
Editorial

It happened. I never thought in my wildest dreams that such an event would take place, but there it was in the headlines of our local newspaper, “TRW Buyout Approved.”

You may well ask yourself what this is all about. I’ll tell you what it’s about, and then I will give you a longer-term perspective.

The “TRW Buyout” means that the corporation for which I had worked for some 30 years before retiring 13 years ago was being purchased by another corporation, in this case, the Northrup-Grumman Corporation. To folks in Southern California, this is big news. To folks in other parts of the world, this may very likely not be big news; however, metallurgical engineers all over the world may have heard of these corporations: Northrup-Grumman makes lots of military fighter airplanes (F-16, F-18, etc.) whereas TRW makes satellites of all types.



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I was amazed that my former employer would ever be purchased by another corporation. Then, in a moment of contemplation, I had to stop and remember all my metallurgical engineer friends in numerous companies that supplied parts to TRW through the years who had told me of working for a company that had been bought out, of having to face a new management group, of having to justify activities in a whole new way, of having to get all new business cards, and of just plain having to adjust to a new “corporate culture.”

Then I realized that this type of transition is normal in private industry, in companies that make a product and who have customers and who are in the business of generating a profit for their stockholders.

This type of transition is an opportunity for the metallurgical engineer to start anew, to think about the way things have been done, and to think afresh of new and innovative ways to accomplish the new corporation’s goals in the future.

This type of transition doesn’t exist in the various national laboratories in numerous countries around the world. The same is true in universities. Oh, I grant you that the national laboratories and universities have their own cultures where competition, stress, and anxiety exist, but I question if any stress (or reward system) can match that of the profit motive and of having a boss who must meet a certain “bottom line.”

So, the act is accomplished. In January 2003, the aerospace portion of the giant TRW Corporation became a part of the Northrup-Grumman Corporation, and all my old colleagues faced the anxiety of transition.

Let me give you another view of this transition. It is upsetting to some individuals, especially those who want security and constancy throughout their life. There was a time when that type of security and constancy existed. In years gone by, your occupation was dictated by your father’s occupation; if he were a cobbler, you would become a cobbler. And you would be a cobbler at a given location all your life. Everything was set in place for you. No shifting of jobs. Only in recent times has it become possible for a person to sell his labor to the highest bidder and to move from job to job as opportunities for higher compensation presented themselves.

This type of freedom for the metallurgical engineer to seek a better situation also applies to the company owner who will buy or sell in order to obtain a better situation and better compensation for the investment that was made.

So, the bottom line is simply that an age-old adage still applies: “The only thing that is constant is change.”

John R. Ogren
Editor