

My name is Sam.

I'm a maintenance man.

I'm also between jobs, but so what, I've been there before, and I'll be there again. The day of birth-to-death employment with the same company is over, has been since my father was forced into early retirement in 1967 by a company he'd spent 43 years with. He was also a maintenance man. Early retirement 'bout killed him. Early retirement won't kill me, because I don't intend to give up until I'm ready.

St. Regis Paper Co. had a pulpwood ship unloading dock in my hometown, the town I grew up in. Use to ship peeled pulpwood by rail from my town to a paper mill not far away on a railroad created, maintained and owned by the company. As a kid I had many a ride to the next town aboard that unscheduled train. I always had to hitchhike back. 'Course back in those days, in that part of the world, hitchhiking was a safe means of traveling. Kids miss a lot today.

My paper industry career started in a small mill in the northeastern USA, might as well have been anywhere, 'cause it was nowhere, like most every other paper mill town in this country. I grew up in a small town, one of those towns that has no right to exist, but does, by the good graces of its residents, who hold on to something that is as slippery as teflon impregnated packing.

My career started on the boards (like in drafting board, now an antique, found only in quaint shops in those towns that have no future in the Web 2.0 world). At the time, just out of college, it was the most exciting adventure open to me. It being a small mill, I was immediately exposed to all kinds of business related issues. I generally took on challenges that other, more experienced individuals overlooked. "You want to do that? Go ahead... 'young feller'". Young, as in curious, being the key word.

This freedom to attempt almost anything spoiled me. It definitely provided me with a risk-taker attitude. Step one in the decision making process is accepting responsibility for actions, even those that turn out wrong.

My problem's always been that I understand the needs and wants of folks just like me, average everyday Jacks and Jills. When you've been there, done that, you understand the emotions and motives involved in those daily confrontations that constantly present themselves, manifested as anger, frustration and sometimes, just plain rage. Those '...just when you were beginning to think everything was finally turning out all right..' situations.

It's been said that the paper industry doesn't attract the best available personnel today because it is a rural industry attracting only 'rural' folks. Use to be a rural industry, is no longer. Use of recycled paper changed a lot of that 'rural' feel. On the other hand it can be said that the paper industry still attracts the same caliber of personnel it did 20 years ago because it is a rural industry. "Rural", sounds like a negative, doesn't it? Use to be, is no longer.

Being, Sam, the maintenance man, I know everything that goes on in my mill. Have to. I am

decisive about problems that regularly occur. But, I am also a dinosaur, extinct well before my time. I make decisions, without approval and definitely without consensus. I am effective, yet I am also dying, 'dead' say some.

Know why I am between jobs? Because I have not learned to play the '...every decision by consensus...' game. I've shortened that expression to 'the game'. I seek advice from others, I seek their opinions, I seek out opposing viewpoints, I seek the right solutions to problems, but I make the decisions based upon my values, my beliefs, my experiences, my knowledge and, yes, my emotions. This process has stood me well through the years. Companies still willing to take risks find me, or not.

Management, at least those comfortable enough to speak their minds, seek to surround themselves with noddors (as in "Nod your head in agreement"), and avoid shakers (as in "Are you shaking your head in disagreement?") As a subordinate, certainly I fit that latter category, although surrounding myself with noddors when leading is fun. I've always felt more comfortable making decisions in an approving environment. But deep down I am a shaker, a renegade whose 'question authority' behavior definitely isn't cool. Know what is cool? Pretending to involve employees in decisions about their lives without providing the leadership for their involvement.

Why is there overwhelming, nearly universal acceptance of consensus decision making? Could it be there is safety in numbers? Individuals can not be identified, nor even held responsible, for decisions made by groups. For many making a decision is impossible so coming up with an excuse, whoops, management concept, for not making a decision is promoted, such as "Let's push that decision down to the lowest possible level". Abdication of responsibility is running amuck.

Anyone spending a entire career with the same company will be, somewhere along the line, confronted with abandoning their principles, values and beliefs (accepting, supporting or enforcing some 'stupid' policy) or they will never be in a position to make a decision that will require a rationalization of their principles. Many folks today, can say, "Well, you know, it really wasn't my decision. It was made by the 'ummh' committee."

Decision-makers can be placed at odds with themselves when trying to make a profit for the shareholders.

You know being between jobs feels right for me. It is like a vacation from reality.