

Excerpt from *Leaving Campus and Going to Work*

ISBN 0-9777237-6-3

Release date April 12, 2006

Pages 108-110

About five years ago, my wife and I bought a new car to replace my aging college jalopy. We used every resource we had to bring the price down to where we could afford it: credit card points you could apply to vehicles, an employee discount through my company, trade in of the old car, and a little bit of cash we raised picking up cans by the side of the road (O.K., maybe the last part was made up, but we did use everything else). By nature we are not extravagant spenders, but for this purchase, we went all out. Leather seats, all the bells and whistles, even the flashy red paint that was limited to the high end model. We planned on making this car last for awhile, so we were O.K. with the expense. For about four years, the car ran great and we really enjoyed how it handled and rode. The gas mileage was good and because it was a six cylinder, it had plenty of power when it was needed. Our car was our friend.

Somewhere around Year Five, however, the friendship started to go south in a hurry. The water pump failed, spraying coolant all over the engine and requiring a complete change of belts. Two (yes, two) batteries died and one came close to exploding, according to the service guy who seemed a bit nervous as he removed it from the car. Strange noises came from the wheel well, making us wonder if it was something minor or if we would soon see our left front wheel waving to us from the other lane. Then, just after fixing yet another coolant leak, which caused us to keep a close eye on the coolant level every other day, the topper: complete and total engine failure due to a fully drained battery and dead alternator at four thousand feet of elevation on a stretch of a mountain road where there was absolutely no cell service. It is one thing to be fuming mad that you were going to incur yet ANOTHER repair bill on a car that you would love to push off a cliff. It is a completely different experience to be fuming AND trying to coast a two-ton rolling chunk of metal down a mountain with no power steering or power brakes.

We no longer own this car. It was sold for a few magic beans and its blue book value approximately two weeks after this little experience. Why, you ask? An alternator is a relatively cheap repair compared to replacing the whole car, isn't it? Weren't the leather seats still soft and comfortable? Didn't the six cylinder engine still kick out enough power and give you decent gas mileage? Did the gadgets still work? Yes to all of it, but the key factor was...I could no longer trust it. Its hassle factor became too high.

I see the same concept of 'hassle factor' come into play when managers describe employees who contribute a significant amount through their jobs but require more than the average amount of attention. Such as:

- The sales employee who consistently beats his sales numbers but treats fellow employees so poorly that people quit the company or leave the department;
- The graphic design employee who produces phenomenally creative work but cannot be counted on to deliver the completed project by the deadline;
- The project manager who is the best in the company but spends at least an hour a week in her supervisor's office complaining about her pay and asking for a promotion;
- The programmer who produces fast, efficient results but has a temper that makes clients reluctant to work with him on projects.

These examples illustrate some of the ways an employee can reduce the value of their contribution to their employer and more importantly, their manager, by having a high hassle factor. Managers may tolerate employees who do tremendous jobs but create headaches for them, but only under certain conditions.