

very high or very low morale. The key is to establish a cohesive group who sees the adverse conditions as a challenge rather than as a hindrance.

As a multi-cultural group the gang is a success story. At no time is there any discrimination on the basis of race and no small racial sub-groups have formed in particular areas. All Attendants are treated equally and all rotate through the different jobs. The two Foremen are both Maoris and this selection was made purely on the basis of experience and ability to lead the men.

No major guide to the selection of satisfactory staff was found, apart from an interest in the operation of plant and physical work. Generally a relatively low level of

education is all that is required, though it is noticeable that the younger Maoris do tend to have better education than the young Pakehas.

Both the matching of formal leadership styles and the development of strong informal leadership within the work group was seen as a major contributory factor to the success of the group.

This success has allowed the group to increase its productivity, modify work routines and achieve excellent safety records despite adverse work conditions and a relatively high turnover. Although the turnover appears high in relation to the total district, it is not seen as a major problem to the gang in this study. ◉

# THE KIWI AND THE WORK ETHIC

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Having worked for an international consultancy firm for a number of years, I have had the opportunity to observe many varying attitudes towards work and leisure in different countries. These differences have been of particular interest to me as I advise on the organisation of companies, hopefully to improve levels of productivity and efficiency. However, I am aware that little attention in this work is paid to cultural differences, which could well be a serious flaw in obtaining satisfactory results. When I arrived in New Zealand in early 1976 I had that initially deceptive impression that attitudes and outlooks here are exactly the same as those in England. Over the last year I have realised that there are significant differences.

My first assignment was in Christchurch, and the winter there was none too warm. Having arrived from an English summer I contracted every sort of cold and flu bug in circulation and spent many evenings in the bar of the motel where I was staying, trying to stop the rot.

One evening I started chatting with a pleasant chap in boots, jeans and T-shirt who I assumed was engaged in the extensions going on to the motel. It gradually dawned on me however, that this was the owner of the establishment, not to mention

his many other interests in Christchurch. The conversation turned to the subject of work, and he told me how he had once had a business in Dunedin. This business had been sold, not for want of profitability, but primarily because it forced him to adopt the role of "manager" — and an absentee manager at that. In his experience, nothing spelt greater trouble than giving this impression to people who worked for you — in his words "they just wouldn't believe that you worked at all," and because of this, felt no great loyalty or responsibility for the welfare of your business. However, if you could keep the enterprise to manage-

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able proportions and constantly be seen to be involved in the "real" work — in his present case bricklaying and roofing — the problems of management, if they didn't exactly disappear, were at least made easier by the positive attitudes of employees. With that, he downed his whisky, put on his industrial gloves, and went out to join the nightshift. For a few months I forgot about this discussion, but gradually came to realise that this Christchurch entrepreneur had identified an important attitude held by the New Zealander towards work.

A useful way of analysing New Zealanders' attitude towards work is by examining their attitudes towards leisure. It was certainly apparent to me after a short time in this country that Kiwis take their leisure very seriously. One obvious illustration of this can be seen by looking at any private property owner.

There always seems to be an unending programme of weekend improvements to be undertaken, whether it's painting the roof, putting in a new garage or adding another bedroom. Land always needs to be fenced, cleared of scrub or drained. The highest level of weekend work is the complete building of a bach or house. First the land needs to be cleared, the home is designed, and then follows months of construction usually undertaken by the owner builder, his friends, or short term contract labour. Now this sort of activity is by no means unique to New Zealand, but I have never lived in a country where the pull of weekend bach and home building has been so strong. I have often been staggered when visiting the homes of business acquaintances, when told that their magnificent edifices had been designed and constructed almost single-handed. My amazement at all the technical ingenuity and hard work required is second only to my surprise that these amateur master-builders show absolutely no sign of this originality and application during their weekdays at work. Even for those not involved in bach building, other weekend and holiday projects and activities abound. My summer here was spent on the Coromandel Peninsular, and it seemed as though the whole population of greater Auckland had descended upon the area complete with tents, caravans and boats; not to mention the additional leisure hardware including portable barbecues, diving gear and fishing tackle.

This same dedicated approach is shown

also to most sporting endeavours. A few months ago I thought I must have offended a friend, who, without warning, ceased to contact me and disappeared off the social scene. When I did finally see him again and enquired concerning his disappearance, I discovered the simple cause was the start of the Rugby season — training all week, an early night on Friday, and drinking with the team Saturday nights. Before this I would have considered him incapable of such devotion to any cause or pursuit. This is an individual example but it's not difficult to find circumstances of mass dedication to sporting activities. I will never forget, half way through the "Round the Bays" run, seeing 18,000 people stretched out, mostly in front, around the Auckland coast road. As the papers said, "It was the day you set a world record."

Whilst world records abound in the annals of New Zealand sport, there are few to be recorded in the day to day work context. Everyone will concede the efficiency of this country's agriculture. At the same time, no-one would expect a country of three million people to have companies of record-breaking proportions. However, what has puzzled me, and indeed it seems to puzzle politicians and captains of industry alike, is why New Zealand productivity is so consistently low and why industrial relations are so consistently bad. Coming from Britain, which has an abysmal post-war record in both areas, it was a surprise to me that New Zealand has even more problems. The mystery deepens when one considers that New Zealand has a uniquely homogeneous and egalitarian society with an impressive history of first in progressive social and industrial legislation. However, anyone expecting to find the "Sweden of the Southern Hemisphere" will come away disappointed.

Statistics alone indicate a rather disappointing performance for New Zealand industry, but I am relying more on my own individual experiences. What happens to all these imaginative, creative and independent people during their 40 hour week at work? Do they, as soon as they are in the grips of an organisation, have some sort of spell placed on them?

Naturally it is unfair to make sweeping generalisations, but it is true that many of the managers with whom I've worked in this country have rather limited concepts of their roles. They refuse to come to terms

with what exactly the concept of management means in a New Zealand context. Moreover, problems in the industrial relations area have often been couched in terms of suspicion and mistrust, certainly in a more brutal way than I have heard in supposedly class-torn Britain. Executives seem far more anxious to know what the next man is getting in salary than being concerned with how effective they themselves are in their job. There also appears to be a lack of drive among New Zealand management — a failure to innovate and make decisions — a feeling that it is not even worth making the effort. And yet these are the same people who will design and build a home single handed, pound a jet boat around the country's rivers and devote most of their spare time to being two-acre farmers.

And what of the workers? Nearly every large scale plant I have visited seems to be populated by people wandering around in a dream. They are rarely told anything by management about what they are supposed to be doing, and seem totally disinterested anyway. Additionally, there is this underlying feeling of hostility and ill humour which can surface in many service situations as out-and-out rudeness. The climate of industrial relations underlines this with parties in most disputes seeming to adopt intransigent positions and both sides acting out stock caricatures.

Perhaps a useful overall summary of attitudes towards work can be experienced during job selection interviews. I have come across candidates for all sorts of jobs whose main purpose at the interview seems to be to demonstrate that they don't really need the job; they haven't bothered to find out much about it; and, if they are selected, the company should consider itself fortunate to obtain their services.

How does one begin to explain this paradox? At play, the New Zealander is a dedicated egalitarian, full of independence and resourcefulness. At work, he is cowed, unimaginative and usually adopts grotesque worker-boss postures long since discarded in most other countries in the world. One feasible explanation can be found in Gordon McLauchlan's recent book "The Passionless People." His thesis, as I understand it, is that all of New Zealand society is based on Victorian attitudes of the early settlers, and social isolation has preserved these values after they were rejected else-

where. Thus he explains conservative attitudes and rigid acceptance of the society norm. However, this theory, though persuasive, does not really account for the New Zealander's attitude towards work. The Victorians, after all, believed in the virtues of hard work above all, and whatever their faults, they were great industrial innovators.

My suggested explanation is somewhat more homespun and in a way very obvious. I think that Kiwis, particularly those in towns, have not really come to accept work and the work environment as a significant part of their lives. In other words, the 40 hours spent at work are seen as the unpleasant if inevitable time that must be sacrificed to maintain the rest of the New Zealand way of life. Rather like sleeping, everyone knows that a third of our lives are spent doing it, but no-one really wants to know much more about it. This attitude is understandable in the context of everyone owning a home and looking after it, having beaches, hills and mountains readily accessible and regarding sport as almost a religion. Who wouldn't close down New Zealand at the weekend and take advantage of its natural playgrounds? However, such a concentration on leisure does divert thought away from work, and in the final analysis, leisure is largely dependent upon work — tents, boats and aqualungs being a result of the surplus wealth that work brings. It is ominous that New Zealand, which once enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world, is now ranked seventeenth.

It appears to me that many people when they get to work allow their minds to free-wheel. Managers and workers alike go through their jobs in a dream, planning the "real" work programme for next weekend. Because their work activities are external to them they rarely utilise their creative talents. They endure a type of authoritarianism they would never accept in their private lives. Managers mouth cliches and pick up the latest gimmicks from overseas instead of really coming to terms with fundamental problems. Workers are either sullenly obedient or erratically aggressive. No-one gives a damn because it doesn't really affect them — at least not directly. And this, of course, brings us back to the Christchurch entrepreneur who realised that the trick was never to give his employees the feeling they were working in an organisation with a manager, but that it was really an exten-

sion of helping out a friend at weekends.

There is a lot to commend "small being beautiful" as learned economists have already informed us, but unfortunately to sustain a reasonable level of economic life, some things have to be done in large scale organisations. This being so, the Kiwi sense of work being unimportant and organisations being alien to those working within them can only result in poor performance and feelings of dissatisfaction.

The reader may by now consider that even if there is some truth in the argument, it's merely the observations of a Pom who should concentrate on sorting out his own country's problems. In a way that's fair because it is essentially up to Kiwis to come to terms with their attitudes about work. As long as the working week is seen as 40 hours of wasted time, attitudes within work cannot be expected to improve. It is not, however, inevitable that individuals working for an organisation can have no say in its control and operation. Managers do not have to adopt such overt authoritarian stances to get people to do things. Industrial relations don't have to be regulated by a plethora of laws with big brother government standing in the wings ready to rush in to avoid incipient chaos. Work, as the saying goes, can be as natural to the human being as rest and play — it's not just a question of carrot and stick.

Many attitudes formed at home and at school can only be changed by the gradual acceptance that New Zealand is no longer a pastoral paradise — most people live in towns and work in urban commercial and industrial organisations. To ensure that these organisations function in everybody's

interest is therefore of primary importance and should not be ignored in the hope that the problem will go away. As with the Germans after the war, procedures can be created to lessen the bureaucratic nature of organisations and to encourage more general participation. The government, instead of legislating about what the workers can't do, should spend much more time working out what they can do, and where industry must encourage them to become involved. Managers need to be trained in group behaviour to appreciate that team work is not just black or white — egalitarian or authoritarian — but that it can come in differing shades of grey.

This certainly does not mean just grabbing the latest in a long line of management catch-phrases such as "workers control," "industrial communication" and "sensitivity training." These techniques and approaches may be useful, but what is required is a fundamental shift in attitude about work. Much of New Zealand's future prosperity will depend on the success of her industry. For such industry to be competitive and successful, it must be able to utilise all the skill and ingenuity of the country's people. To do this, people at work should be motivated to use their talents in the same participative way they do so easily in their leisure time. One thing is for certain — if you could channel just a small proportion of the weekend Kiwi's enthusiasms into his work environment, Mr Muldoon would no longer have to worry about the country's productivity levels and we could look forward to an increasingly successful industrial and economic future. ©