

Many of you dear readers, and especially our esteemed Editor, probably think I fell off the face of the earth, or something akin. Well, almost. I am again working with Duracell Packaging, and while I cannot tell you here about it, you will undoubtedly see the results therefrom by early summer in the stores. And the competition will definitely be playing catch-up. This is my second project with Duracell, and I guess they were sufficiently happy with the results of the first that they didn't bother to even look elsewhere. When they got the idea for this, a major product commitment, they simply called and asked me to take on the project.

Believe it or not, most of the key players except the critical two were unwilling to commit, which meant I had to do some selling to the vendors who stood to make about a million bucks each on the project, and they still would not commit time-wise, the only real need the customer had as a limiting factor. At the time, I was in a situation with Federal Mogul which can only be described as unprofessional on their part. With the requirement that I commute through metro Chicago at least 45 minutes each way if I got rolling way before and after rush hours, and more than twice that if not, I jumped at the chance even before the project existed. I have not looked back, except with relief.

The pressures in both responsibilities were and are enormous, but they are as different as night and day. And my reactions to each are just as different. The Federal Mogul stresses were enough to put my diabetes over the edge so that I will likely have to start insulin injection, something I had held off for the past four years. The stresses of the Duracell thing, which requires me to be very much on my own, are such that I actually look forward to each day, and often don't sleep well because I'm "cogitating" on a problem resolution. Yet if you ask my wife, she will confirm that I have rarely been happier. Sure, I'm not home enough to keep the Silver Bullet from running poorly merely due to disuse. I can't even claim it looks good enough for a concours to justify that sacrilege, and I am suffering withdrawal symptoms **BIG TIME**, as the weather where I **HAVE** been is about 25 Deg. warmer, and I regularly pass some guy in a black Targa going the other way out here in rural Brookville, IN., which has also been a lot sunnier than Syracuse. (Come to think of it, almost **ANYWHERE** could fit that description in winter). But the personal empowerment of Duracell seeking **ME** out, and then entrusting to me what you dear readers must wait to understand, is heady with a capital **HEAD**.

But all of this got me to thinking of the stresses which must have been borne by the Project Manager responsible for destroying an icon, the air-cooled 911, and replacing its austere, strictly business demeanor with a stylistic interior and the wrong color and viscosity coolant for the engine. Imagine yourself betting the future of the only global independent builder of sports cars on a concept whose forebears were taking a dive in the unit volume department, having never lived up to hoped-for market penetration (remember the 928 and 968?). Further, as a result of the Japanese consultants' advice to rationalize the product, you are faced with the constraint that the earlier replacement for those two models aforementioned, acknowledged by the marketplace to be Porsche's "budget" model (no disrespect for the Boxster intended, but the launch price of \$40K was **CLEARLY** aimed at dollar motivation in favor of performance), will define the appearance of your iconic replacement for the front half of the vehicle, like it is some hand-me-down unworthy of a unique appearance. Yeah, I can imagine **HIS** blood sugars looked like the national debt, too.

Now add to that fact the reality that **EVERY** one of these "budget" Porsches with the "use-em-anywhere" nose will come to Porsche's most important corporate market from a country with such a long automotive and racing heritage. You know; Finland. Fin Where?!

But I digress, yada, yada, yada...

If one reads “Dilbert”, one is assured that the role of “manager” is to ruin the lives of ordinary folks, for totally worthless causes, or merely as a means of demonstrating their power, like the rationale for why a dog licks himself in his privates; because he can. But I’ve had the opportunity of working with another vendor to Duracell; J&J Div. Franks Ind., a privately held contract packaging house about 30 miles west of Cincinnati which regularly steals business from the captive Duracell packaging plant strictly because of their attitude. You’ll never see a “Dilbert” posted on a wall there; they don’t understand the jokes. They walk the talk, though, and I’ll end this diatribe with reference to their approach. But I need to tie that back to Porsche, both so John won’t think he received this by mistake, nor think it was a personal “press release” like some presidential, congressional or independent counsellor’s taking a “leak”.

No, the Porsche Project Manager simply recognized that the world just isn’t the same as it used to be. The expectations of the customer will simply not be satisfied by mere “heritage” in the absence of a heater and defroster in the cold, and air conditioning which actually cools the occupants in a \$70K car. A car which, certainly, must be expected to reward competence behind the wheel. But if it feels twitchy at the limits, even when those limits exceed common sense for all but the craziest of people with fat wallets and heads to match, then it ought not to claim any marketplace birthright when the market asks whether there isn’t a better way.

You see, the whole world has changed. Success tomorrow, and Porsche cannot DARE to fail to think longer-term than most of its supposed competitors, will be based less on what you KNOW to do, than on how you know to act, and WHY. Most of the problems will have solutions which have no linear precursor. To paraphrase, they can only be contemplated by thinking outside the “box”ster. They will require a deeper understanding of the people who, unlike we smitten idiots, do not associate everything holy with the mere name Porsche, but expect them to put up or shut up just like any other supplier seeking to gain their favor in return for their hard-earned pictures of dead presidents or live queens. It’s called customer service, and is based on recognizing what the customer really wants and delivering exactly that, even when the customer himself may not really understand what he really wants. At Porsche it manifests itself in making a car which may not seem like the ideal track car, in return for making the car forgiving of human frailties, which even we zealots must ultimately acknowledge we have appreciated when we, too, have done something stupid. Sure, we’ve grown this arrogant chip on our shoulders which stems from the Spartan equation that a poorly driven Porsche 911 can kill you, so if we drive a 911 and we ain’t dead, then ergo we must be pretty good drivers. Porsche simply listened to their OTHER customers, and used the same engineering talent to make a car which provides exceptional performance, while STILL providing a safety net for the less-than-fabulous drivers among us. In other words, they followed the J&J approach to customer service; “The answer is YES. Now what was the question?” It’s the reason I may actually be capable of contemplating one of those new cars with the engine in the wrong place and the wrong fluid in its veins. I hope the Project Manager gets a little sleep. He did pretty good.

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