

Engineers should be

Masters of the Universe

WHILE TOP GEAR, THE POPULAR BBC PROGRAMME HAS ITS OWN TAME RACING DRIVER, THE STIG, WE AT KNOW+HOW HAVE OUR OWN ANSWER. SOME SAY HE WAS CREATED FROM REDUNDANT PARTS FOLLOWING AN ASSET AUDIT, OTHERS THAT HE EMERGED FULLY FORMED FROM A SMELTING PLANT...ALL WE KNOW IS THAT HE'S A TAME MAINTENANCE ENGINEER AND HE'S CALLED **THE TIG**.



As we emerge blinking into the daylight of the New Year like newborn rabbits, shaking with fear about some unseen, unknown enemy, it strikes me that the whole world might be a very different place if only the bean counters, or anyone in any way related to the world of accountancy and 'Financial Services' (cue ironic finger apostrophes), behaved more like engineers.

New problems all bring with them their own terminology with which we are now horribly familiar. 'Credit crunch', 'global economic downturn', 'derivatives', 'future trading', 'Strictly' – all phrases we blithely bandy around in our every day conversations. None of this needed to happen though if only the bean counters had stopped mid-bean and admitted that they were not totally sure that their 'brilliant' ideas about packaging up debt and selling it on actually made sense.

We have been presented for years with the argument that the reason all the traders and brokers and city slickers get paid in the squillions is because essentially they are super-humans and cleverer than us, but the evidence is now pretty conclusive they are not. The recent Madoff scandal is a case in point with billions being handed over by investors with no clear idea of what was to be done with their money. It would never happen in the MRO world because we

have to justify the ins and outs of a duck's behind on the requisition order just to get some fresh glass-paper out of stores. Anyway I digress, but really, can you imagine the conversation if you transplant this problem to an engineering company?

Bill: I've got this really great idea about this product and selling it to Company X (which essentially does the same as we do but just slightly different) for a huge wodge of cash, what do you think?

Fred: Sounds great, let's have a look at your CAD spec, your process modelling and your risk assessment.

Bill: (uncomfortably) Well, it's interesting that you say that because I've done all that on a piece of paper and it all looks really good but if certain conditions prevail I can't really tell what will happen, but I think we'll make more money...

Fred: Well that's no good. We cannot launch a product that might fail under certain conditions, however unlikely they seem.

Bill: Yeah, but we will both get great Christmas bonuses.

Fred: Good point. Do it – and anyway, how likely is it that house prices will fall in the near future?

Fred/Bill: Laugh loudly I know what you're thinking – ridiculous – as if we'd ever get a Christmas bonus anyway! But, essentially the point I am trying to make is that to get where we are you have to serve an apprenticeship or achieve formal qualifications and receive lots of on-the-job training. Apparently, in the City all you need is to be an extra from EastEnders and they make you a trader because you're 'streetwise'. Or if you went to a public school they give you a big desk and a sharp pencil and insist that you keep all the posh money going round by constantly achieving 'positions' without actually ever 'doing' anything.

Come the revolution comrades and as Pete Townshend, of The Who famously put it, 'We won't get fooled again' ...well at least we might ask some pointed questions next time such as, "Dear Mr.

Sharp-suited spotty 12-year old graduate; Do you really know what you are doing with my pension?"

If you'd like to write to The TIG and get something off your chest or if you have an opinion about his column then please do write, via email to:

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