*Notes on:*

Gung Ho!

Turn on the People in Any Organization

By Ken Blanchard & Sheldon Bowles

# Overview

This book documents the real-lift events of a General Manager trying to turn around a failing plant on a short time-frame. Peggy Sinclair is appointed GM at Walton Works #2 (a fictionalized plant name), but she believes that she is being setup. The plant is one of the worst performers in the company and slated to be closed in 4 months if it doesn’t start improving. Closing the plant would devastate the small town around it, and it would also give the company President an easy excuse to fire Peggy (who had offended him by opposing a strategic plan he proposed).

Peggy finds that both morale and production in the plant are down. The only gem in the plant is the finishing department (the best-performing department in the company), run by a Native American named Andy Longclaw. At a chance meeting at a park bench, Peggy learns that Andy runs his department using a philosophy he calls “Gung Ho!” which consists of three lessons:

* The Spirit of the Squirrel (meaningful work)
* The Way of the Beaver (empowerment and trust)
* The Gift of the Goose (cheering and affirmation)

Peggy decides to commit herself to making the entire plant “Gung Ho” and Andy agrees to help her. Over the course of a year they are able to turn the plant around, keep it from closing, and re-engage and inspire both management and front-line team members. This story documents how they were able to accomplish this.

Aside from a few entertaining anecdotes:

* Andy pretending to be a stereo-typical Native American with gifts of talking to animals and knowing the weather
* A former employee (the son of the company’s owner) getting tired of his ideas being called “B.S.” and leaving a bull in his manager’s office overnight (to show him what real B.S. looks and smells like), and
* Andy postponing the closing of the plant from year end to mid-July by arranging a fake award ceremony for the same owner’s son

the story can actually be summed up very well by explaining each of the 3 key lessons.

The notes below describe each lesson. The “Reassessment Guide” for each section is also reproduced. Peggy used the high-level bullet points (and pictures of the animals) to make signs.

# The Spirit of the Squirrel

Andy took Peggy out to his cabin and had her watch the squirrels work (while he slept in a hammock). The squirrels were gathering food from a feeder and would run frantically back and forth to store the nuts for winter. Andy’s questions led Peggy to understand that the reason the squirrels work so hard is because their work is important. If they don’t store food they will die. Knowing that the work you do is important causes people to work harder. Even if it is something as simple as washing dishes, clean dishes allow people to enjoy meals and get food quickly (without getting sick). Importance of a job must be related to the human impact of that job and the people it helps.

However, it’s worth noting that the squirrels did not work particularly well together. Each was on its own mission and would fight the others for food. They did stop to yell warning calls to each other – to let them know if a predator was coming, but they lacked a unifying goal.

Peggy went back to the plant and had 1-hour, weekly meetings where each Division Manager would discuss why they were all doing what they were doing and why that work was important.

*Reassessment Guidepost (from the back of the book):*

1. Knowing we make the world a better place
   * It’s the understanding, not the work
   * It’s how the work helps others, not units dealt with
   * Result: self-esteem – an emotion whose power ranks right up there with love and hate
2. Everyone works toward a shared goal
   * Goal sharing means buy-in, not announcing. Trust and putting team members first lead to support for goals.
   * The manager sets critical goals. The team can set the rest. (People support best that which they help create.)
   * Goals are marker posts you drive into the future landscape between where you are and where you want to be. They focus attention productively.
3. Values guide all plans, decisions and actions
   * Goals are for the future. Values are for now. Goals are set. Values are lived. Goals change. Values are rocks you can count on. Goals get people going. Values sustain the effort.
   * Values become real only when you demonstrate them in the way you act and the way you insist others behave.
   * In a Gung Ho organization, values are the real boss.

# The Way of the Beaver

A few weeks later, Andy took Peggy to a tree where they could overlook a beaver dam. The beavers were repairing a break in the dam that occurred during a heavy rain. She noticed that no single beaver was directing the work of the others. They each worked individually. Everyone knew the goal, and everyone worked in the manner they thought would best help to obtain that goal. Beavers didn’t tear apart each other’s work or re-work anything. Everyone’s contribution was left as-is and added value.

Andy explained that front-line workers need to be given respect for knowing how to do their jobs, and they should be put in as much control of their jobs as possible. They should also be challenged and given room to grow. In Andy’s department a front-line worker would decide when a machine needed to be taken out of service a few days to be repaired. Peggy copied this lesson and had her Division Managers decide what goals should be set for the company and what priorities they should work on. She also encouraged them to turn around and ask their shift managers and front-line workers the same questions.

*Reassessment Guidepost (from the back of the book):*

1. A playing field with clearly marked territory.
   * Goals and values define the playing field and rules of the game.
   * Leaders decide what position team members play but then have to get off the field and let the players move the ball.
   * Freedom to take charge comes from knowing exactly what territory is yours.
2. Thoughts, feelings, needs, and dreams are respected, listened to, and acted upon.
   * You can’t be in control unless the rest of the organization supports you and doesn’t rip you, or your work, apart.
   * Golden Rule of Management: value individuals as persons.
   * Information is the gatekeeper to power. Everybody needs full open access to information. Managers must be willing to give up the levers of control they’ve worked a lifetime to get hold of. It’s tough to be boss without being bossy.
3. Able but challenged
   * Production expectations should be within capacity and skills, but if you undershoot you’ll insult.
   * Nothing drains self-esteem faster than knowing you’re ripping off the system, not contributing. If people can’t do a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, you demean them.
   * Gung Ho requires a stretch: work that demands people’s best and allows them to learn and move ahead into uncharted territory.

# The Gift of the Goose

Andy takes Peggy out in a canoe on a lake to watch the geese. The geese fly overhead and land on the lake, and Peggy is left determine why they make such a loud noise. She realizes that the geese are always yelling. Not just when danger is around – but also when they take off, when they land, and as they fly. She realizes that the geese are cheering each other on.

*Reassessment Guidepost (from the back of the book):*

1. Active or passive, congratulations must be TRUE
   * Congratulations are affirmations that who people are and what they do matter, and that they are making a valuable contribution toward achieving the shared mission.
   * Telling people what a great job they’ve done or presenting an award is an active congratulation. Passive congratulations are such things as stepping aside and letting a team member go forward with a tricky, complicated, and important project, without exercising some sort of control or even offering advice.
   * You can’t overdo TRUE congratulations: Timely, Responsive, Unconditional, Enthusiastic.
2. No score, no game, and cheer the progress.
   * At football games fans don’t sit mute as the ball is moved down the field, waiting for the touchdown before cheering. Cheer the progress, not just the results. Measurement (score) shared with everyone generates excitement.
   * The farther congratulations are to the right on the scale below, the better (more effective) they are:

Programmed 🡪 Spontaneous

Blanket 🡪 Individual

General 🡪 Specific

Traditional 🡪 Unique

* + Stop focusing on problems and the guilty party (police behavior) and start looking for those responsible for things gone rich (coach behavior).

1. E = mc2 (Enthusiasm equals mission times cash and congratulations)
   * Worthwhile work and being in control of achieving the goal – that’s a mission
   * Cheering each other on brings enthusiasm to work
   * Cash comes first – you need to feed material needs (food, clothing, etc.) before you can feed the spirit with congratulations.