



LYLE'S LAWS

Lyle's Law of Jobs

In keeping with our humble estate—and even more humble budget—my wife and I usually fly coach. Occasionally, however, an airline has a good sale, or we cash in some long-hoarded frequent flyer points and enjoy the comforts of the business class cabin, especially on a long overseas flight. Such was the case recently as we flew from Oslo to Philadelphia.

Forty thousand feet. Smooth ride. Comfortable seats. Good wine. And lousy service. I don't mean poor service. I mean atrocious service. The flight attendant repeatedly brought us the wrong orders after carefully writing them down. She would disappear for long periods of time. Our dessert and coffee dishes stayed on our trays for 10 minutes—15 minutes—20 minutes. Other flight attendants walked by en route to the galley, passing my used dishes without a sideward glance. "What is going on, here?" I asked myself. And myself provided no answer. Finally, I stood up, took my own dishes to the galley and found our flight attendant huddled with one of her colleagues, viewing photographs on his cell phone. I said—calmly, I think—"I'd like to see your supervisor." She replied—also calmly—"I am the supervisor." Well.

Then ensued a conversation, the details of which I will not burden you with except to say that it was calm and that I tried—I really tried—to be constructive and not too judgmental. Until ... until I pointed out how many flight attendants had walked by without picking up my dishes, and she replied, "But that's not their job."

Oh, my. I stayed calm—I really did. (Doth he protest too much?) But I did expound at some length on just what one's job should be, before returning to my seat. Disgruntled as I was, however, I am grateful for this experience because from that conversation was born Lyle's Law of Jobs: *Your job is greater than your assignment.*

Wherever you are employed, you have some defined responsibilities. Maybe you design jet engines. Maybe you write software. Maybe you teach control systems. Those assignments can be pretty specific or very general, but in any event you might feel justified in just designing jet engines or writing software or teaching control systems.

Indeed, you can feel successful if you obtain excellent results in performing your assigned function. However, while I don't know much about management theory, I don't think an enterprise can succeed if all do nothing more than fulfill their assignments. One reason for this belief is that I don't think anyone can think of all the things that need to be done to ensure that success. One

of several reasons for the failure of communism is the practice of central planning where the great planners define everything that needs to be done. A fatal flaw in central planning—among many—is that the planners can't think of all the tasks that must be done and then assign people to do them. Some will invariably be missed. Assignments alone will not assure success. Jobs will, if the jobs are greater than the assignments.

Like everyone, most of what I know I have learned from others. One of my best teachers was Harvey Fraser who was president of the South Dakota School of Mines when I was beginning my career in

academia. Harvey is a West Point graduate who fought in the Battle of the Bulge, later taught at West Point, and retired from the Army as a brigadier general. He was a deliberate and decisive leader who wrought many improvements during his tenure at the Mines. He was fond of saying that a campus should be "clean, green, and serene." The "serene" part was particularly significant because that was during the turbulent sixties, but he was serious about clean and green, too. As he walked across campus at any time of day, if he saw a piece of paper or a discarded pop can (Yes, "pop." We were west of the Mississippi) he would go out of his way to pick it up. Was that his assignment? Hardly. Was it his job? He thought so. And his example—not only, I hasten to add, in picking up trash—taught me to think so as well.

Would that piece of paper have been picked up if President Fraser had not done it? Of course. That was someone's assignment and someone would eventually get to it. But meanwhile, "clean, green, and serene" would suffer.

It is also important for students to understand what their job is. One of the easiest and most effective tech-

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niques for improving the quality of education is, in my humble opinion, the use of clear educational objectives. Tell students what they should be able to do at the end of the course, and they are much more likely to be able to do it. I'm sure of it. And what's more, people who know a lot more about educational theory than I do are also sure of it. What's not to like?



Well, one argument against using objectives is that if you specify what students are supposed to learn, they will learn only what is specified. I would like to reject that argument completely but have to admit that it has a certain amount of validity. But not if students understand that their job is greater than their assignment.

It may be too narrow to say their assignment is to get a degree, but I don't hesitate at all to say their job is to get an education—in all its broadest meanings.

Perhaps the significant difference between an assignment and a job is that of motivation. Fulfilling an assignment is *internally* motivated. I want to keep my job. I want to get a raise. I want a promotion. Doing a job (as defined in Lyle's Law) is *externally* motivated. The campus looks clean and green. The company I work for is more successful. My community—or the community I'm visiting—is a better place. Someone else—a friend, someone I know, or someone I don't know—is happier or safer.

You will be judged by someone else on how well you do your assignment. You will judge yourself on how well you do your job.

—**Lyle D. Feisel, Ph.D., P.E., Iowa Alpha '61**

Cleve's Back!

Cleveland L. Campbell, P.E., Iowa Alpha '47, is once again offering to match first-time donations



to Tau Beta Pi's Alumnus Giving Program. Any such gift received in 2011 (up to \$2,000) will be matched dollar-for-dollar, until we reach \$25,000. Past challenges of \$10K, \$12K, and \$25K were met and matched.

Cleve's matching funds are used to create new TBII-Campbell scholarships. If you are a first-time donor and would allow Cleve to match your gift, please send a check (write "Campbell match" on it) to **Tau Beta Pi**, P.O. Box 2697, Knoxville, TN 37901-2697, or use a credit card by calling us at 865/546-4578.

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—**Joel N. Mehler, Kansas Beta '05**
Campbell Scholar No. 4

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT

James D. Froula, P.E., who has served Tau Beta Pi as Executive Director, Secretary-Treasurer, & Editor since 1982, has indicated his intention to retire in the fall of 2011. During his tenure, the Association has had tremendous growth and experienced many positive changes. It remains a complex organization requiring innovative and dedicated management. A hard person to replace, Jim has expertly guided the Society through continuous improvements while maintaining the basic purposes and mission of TBII. However, it is transition time again, and we need your help.

Please send the name of a capable TBII member, including yourself, who might be interested in the position. A search committee is soliciting nominations and applications in confidence. See www.tbp.org for additional information. Send a cover letter, résumé (3-5 pages), and names and addresses of three references to: Search and Screen Committee, c/o Russell W. Pierce, The Tau Beta Pi Association, P.O. Box 2697, Knoxville, TN 37901-2697 or electronically submit digital files to russ@tbp.org. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled, and review of applications will begin January 1, 2011.—L.A.S.

\$\$ Benefit for Members

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