



(U) Opinion Piece: The SIGINT Curmudgeon's Last Shot!

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Run Date: 04/10/2006

(U) Editor's note: Long-time collector and "SIGINT Curmudgeon" [REDACTED] retired at the end of March. Before he left, he sent in some strong opinions on the "corporatization" of NSA... Do you agree? Post your comments on the [SID today blog](#).

(U) As a self-appointed "SIGINT Curmudgeon" one of my most important duties is to have lots of Pet Peeves (PPs), and be vocal about them. So far I haven't found this to be a problem! It is the first block on my Curmudgeon P3 and counts for 50% of my rating. I have no doubts that I can max-out the PP category on my P3 every time.

(U) Corporatization of NSA?

(U//FOUO) Close to the top of my PP list has got to be this "corporatization" of NSA that has been going on for 20-some years. I ignored it for the first 10-15 years and just pretended it didn't exist, but lately it has been bugging me. I fail to see how running a Cryptologic Intelligence Agency bears more than a superficial resemblance to running a corporation.

(U//FOUO) If we had a product to sell, and competition selling that product, I would gladly embrace the corporate model for NSA. But we don't have competition. Other agencies exploit different environments and utilize different methods, so we are not in competition. If we cannot compare ourselves to a competitor, how can we know when we are really being successful and making a "profit"? Not by private industry's methods. We need different measurements and different checks and balances to ensure we are fulfilling our customer's needs. Just because we are giving our customer unique product and they are happy with it, doesn't mean we are being successful. We need to ensure we are giving them The Best unique product that is available to us. We don't do that very well using the corporate model.

(U) One of my biggest problems with corporate America today is the amount of money and perks given to CEOs and senior corporate managers. It seems to me to be way out of line with what they accomplish. CEOs are lured to a company with obscene bonuses, given a ton of perks, a huge salary, and then, when their company is one the verge of collapse a couple of years later, they receive a golden parachute equal to Great Britain's GNP! And now we hear that many of them are skimming money or benefits from the time they're hired to the time they're fired. That's nice work if you can get it!

(U) Are these the people and practices we want to emulate and base our Agency "practices" on! Pay them well, but take the excess and give it back to the workers. That's where the work gets done. A well-paid and "well-perked" middle management and labor force will take a company a lot further than overpaying the executives. That's a model we can live with at NSA. I just don't get it!

(U) The Lingo

(U) Actually, I do understand some of it. The lure of the "lingo" is very strong. To listen to someone speak "Corp-speak" fluently is like listening to a Bushman speaking a Khoisan "click" language. It's absolutely fascinating, but, except for some of the hand waving, it's totally incomprehensible to outsiders! A few months ago I was in a meeting that was attended by a couple of seniors who were not technical people. They were staff or HR types and they spoke "Corp-speak." One of them did a lot of talking during the hour meeting, but I have no idea what he said. I'm not a stupid person (really!) but I was clueless. I mean, I recognized the words: "Leverage," "paradigm," "synergy." "synergistic," "enterprise," "extended enterprise," "teaming," "corporateness," etc., but they didn't fit together in a way that I understood.

(U) Whatever happened to common, honest words and phrases like "borrow," "use," "cooperate," "field site," "teamwork," etc.? As far as I'm concerned, a paradigm is 20 cents! (If you don't get that one, don't call me, I can't help you!) I think only two or three other people, out of the other 10 at the meeting, understood what they were talking about, but we all acted like we knew. I know I had an action from that meeting, but I'll be blessed if I could figure out what it was! It doesn't really matter, since I was never contacted about it again!

(U) I think what concerns me most is we seem to have a love affair with big words, fancy organizational names, and staff-heavy organizations with clever box-charts illustrating them. It isn't just an NSA or IC (Intelligence Community) phenomenon. We are part of a society that sometimes values glitz, glamour, and window dressing, above functionality and performance. It is only natural we should reflect this, being part of that society. Natural, but not productive! I think we, as an agency, need to place our feet firmly on the ground and start separating the values we need to do our job from the nice-to-have, glitz and glamour "values." Maybe we should focus on job development instead of career development. The taxpayers don't pay us to advance our careers; they pay us to do our jobs and do them well. The two are not the same.

(U) This is the SIGINT Curmudgeon's last posting to SID *today* . I am retired! I plan to stay irreverent and tell it the way I see it on the outside too. I just don't know any other way to go through life! I want to leave you with two admonitions. First, take the job very seriously, but not yourself. As Sidney Friedman said in MASH (the series), "Ladies and gents, take my advice, you've got to pull down your pants and slide on the ice!" The second admonition is: don't forget why we're here. We weren't hired for career advancement, but to do a job and do it well. Let's stay focused. And my final words? "Goodbye and thanks for all the fish."

█'s definitions:

- ACTION CELL: A battery filled with prune juice
- CORPORATENESS: Don't rock the boat
- CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE: Knowing what will happen if you rock the boat
- ENTERPRISE: NCC-1701
- EXTENDED ENTERPRISE: NCC-1701D (it's longer)
- GOVER NANCE: Maternal uncle to John Nance Garner!
- KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE LEARNING (?): (Why use one word when two will do?)
- LESSONS LEARNED: Mistakes that we will repeat every 3-5 years when management rotates
- LEVERAGE: What you get by applying force at the end of a lever over a fulcrum
- METRICS: Measurement (Why is that word inappropriate?)
- MISTAKES?: We never make them. Only lessons-learned and success stories allowed here!
- NET-CENTRIC: A free throw that drops through the hoop without touching the rim
- PARADIGM: Twenty cents
- PRACTICES: Preparations for the real event
- SUCCESS STORY: What we talk about so we don't have to admit our failures
- SYNERGISTIC: Isn't that from "Mary Poppins"? (Supersynergisticexpeallidosious)
- SYNERGY: Sinning with gusto
- TEAMING: My backyard pond -- with insect life

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