

Management techniques: After-action reports

M. Simon, Technical Contributor



CBS News [Money Watch](#) [1] has a great post up on how to improve management effectiveness. That includes both self and corporate management. The technique is common in the military but not so common in the corporate world. It is the after-action report. Or the project post mortem in the corporate world. Some of this is of course done in design reviews. Having worked in aerospace, I'm a big fan of brutal design reviews - giving and receiving. Since I hate getting dinged, I like to learn what I need to know well before the design review. There are engineers who don't have that attitude. Their design reviews are painful to watch.

The context of the Money Watch article was a review of a sales pitch meeting with a customer. The author points out that one of the things very useful for engineers is to do something to make you seem human. Like ask a personal question or two. "How's the wife and kids?" is a good one (assuming you know that the person is male, that he has a wife, and that he has kids). And of course the perennial "Nice (bad) weather we are having."

I do remember one particularly good after-action report I got on an aerospace test equipment project. The project was on time, under budget, and met the needed specs (we were 50% short of desired specs but 2X over the needed spec). I had given my usual performance - only coming in when I felt I was needed instead of keeping a regular schedule. This of course caused friction with the project manager. The manager was going over the budget, and he came to my line item and got the biggest smile on his face (he never smiled). All he said was, "You came in at under what I had projected." Which would not have been the case had I followed orders.

But everyone is different. And management has to be wise enough to figure out how to manage individuals. That means managing envy - "why does he get to....?" - as well as projects. I believe this is one of the reasons we are going more toward a contracting environment rather than sticking with the employee-for-life business model. Contracting allows you to tailor the deal to the person.

Also relevant to this is my recent article [How to manage creative types \(with a](#)

Management techniques: After-action reports

Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

[minimum of fuss](#)) [2].

M. Simon's e-mail can be found on the sidebar at [Space-Time Productions](#) [3].

Engineering is the art of making what you want from what you can get at a profit.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/15/2014 - 7:06am):

<http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2013/04/management-techniques-after-action-reports>

Links:

[1] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505125_162-57580656/what-great-coaches-do-and-leaders-should-too/?tag=nl.e664&cid=e664&ttag=e664

[2] <http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2013/04/how-manage-creative-types-minimum-fuss>

[3] <http://spacetimepro.blogspot.com/>