

## Chapter 3

# VIENNA WAITS FOR YOU

LIFE IS PASSING YOU BY

there is no value in working harder  
only in WORKING SMARTER

*Some years ago I was swapping war stories with the manager of a large project in southern California. He began to restate the effect that his project and its crazy hours had had on his staff. There were two divorces that he could trace directly to the overtime his people were putting in, and one of his worker's kids had gotten into some kind of trouble with drugs, probably because his father had been too busy for parenting during the past year. Finally there had been the nervous breakdown of the test team leader.*

*As he continued through these horrors, I began to realize that in his own strange way, the man was bragging. You might suspect that with another divorce or two and a suicide, the project would have been a complete success, at least in his eyes.*

—TDM

For all the talk about "working smarter," there is a widespread sense that what real-world management is all about is getting people to work harder and longer, largely at the expense of their personal lives. Managers are forever tooting their horns about the quantity of overtime their people put in, and the tricks one can use to get even more out of them.

## Spanish Theory Management

Historians long ago formed an abstraction about different theories of value: The Spanish Theory, for one, held that only a fixed amount of value existed on earth, and therefore the path to the accumulation of wealth was to learn to extract it more efficiently from the soil or from people's backs. Then there was the English Theory that held that value could be created through ingenuity and technology. So the English had an Industrial Revolution, while the Spanish spun their wheels trying to exploit the land and the Indians in the New World. They moved huge quantities of gold across the ocean, and all they got for their effort was enormous inflation (too much gold money chasing too few usable goods).

The Spanish Theory of Value is alive and well among managers everywhere. You see that whenever they talk about productivity. Productivity ought to mean achieving more in an hour of work, but all too often it has come to mean extracting more for an hour of pay. There is a large difference. The Spanish Theory managers dream of attaining new productivity levels through the simple mechanism of unpaid overtime. They divide whatever work is done in a week by forty hours, not by the eighty or ninety hours that the worker actually put in.

That's not exactly productivity—it's more like fraud—but it's the state of the art for many American managers. They bully and cajole their people into long hours. They impress upon them how important the delivery date is (even though it may be totally arbitrary; the world isn't going to stop just because a project completes a month late). They trick them into accepting hopelessly tight schedules, shame them into sacrificing any and all to meet the deadline, and do anything to get them to work longer and harder.

## And Now a Word from the Home Front

Although your staff may be exposed to the message "Work longer and harder" while they're at the office, they're getting a very different message at home. The message at home is, "Life is passing you by." Your laundry is piling up in the closet, your babies are uncuddled, your spouse is starting to look elsewhere. There is only one

time around on this merry-go-round called life, only one shot at the brass ring. And if you use your life up on COBOL.,."

But you know when the truth is told,  
That you can get what you want or you can just get old.  
You're going to kick off before you even get halfway through.  
When will you realize . . . Vienna waits for you?

—"The Stranger," Billy Joel

The Vienna that waits for you, in Billy Joel's phrase, is the last stop on your personal itinerary. When you get there, it's all over. If you think your project members never worry about such weighty matters, think again. Your people are very aware of the one short life that each person is allotted. And they know too well that there has got to be something more important than the silly job they're working on.

## There Ain't No Such Thing as Overtime

Overtime for salaried workers is a figment of the naive manager's imagination. Oh, there might be some benefit in a few extra hours worked on Saturday to meet a Monday deadline, but that's almost always followed by an equal period of compensatory "undertime" while the workers catch up with their lives. Throughout the effort there will be more or less an hour of undertime for every hour of overtime. The trade-off might work to your advantage for the short term, but for the long term it will cancel out

• pushing people to do overtime work will not lead to increased productivity  
• any gain is cancelled out in longer term.  
*What is baseline productivity to aim for without overtime or burnout?*

Slow down you crazy child,  
And take the phone off the hook and disappear for a while.  
It's all right. You can afford to lose a day or two.  
When will you realize . . . Vienna waits for you?

Just as the unpaid overtime was largely invisible to the Spanish Theory manager (who always counts the week as forty hours regardless of how much time the people put in), so too is the undertime invisible. You never see it on anybody's time sheet. It's time spent on the phone or in bull sessions or just resting. Nobody can

really work much more than forty hours, at least not continually and with the level of intensity required for creative work.

Overtime is like sprinting: It makes some sense for the last hundred yards of the marathon for those with any energy left, but if you start sprinting in the first mile, you're just wasting time. Trying to get people to sprint too much can only result in loss of respect for the manager. The best workers have been through it all before; they know enough to keep silent and roll their eyes while the manager raves on that the job has got to get done by April. Then they take their compensatory undertime when they can, and end up putting in forty hours of real work each week. The best workers react that way; the others are workaholics.

## Workaholics

Workaholics will put in uncompensated overtime. They'll work extravagant hours, though perhaps with declining effectiveness. Put them under enough pressure and they will go a long way toward spoiling their personal lives. But only for a while. Sooner or later the message comes through to even the most dedicated workaholic:

Slow down, you're doing fine,  
 You can't be everything you want to be before your time.  
 Although it's so romantic on the borderline tonight.  
 But when will you realize . . . Vienna waits for you?

Once that idea is digested, the worker is lost forever after to the project. The realization that one has sacrificed a more important value (family, love, home, youth) for a less important value (work) is devastating. It makes the person who has unwittingly sacrificed seek revenge. He doesn't go to the boss and explain calmly and thoughtfully that things have to change in the future—he just quits, another case of burnout. One way or the other, he's gone.

Workaholism is an illness, but not an illness like alcoholism that affects only the unlucky few. Workaholism is more like the common cold: Everyone has a bout of it now and then. Our purpose in writing about it here is not so much to discuss its causes and cures, but to address the simpler problem of how you, the manager, ought to deal with your workaholics. If you exploit them to the hilt in typical Spanish Theory fashion, you'll eventually lose them. No matter how desperately you need them to put in all those hours, you

can't let them do so at the expense of their personal lives. The loss of a good person isn't worth it. This point goes beyond the narrow area of workaholism, into the much more complex subject of *meaningful* productivity.

## Productivity: Winning Battles and Losing Wars

Next time you hear someone talking about productivity, listen carefully to hear if the speaker ever uses the word *turnover*. Chances are that he or she will not. In years of hearing productivity discussed and in hundreds of articles about it, we have never encountered a single expert that had anything to say about the related subject of turnover. But what sense can it possibly make to discuss one without the other? Consider some of the things that organizations typically do to improve productivity:

- pressure, people to put in more hours
- mechanize the process of product development
- compromise the quality of the product (more about this in the next chapter)
- standardize procedures

Any of these measures can potentially make the work less enjoyable and less satisfying. Hence, the process of improving productivity risks worsening turnover. That doesn't say you can't improve productivity without paying a turnover price. It only says you need to take turnover into account whenever you set out to attain higher productivity. Otherwise, you may achieve an "improvement" that is more than offset by the loss of your key people.

Most organizations don't even keep statistics on turnover. Virtually none can tell you what replacement of an experienced worker costs. And whenever productivity is considered, it is done as though turnover were nonexistent or cost-free. The Eagle project at Data General is a case in point. The project was a Spanish Theory triumph: Workaholic project members put in endless unpaid overtime hours to push productivity to unheard of levels. At the end of the project, virtually the entire development staff quit. What was the cost of that? No one even figured it into the equation.

Productivity has to be defined as benefit divided by cost. The benefit is observed dollar savings and revenue from the work per-

formed, and cost is the total cost, including replacement of any workers used up by the effort.

## Reprise

*During the past year, I did some consulting for a project that was proceeding so smoothly that the project manager knew she would deliver the product on schedule. She was summoned in front of the management committee and asked for a progress report. She said she could guarantee that her product would be ready by the deadline of March 1, exactly on time according to the original estimate. The upper managers chewed over that piece of unexpected good news and then called her in again the next day. Since she was on time for March 1, they explained, the deadline had been moved up to January 15.*

—TRL

A schedule that the project could actually meet was of no value to those Spanish Theory managers, because it didn't put the people under pressure. Better to have a hopelessly impossible schedule to extract more labor from the workers.

Chances are, you've known one or more Spanish Theory managers during your career. It's all very well to smile at their short-sightedness, but don't let yourself off the hook too easily. Each of us has succumbed at one time or another to the short-term tactic of putting people under pressure to get them to work harder. In order to do this, we have to ignore their decreased effectiveness and the resultant turnover, but ignoring bad side effects is easy. What's not so easy is keeping in mind an inconvenient truth like this one:

**People under time pressure don't work better; they just work faster.**

In order to work faster, they may have to sacrifice the quality of the product and their own job satisfaction.

*There is no way to work faster without sacrificing . quality or . job satisfaction*