

# meatballs

“You get no bread with one meatball.”  
Depression era folk song

# 9

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Meatballs is put out in the belief that a strong union at SHAP depends on an informed and involved membership. Meatballs welcomes different points of view. Contact Mike Parker, electrician second shift, body shop, or you can email meatballs@rts-tech.com. Publication labor is volunteer and views are those of the writers. For back issues go to [www.rts-tech.com/meatballs](http://www.rts-tech.com/meatballs)

Chrysler:

## Choosing the Wrong Path

This is a critical period for Chrysler. Management's chosen path is to copy Toyota. Does this strategy make sense?

First, I don't think Toyota workers will stand for the Toyota treatment much longer. There is an organizing effort at its flagship plant in Kentucky. Workers there are reacting to Toyota downsizing even as it *gains* market share. People are finding it harder and harder to maintain the pace. More people see through the pretense when management tries to control when they can take a sip of water at their work station (see box).

Skilled Trades are responding to deskilling. A Toyota skilled maintenance worker told me that they used to repair dock doors. Now their only job is to block them and tag them until a vendor comes to fix them.

Second, Chrysler will never be able to implement the full Toyota model because it is an anti-union model and union workers will not tolerate those conditions. Chrysler would end up as a poor copy of Toyota with low morale—and that won't produce high quality or profits.

There is another path. The company can use our experience and skill. We could clean up the plant. We could fix the machines properly. We could establish SHAP's reputation for quality in the remaining years of the JR. We could train for the coming technology. We could prepare ourselves for an effective launch

### Keeping in touch: If You are Laid-Off

When I was laid-off years ago I wanted to keep in touch with what was happening in the plant, partly out of plain interest and possibly to get clues when I might get called back.

I volunteer to help keep tradespeople in touch. If you give me an email address I will try to let you know what is happening. If you think you may be laid off, send me your email address or tell me personally. Also let me know whether it is OK to share the email address with other trades. The info will be trades oriented, but all laid-off Local 1700 members are welcome.

Email me at [meatballs@rts-tech.com](mailto:meatballs@rts-tech.com)  
Or (at least for now) I am in the AA28 crib 2<sup>nd</sup> shift.

If the layoff gets to me I will try to find someone else who will continue this. Any volunteers? Anyone want to help?  
—Mike Parker.

### Copy the Toyota Model?

#### Policy on Water Bottles

"Team members should not drink from the bottles when the conveyor/equipment is running or when they are performing standardized work, unless they pull the cord/push the button and notify their team leader or group leader. It is important that this should only be done in situations when the team member cannot wait until break."

Toyota (Kentucky Plant) daily information memo sent out June 9, 2004

of the next model. The launch period is decisive in determining the reputation and success of a car.

The plant and the corporation need to decide on the priority: low Harbour numbers or high quality. Both cannot be first.

### Savings and cost of management's strategy

Let's assume that SHAP's labor cost is approximately \$50/hour including wages, benefits, and a reasonable amount for support. (Use your own figure here if you want. The quoted GM figure of \$78/hour seems unreasonably high.)

Let's assume that we now make roughly 900 cars in two eight-hour shifts with 2400 workers. That means that SHAP labor per car is roughly  $(2400 \times 8)/900 = 21.4$  hours per car or about \$1100 per car.

Now let's say that management could succeed in cutting 10% of the SHAP labor force, making the **same** number of cars **without productivity, throughput, or quality losses**, and passed the entire savings on to the customer as a price reduction. You could knock off about \$110 from the price of the car.

We know from Chrysler's experiments with *thousands* of dollars of rebates and promotions, a \$110 cut would hardly be noticed.

And all of this assumes that the entire labor savings would be passed on to the consumer. Laying off people is not free money for the company. The company ends up paying the unemployment and SUB. The company pays for the Job Bank. Now add in the cost of retraining people two or three times in the job shuffle, and the cost of moving equipment to accommodate the slower line speeds. Add to that the costs in quality and productivity due to inexperience, chaos, and low morale.

The result is clear. At most the cost of a car will be reduced by a few dollars. This is not a strategy to improve sales. It is a strategy to improve Harbour numbers (fewer workers per vehicle) and raise profits with lower sales.

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## Quality makes the difference

What does make a difference in today's market is quality. The perception of Chrysler quality lags behind the reality, and the reality is still behind the imports and transplants. So Chrysler has a lot of catching up to do.

The proposed job cuts will accomplish nothing to *improve* the marketing of the car. But the cuts will almost certainly guarantee that quality will take a big hit.

## Where will the reductions come from?

The proposed plan is to cut line speed and production by 12% and cut the work force by about 16% (390 out of 2400).

Who will be cut? Production jobs will be combined and made harder. But since production is primary you can be sure that management will solve any problem at the expense of plant cleaning, inspection, safety, and maintenance. Perhaps management thinks they might as well cut our jobs since they are refusing to buy the parts and materials we need to do our jobs.

The starting point cut-numbers (390 total including 74 skilled trades plus the backfill) come from Corporate AME (Advanced Manufacturing Engineering). But the total real cuts and apportionment to each department will depend on how well departmental and plant management stand up and tell these so-called industrial engineers and their Harbour-obsessed bosses the truth. Chrysler seems to promote managers to higher positions by their talents in shifting blame, loud yelling, and short-term thinking, rather than backbone and knowledge. There are those supervisors who think they can get ahead by telling the boss what he/she wants to hear. It is hard for reality and common sense to carry the day.

## If they go through with it

If they go through with their plan, start-up will be very difficult, particularly for the trades. Knowledgeable people in several areas will be lost, people will be forced to shifts and jobs they worked hard to get away from. It will only be a question of which is lower: morale or knowledge. Areas for coverage will be enlarged so that chairs will only have time to do regular surface maintenance, assuming no other problems show. Temporary assistance will not have the knowledge to spot problems, nor the pride and sense of ownership of an area required to keep the equipment running well.

Management will be requesting/ordering people to put in the extra effort to fill the emergencies they have created by these foolish or self-serving plans. And they will ask you to overlook some things while they get their plans sorted out. What should we do?

1. Work safely.
2. Insist on what you need to do quality work and produce a quality product.
3. Insist on a clean workplace. If the rest areas are not clean get together and write a group grievance. If the cells are slippery, call your steward.
4. Think about overtime. Is the overtime they want part of the plan to keep brothers and sisters in the street?

—Mike Parker

Poor planning on your part  
does not constitute an  
emergency on my part!

## Lockout Again

MIOSHA was in this month on a complaint from an incident in February where a Paint area manager ordered other supervisors to work in an area with running equipment. The repeated plant safety violations are going to escalate the fines the plant will have to pay to some serious numbers. But of course since fines don't enter into the Harbour calculations, the pressure will still be on supervisors to keep production going no matter what the safety policy says.

Thus while the plant is being fined, we have the Assembly supervisor who seems to be proud that he "shared with the electricians in order to relieve their insecure feelings" that "there should be no need to utilize the emergency stop in order to complete any task" in the cell.

True, many of our machines were never designed to recover easily from E-Stop. They go out of sequence or lose information when E-Stop is applied. So what is management going to do about it? Instead of assigning skilled trades to solve these control problems, management will lay off more trades and then quietly go back to pressuring ("sharing with") workers not to use proper lockout procedures.

Along similar lines was the incident where an assembly line stopped but no alarm message was generated. Blame the controls? Maybe, but a supervisor issued a disciplinary warning to the electricians who did not notice that it was a fault—not a production stop—for two to three minutes. Really makes you want to go the extra mile.

## The Beatings Will Continue Till the Morale Improves.

The joke's on us. Chrysler's main measurement of morale these days is attendance. How do they propose to improve morale (attendance)? Management will apply stricter discipline and give more time-off. This new absence procedure should not be taken lightly. It may be, as management claims, that the policy is directed against the "players." But the reality is that there are many people who consider themselves to be conscientious workers but have responsibilities for relatives or health problems that kept them from the protection of the Good Record category. These are the ones who will be caught in this "morale" booster with a couple of unexpected events.

Make sure you know the rules and FMLA. Get advice *before* you get near the 30 days level. Remember, with the layoffs, management has no particular interest in working with you to keep you around and every interest in "attriting" the work force. Why pay a retirement bonus to reduce the headcount?