

**VALUE-ADDED
ATTITUDE & ACTION**

William I. Gorden

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Library Of Congress Catalog
Card Number 94-96463

ISBN 0-9643860-1-1

Printed in the United States of America

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Production Editing: Capenhurst Publishing
Cover Design: Daniel V. West
Printing and Binding: Fairway Press, Lima, Ohio
Published by WEGO BOOKS, Kent, Ohio 44240

◆ TABLE OF CONTENTS ◆

Acknowledgements	iv
Preface	v

Chapter 1 - THE FAMILY CONNECTION

Beyond Closeness To Connectedness	2
Harry Was A Family Man	2
Call Me Walt	6
The Dream Sidetracked	8
The Unfriendly Workplace	9
Feeling Like A Number	11

Chapter 2 - OUR STORY

A Rough Start	14
A Slippery Mystery Solved	15
From Adversity To Diversity	16
To Be Known By Name	24
Family Produces Added Value	25

Chapter 3 - COMMUNICATION AT WORK

Hi Hon, Can You Come Here?	28
There Is No Morale Problem Here	30
Communication Is More Than Information	32
Conflict Goes With The Job	33
Bosses From Hell	35
Talking As Though Walking On Eggs	36
Communication Rich	37
What Do Employees Need To Know?	38
Two-Way And Frequent	39

Chapter 4 - WORK HOARSE vs. CLEAR VOICE

Success Depends Upon Undistorted Information	42
Bootlicking Hurts Employee Voice	42
Workers' Range Of Voice	43
Anti-Union, Anti-Voice	44
The Voice Of Partnership	46
Critical Involvement	48
Voiceless	50

Chapter 5 - WE WILL NOT GIVE QUALITY...

What The Customer Wants	54
Three God-Words	54
Cut The Slogans	55
The Quality Movement	56
The Ongoing Improvement Process	58
TQM As Service	60
Benchmarking & Going For The Gold	62

Chapter 6 - CLOSE TO THE CUSTOMER

Everyone Is A Customer	66
A Leaky Bureaucracy	67
Suppliers And Customers	69
Most Favored Customer Status	71

Chapter 7 - T.E.A.M.

Teams Are Partnerships	76
Many Different Varieties	78
In Different Configurations	79
Not All Harmony And Song	80
Team Problem Solving	81
The Rules Of Teamwork	83

Chapter 8 - SERVICE ENHANCEMENT

This Place Is A Zoo	90
Getting Closer To The Public	91
Confidence Is Earned	93
50,000 Moments Of Truth	94

Chapter 9 - THE NEXT CHAPTER

Why Not A Circus?	98
If Not A Circus, Why Not Butterflies?	103

NOTES AND REFERENCES

References	106
List Of Companies Researched/Consulted	111
About The Author	112

Acknowledgements

Value-Added Attitude and Action would not have been possible without the help of many individuals who took me into their places of work like an old friend. A selected list of those companies and organizations is included on page 111. Several individuals, who arranged on-site interviews, merit special mention: Gerald Sargent, now with Challenger, Gray and Christmas in Houston, scheduled interviews for me in Dallas; Jack White, with HELP Bronx, smoothed entry into organizations in Washington D.C.; and John Izzo, with Einstein Consulting, did the same San Diego. I wish to thank Neal Irwin, Ronda Smith, Rogers Slease, and Wayne Wogan for their attention to detail and thoughtful comments after reading drafts of this manuscript. Finally, I express my appreciation to Dan West for preparing this text for the printer.

Preface:
Proceed Directly To Goal

My goal for *Value-Added Attitude and Action* is to add value to those lives I touch. More particularly, I want to increase understanding and adoption of attitudes and actions that enrich the workplace and working lives.

Value-added attitude and action is no simple matter. Rather it is a complex process in which human energies, competencies, and good will are coordinated to transform goods and services into what is of special value to users. The good news is that value-added attitude and action when present in a few in our places of work will become positively contagious.

Motivational slogans and work ethic are insufficient for transforming today's corporate environment. I argue there are certain **must** conditions for making the workplace a value-added place:

- work **must** have meaning to head and heart,
- vision and initiative **must** be widely present,
- managers **must** have business savvy,
- superiors **must** earn loyalty by sharing decisions,
- employees' well-being **must** equal other stakeholders,
- money and benefits **must** be fairly distributed,
- the work culture **must** engender connectedness,
- communication **must** be rich and voice must be valued,
- quality improvement **must** be foremost and continuous,
- customer relations **must** be governed by good will,
- suppliers and customers **must** treat each other as partners.

When these **musts** are met--when value-added attitude and action are organization-wide, from the security guard at the gate to the chief executive officer--America can better compete in the race for world class quality.

My message is practical. I am committed to those well-conceived efforts to improve quality. Corporate continuous quality improvement efforts, however, often are misdirected because they are too much profit-driven. This is not to suggest that profit is unimportant. I am not naive. But defining value-added only in terms of the bottom line squelches the best that is in us, that insatiable hunger and thirst for the good, the true and the beautiful. We are a people who want to do good while doing well. We want our work to add to the well-being of customers and to a safe environment.

My core message is expressed in the idea that each of us wants to make a difference--that we want to add value to what we do. I examine workplace conditions--the connectedness, commitment to quality, and the importance of employee voice--that affect worker attitude and commitment. Throughout I make observations of what companies are doing to improve quality and to please customers.

Q. Who should read *Value-Added Attitude and Action*?

A. This book is for all people who want to do more than earn a living.

Perhaps the readers that will benefit the most are those who have lived long enough to know that they can not expect a smile on the face of a waitress whose shoes pinch her feet or whose boss rarely says thanks. By that, I mean that this is a book for ordinary people who work hard in less than exciting jobs and who often are expected to do quality work in spite of personal difficulties, a poor work climate, and low pay. *Value-Added* also should have special benefit for those who know how important is the bottom line, who must meet payrolls, and whose attitude and action do much to shape the work environment.

Those few individuals who think that they are destined to boss while others are doomed to drudge work will find little comfort in *Value-Added*. Whoever you are, whether in various levels of management, a union member, non-union worker, or a temporary hire, you will discover that some of the positions I take will provoke argument.

Most people don't read a Preface. If you have read this far, it is a sign that you like to consult a road map before you begin a journey. That now is done. So proceed directly to Chapter One. You will find there and in the chapters that follow inspirational stories and experiences that have shaped my own and others' lives, and that can transform the workplace.

Please tell me if what you read rings true. I will appreciate hearing from you.

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CHAPTER ONE

**THE FAMILY
CONNECTION**

BEYOND CLOSENESS TO CONNECTEDNESS

"As a child is connected to the parent, to be connected with another person is the only security we ever have in life. In that sense, we never grow up."

--Susan Johnson & Hara Estroff Marano

Physical closeness between a mother and child serves the survival of the infant. Attachment to a responsible caregiver is the most basic of all rules of life. That need for **connectedness** is something we never lose. It is a primary motivation. The meaning of life and our mental health are entwined in bonding and connections with others. This principle not only applies to the family but to the workplace.

Harry Was A Family Man

Sometimes we can better appreciate the importance of connectedness by seeing it demonstrated in the lives of those who attain celebrity status. Harry's life is a love story. He was "his mother's son." Yet from his father, who was small in stature, he acquired a feistiness, courage, honesty, a veneration for women, and hunger to get rich. His father's speculation into wheat futures put him deeply in debt, a debt carried by Harry long after his father's death.

Debt put college out of the question for him. Rather he got a down-to-earth education in such jobs as a construction time keeper for the Santa Fe. He worked 10 hours a day, six days a week, and lived with railroad gangs in their tents. Later, he worked as a clerk in the basement of Kansas City's National Bank of Commerce, and then on his uncle's 600 acre farm. Everyone in the family worked to survive on the farm. To be a good farmer was something to take pride in.

One day, while visiting friends in Independence, he returned a cake plate to the Gates' house. It was there that Harry met the Gates' granddaughter, Bessie Wallace. He talked with her for two hours. Later he was invited to dinner, and after dinner he played the piano. He had earned a standing invitation to Sunday dinner. It was the beginning of letter after letter, hundreds of them, in which he poured out his heart to her. Bess and Harry were not married until she was 34 and he 35.

His letters were not mushy and romantic, nor was his proposal by mail. Only occasionally did one speak of love such as "I really never had any desire to make love to a girl just for the fun of it, and you have always been the reason." Many letters told of the mundane work on the farm such as putting hundreds of rings in hogs' noses. Some told of his religious convictions because he knew that was important to her, "I think there's more in acting than in talking," and, although a Baptist, he accepted her invitation to attend an Episcopal service.

At her suggestion, he read books by Charles Dickens, and he boasted of reading Plato's *Republic* rather than only magazines such as *Adventure* and *Everybody's Life*. Writing about breaking his leg, he commented, had taught him sympathy for others. He

also confessed his less than masculine behavior of yelling when he had a tooth pulled, and expressed a distaste for guns when he wrote about his stint with the National Guard.

Several years later, yet before they were married, he would write from Europe of his leadership as Captain of the artillery "Wild Irish" Battery D. He enlisted his 5'8" 150 pound frame to fight the Germans in World War I. His dependence upon spectacles was so great that he took seven pairs with him. Early on he made it clear to his men that they had "to get along with me" and that he would bust any who would not. But he earned the respect of his "Wild Irish" recruits and made friends, some who many years later were important to him politically.

Harry did everything possible to persuade Bess to have a favorable opinion of him: he built a tennis court on the farm, bought an expensive automobile in order to make the trip from the farm to Independence more quickly, escorted her to the theater, and got into risky business ventures in hopes of making himself better able to support her.

His investments in a zinc mine failed. Selling oil leases failed. His partnership in a retail men's furnishings store failed. With several others, he took over a bank that he learned too late was tottering. No sooner had he sold it than it too failed. Not long after that he was cheated in a savings and loan stock selling venture. There was something persistent about him. If one thing failed, it was not long before he would begin another.

Other than his leadership role in the war, it was not until he ventured into politics that he would do well: first winning an election as a county commissioner whose major task was to keep the roads in good shape; then from 1927 to 1935, he served as presiding judge in Independence-Kansas City, Missouri. His oversight of roads was enlarged to arrange construction of many projects, including a new courthouse for Kansas City. And Harry ran a tight ship, clear of scandal in a town in which the Pendergasts' machine dictated politics.

On Sundays, Harry, Bess, and their daughter Margaret would drive to the farm for a midday fried chicken dinner. Harry's heart now included Bess, their daughter, and Mamma. He was responsible in all things. His car had to be clean and its tires carry the right pressure. He dressed carefully, and never went out the door without his hat, a hat he wore straight on his head.

Some years later after being elected to the Senate, his Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense was relentless in its efforts to rectify what he called "Santa Claus passes" to contractors. But he wrote Bess, who at that time was back in Missouri, "I hope I don't make any mistakes . . . Hope I won't be here too long."

And as president, Harry--the buck stops here--Truman will be remembered not only as "Give 'em hell, Harry", but also as a man terribly protective of his family. Remember his scathing letter to a critic who had reviewed his daughter Margaret's concert? "Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens you'll need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a supporter below."

ATTITUDE & ACTION

The most used metaphor to describe the workplace at its best is family. That was the theme song of the Pittsburgh Pirates when they won the world series in 1979. The message of the hit song "We Are Family" by Sister Sledge caught the imagination of the whole city.

Call Me Walt

The history of Disney echoes with two themes: Disney is **drama** and Disney is **family**. Disney as drama is evident in the concept that everyone is a part of the show--that all employees are members of a cast who act out their roles on stage. Disneyland is designed as an escape from the real world in which paying customers are guests of the happiest place on earth. Dress codes are seen as costuming. There are special ways to look, talk, and behave according to the role you play. The drama is carefully scripted.

A Disney training seminar is designed for employees to catch a bit of the same stardust they are expected to sprinkle upon those who enter Disneyland.

In its early days, Disney was known as a **first name friendly place to work** and a place where teamwork was essential. Walt Disney insisted that everyone call him "Walt." The stories that employees tell depict him as a family man, who reserved Saturdays for his daughters and as one who created Disneyland to provide his own and others' families a safe, clean, fun place to go.

A colleague research team from California, Ruth Smith and Eric Eisenberg, learned that Disney employees uncritically adopted the family atmosphere created for paying customers as the way Disney employees should be treated and should behave.

A ride operator they interviewed said, "These people are like my brothers and sisters." Another employee described his work relationships as "close knit" and "better than marriage." Yet another stated, "The people who work here treat each other as a family . . . We're a family presenting family entertainment, it's like inviting someone to our home to entertain them." Management encouraged this family-feeling by naming the annual party the "family picnic."

The Dream Sidetracked

As Disney expanded, management became more concerned about the bottom-line and profits. In the mid-80s, wages and benefits were cut for some hourly employees. Employees were shocked. They complained about how it used to be "Try to make the employees happy as possible so that they make the public happy" and now it's "let's save as much money as we can and make a buck."

Employees felt that they were no longer treated as family. Their talk was different: "It's just totally business," "They don't care," "It's not fun to work at Disneyland any more," and "Walt wanted family, but it's business now, not Walt's dream, that's shot, it's not what he wanted."

A 22-day strike disrupted Disneyland. The strike created a new drama at the gates of the Magic Kingdom--pickets, restraining orders, ultimatums of return to work or else, letters of replacement, hiring of replacements, and some employees crossing the picket line. And then the strikers came up with a tactic that hit management where it hurt--they paid to enter Disneyland and once inside distributed handbills to the public and told how disheartened they were because they no longer were treated as family. Shortly after that tactic, the strike was settled.

But relations between those who manned and had crossed picket lines and between labor and management were changed. A two-tier pay scale which was part of the strike settlement favored those with three or more years. Many hourly employees saw management as adversaries; they saw themselves as the "less wanted step-children."

In the years that have followed, Disney continues to promote its theme of the happiest place on earth, and has regained among many of its permanent employees the belief that Disney is a good place to work. Bright and talented young people apply in droves to work in Disney parks despite the long hours and modest wages. However, behind the scenes there are others far from excited about their jobs, such as the banks of telephone operators who know the tedium year after year of making reservations.

The Unfriendly Workplace

The opposite of connectedness, of course, is disconnectedness and alienation. The scourge of killings and grievous injuries by alienated Post Office employees and discharged workers are grim evidence of how vital is the human need to be a valued member in a workplace. The 1,000 killings each year within U.S. workplaces are not just the work of madmen who blow away anyone in their path; they are often lonely people, jilted lovers, mistreated employees driven to kill in revenge and then take their own lives. Life can become quite desperate when we invest years in a workplace yet feel unappreciated, unfulfilled, and unloved.

Efficient scheduling of work around the clock for hundreds and sometimes thousands of employees is no easy task for managers. Some work has to be performed at inconvenient times. Employees are expected to arrange their lives accordingly. Because Federal Express does much of its work at night, the company fired Diane Mutchler, one of its agents in Pittsburgh who failed to report for a night assignment. Ms. Mutchler was a single mother of three small children who could not find child care at night. "We Are Family" was not a song sung that week in Pittsburgh.

Companies are finding it costs less to pay overtime than to hire more employees. But that strategy can be pushed only so far. The Flint, Michigan General Motors plant was

ATTITUDE & ACTION

The intoxicating start-up of one's own business and the demands of making it grow can suck the oxygen out of your life, says Todd Logan, founder of Sportscape Inc. Publications in Winnetka, Illinois. Foremost of the signs that one is trapped and prisoner of one's own success, Todd declares, is despair over the loss of closeness in important personal relationships--"a breakdown in the relationships we value most."

*--from Todd Logan's Mind of
the Manager: Trapped in INC.*

struck to protest mandatory overtime that sometimes resulted in 66 hour workweeks and the suspension of several workers who refused to work an overtime shift. Allegheny Ludlum steel plants were struck after some workers were required to work 146 hours in

two weeks. What do these unfortunate instances tell us? They warn us that workers have lives and families who need them in person and not just their paychecks. They also remind us that employees want family-friendly employers that negotiate rather than mandate work assignments, employers that help arrange child care, and employers that help employees nurture family.

Feeling Like A Number

Disconnectedness is the product of an urban landscape in which our identity is an ID number, and where, unlike in Cheers, only a few people know your name. Our hometown is not a place where we live, but some place where we grew up. Most of us work for organizations that are very big and in which it is easy to get lost. Our immediate family may be even more treasured as an enterprise grows large. It is ironic that creating a family-friendly work culture within our large work organizations is keenly valued, yet quite difficult to achieve.

Secretary of Labor Robert Reich has warned that the American middle class is splintering into three groups: an *underclass*, an *overclass*, and the largest group is an *anxious class*. The underclass is trapped in poverty and the inner cities. Overclass families are the well-educated and have moved to the suburbs, some which are protected by gates. They have prospered while the less-well educated have suffered a steep decline in living standards.

The anxious class, most of them in houses and apartments too small for their families, need two or three paychecks to deliver the standard of living that one used to supply. The forces that pull America apart work to the disadvantage of us all. Our national connectedness and competitive advantage, as Reich argues, hinge upon renewing "the compact among American business, American government, and American working men and women." Government must invest in infrastructure and, along with business, must invest in workers--in creating a skilled and flexible workforce and that also must mean creating a family-friendly workplace.