plunging off the cliff comes opportunity. Every vehicle on the road is obsolete and will need to be replaced. We are on the cusp of a new technology driven by market forces out of control. Someone will have to do the work required to build new transportation and energy efficient accommodations.

As Sheik Yamani, a former oil minister from Saudi Arabia once said, "The Stone Age didn't end because there were no more stones. It ended because people became more intelligent."

It isn't simply the shells of old heaps that will have to be towed to the scrap yard. The institutions— corporate, government, union —that brokered the self destructive contrivance called "neoliberalism" are obsolete and need to be replaced.

We the People have expectations, too.

sos, GreggShotwell