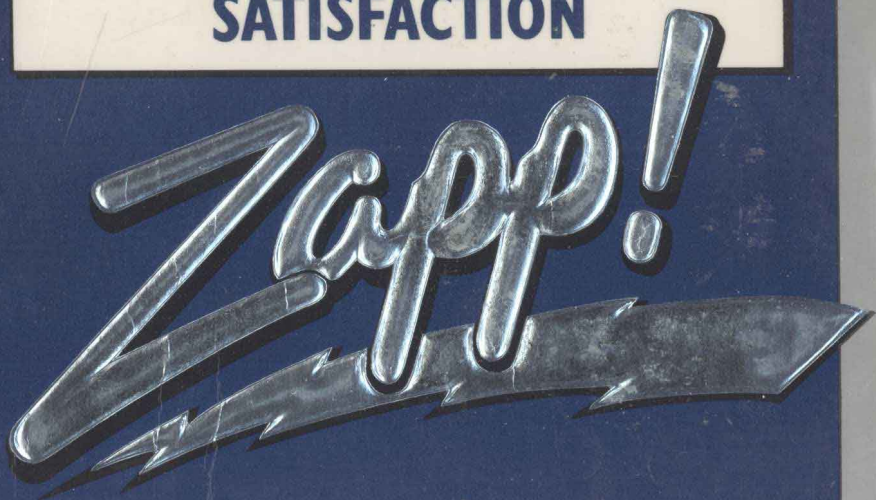


**HOW TO IMPROVE
QUALITY, PRODUCTIVITY,
AND EMPLOYEE
SATISFACTION**



The Lightning of Empowerment

**WILLIAM C. BYHAM, Ph.D.
with JEFF COX**

**FAWCETT
COLUMBINE**

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IS POWERFUL!

"Zapp! is the best book I have ever read on empowering people within the business organization. Its secret is in painting a simple yet vivid picture in the reader's mind, accompanied by a concise review of principles. In fact, it is so simple I found it to be profound."

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PREFACE

Why Should You Read This Book?

That's a fair question. Why *should* a serious, rational adult in business today take time to read a fable about the troubles and triumphs of workers in a make-believe department headed by a guy named Joe Mode? Frankly, your own career is one good reason for reading *Zapp!* The success and survival of the organization you work for is another.

To do business in the markets of the late 20th Century, in a global economy, and often against excellent competitors, it is essential to keep working for constant improvement, for what the Japanese call *kai-zen*. This means that in a world-class organization, everybody in the company has to be thinking every day about ways to make the business better in quality, output, costs, sales, and customer satisfaction. In government and other public service organizations as well as in business, there are demands for higher performance.

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More and more in years to come, the successful organizations will be the ones best able to apply the creative energy of individuals toward constant improvement. Yet, constant improvement is a value that cannot be imposed upon people. It has to come from the individual. The only way to get people to adopt constant improvement as a way of life in doing daily business is by *empowering* them.

That is what *Zapp!* is about. It deals with the basic principles of empowering people, about helping employees take ownership of their jobs so that they take personal interest in improving the performance of the organization. This book can help you understand on a fundamental, practical level what empowerment really is, why it is important, and how to start using its key principles on the job.

Why did we write the book in the style of a fable? Because even the best ideas are of small value unless communicated well. *Zapp!* is written the way it is so that we could take an abstract concept and let people visualize it in action, and in lively but meaningful terms. We wanted the book to be easy to understand, but challenging to the imagination.

There are two ways to read the book. Most people will find the story amusing and will probably finish this book in one or two sittings. But if you're in a hurry, skim through the sections called "Joe Mode's Notebook." These summarize the essence of the book and outline the basic principles of empowerment. The better way, however, is to read the story, which lets you

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discover the ideas, and try to deduce the conclusions as you go along.

Fable or not, this is a realistic, practical book. We expect that after you have read *Zapp!*, you will have the knowledge to start putting the underlying ideas to work, and a basis for beginning formal training in empowerment skills and related areas. So we hope you enjoy *Zapp!*, and, more important, that you learn about what has become a concept vital to personal and organizational success.

William C. Byham, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

PART I



Situation Normal



Once upon a time, in a magic land called America, there lived a normal guy named Ralph Rosco.

Ralph worked in Dept N of the Normal Company in Normalburg, USA. For years, Normal had been a leading manufacturer of normalators, those amazing devices which are so fundamental to society as we know it.

As you might expect, just about everything was normal at Normal, including the understanding of who was normally supposed to do what:

Managers did the thinking.

Supervisors did the talking.

And employees did the doing.

That was the way it had always been—ever since Norman Normal had invented the normalator and founded the company—and so everybody just assumed that was the way it should always be.

Ralph was your normal type of employee. He came to work. He did the jobs his supervisor told him to do. And at the end of the day he dragged himself

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home to get ready to do it all again.

When friends or family asked him how he liked his work, Ralph would say, “Oh, it’s all right, I guess. Not very exciting, but I guess that’s normal. Anyway, it’s a job and the pay is OK.”

In truth, working for the Normal Company was not very satisfying for Ralph, though he was not sure why. The pay was more than OK; it was good. The benefits were fine. The working conditions were safe. Yet something seemed to be missing.

But Ralph figured there wasn’t much he could do to change things at Normal. After all, he reasoned, who would even bother to listen? So at work he kept his thoughts to himself, and just did what he was told.

Ralph worked on a subsystem of what was technically termed “the guts” of the Normal normalator. One day on his way back from lunch, Ralph happened to be thinking about the guts of the normalator, and—well, he was simply ZAPPED by an idea so original and so full of promise that his head nearly exploded with excitement.

“Wowie! Zowie!! Yeah!!!” exclaimed Ralph—to the shock of the Normal employees around him.

In his excitement, Ralph totally forgot that probably nobody would listen, and he ran down the hall to explain his idea to his supervisor, Joe Mode.

Ralph found Joe Mode busy doing what he normally did. He was telling everybody what to do as he worried about each of the 167 rush jobs that had to be done by the end of the day as he added some figures

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while he scribbled a memo in the middle of taking an urgent call from *his* boss, Mary Ellen Krabofski.

“Mode, I want you to start cracking the whip down there,” Krabofski was telling him.

“But I do crack the whip,” Joe said. “Every chance I get.”

“Well, whatever you’re doing, it’s not good enough. All the big bosses are pacing in their offices. They say the competition is stiff and getting stiffer. Sales are low and getting lower. Profits are thin and getting thinner. So you’d better do something quick, or else!”

“But what can I do?” Joe asked in desperation.

“Raise that productivity, Mode! Cut those costs! Boost that quality! And, above all, do not let your efficiencies slip!”

“Right, got it,” said Joe.

“Then get to it!”

And they both hung up. That was when Joe saw Ralph standing off to the side eagerly waiting to talk about his idea.

“So talk,” said Mode.

Ralph explained his idea, which was so original and full of promise, as Joe continued doing everything he was already doing.

“But that isn’t what I gave you to work on,” said Joe. “How are you coming with that rush job you’re supposed to have done by the end of the day?”

“OK, I’ll finish it. But what about my idea?” asked Ralph.

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“It doesn’t sound to me like the Normal way to do things,” said Joe. “And don’t you think if that idea is good, the Normal R&D people would have thought of it?”

“But, tell you what, when I get time I’ll kick it upstairs and we’ll see what happens. Maybe they’ll form a task force to look into it.”

At that moment, Ralph was tempted to tell Joe that he didn’t want his idea to be kicked anywhere by anybody, and that *furthermore* . . .

But being normal, Ralph didn’t tell Joe anything. He just nodded, and went back to work—and Joe went back to telling everybody what to do and worrying about the 167 rush jobs that had to get done.

By the end of the day, Ralph somehow had managed not to finish the job Joe needed. He left it and bolted for the parking lot with the others. And Joe, with a sense of defeat, sat down at his desk and worried about Mary Ellen Krabofski.

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One thing to Joe Mode's credit, he was organized. Over the years, he had developed the habit of writing things down, and all this jotting and scribbling had evolved into a notebook he kept. Sitting there at his desk, Joe got out his notebook and wrote down the problem as he saw it.

