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EXTENDED CONTENTS: A READER'S GUIDE

This guide is for readers who want to navigate the book by topic rather than by chapter title. The chapter titles are written as principles, and that choice is deliberate, but principles do not always announce the operational subjects underneath them. Each entry below expands the chapter into a short synopsis and a list of the specific topics it treats.

We still recommend reading the book from beginning to end. The chapters were written to stand alone, but they were ordered to build on one another, and the cumulative effect is greater than any single story. For the practitioner who walks in with a specific problem in hand, however, this guide is the fastest way to find the chapters that speak to it.

Chapter 1: Focus on Serving the Customer

Case Study: The Golden Cuvettes

A new Director of Operations inherits a manufacturing line that the outgoing plant manager calls unsolvable. Rather than accept the inherited workaround of building a year's worth of safety stock, he challenges the underlying premise, redefines the problem, and discovers that the true cost of the existing approach was being absorbed by the customer all along.

Key topics covered: customer service vs. customer success, total cost of ownership, policy constraints, root cause vs. symptom management, inherited assumptions, cross-functional alignment

Chapter 2: Silence Is Acceptance of the Plan

Case Study: The Reckoning at Right-Result

Two divisions face the same 15% cost-cut mandate. One stays silent and produces a fast, safe plan in under an hour. The other pushes back, reframes the problem, and proposes a riskier path, or is it? The chapter contrasts the two outcomes and explains why agreement without dialogue is the most expensive form of compliance.

Key topics covered: leadership culture, push-back and dissent, planning discipline, target setting, top-down vs. bottom-up planning, cost of silence

Chapter 3: Full Disclosure of Relevant Information Is Required

Case Study: But You Didn't Ask About Equipment

A production supervisor answers every question he is asked, accurately and without hesitation. By midday, the plant manager's record-breaking forecast has collapsed. The story examines what happens when answering the question asked replaces a culture of full disclosure.

Key topics covered: information sharing, daily huddles and stand-ups, escalation discipline, equipment readiness, proactive communication, status update integrity

Chapter 4: If You Lie to MRP, MRP Will Lie to You

Case Study: The Landmine in the Data

A capacity ramp under impossible deadline pressure leads a planning team to enter assumptions into Material Requirements Planning (MRP) that the underlying processes cannot support. The system dutifully replies with promised dates, the consequences move downstream, and the company is forced to confront what it owes the system that runs its business.

Key topics covered: MRP integrity, planning data, capacity assumptions, lead-time accuracy, ramp-up planning, master data discipline, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) truth, truth audit

Chapter 5: Without Supply Forecast Accuracy, Demand Forecast Accuracy Is Irrelevant

Case Study: A Number We Can All Believe In

The Sales and Operations Planning meetings at a diagnostics company have devolved into ritualized blame, with sales inflating forecasts and planners adding hidden buffers. A new VP breaks the cycle by reversing the conventional wisdom: she fixes supply credibility first, then asks for an honest demand number that everyone can stand behind.

Key topics covered: S&OP, Integrated Business Planning (IBP), demand forecast accuracy, supply forecast accuracy, plan credibility, sandbagging and hidden buffers, sales-and-operations partnership, one set of numbers

Chapter 6: Data Accuracy Is Next to Godliness

Case Study: The 90-Day Data Cure for Customer Retention

Aureon Diagnostics is given an ultimatum by its largest customer: fix chronic delivery failures or lose the contract. The leadership team blames everything from suppliers to the ERP system before discovering that the foundation underneath all of those systems is data they no longer trust.

Key topics covered: data accuracy, master data governance, ERP data integrity, change control, source-of-truth ownership, customer retention, delivery performance, data ownership

Chapter 7: Wisdom Comes Only from Suffering

Case Study: When Shortcuts Cost Everything

A clinical chemistry analyzer launches on schedule, but the field failure rate climbs to 23% within four months. The plant manager and his team have six months to rework every unit in the field. This chapter is a study in how organizations confuse surviving a launch with executing one.

Key topics covered: new product launch, validation discipline, supplier qualification, field reliability, recall management, design transfer, schedule pressure vs. quality, organizational learning, leadership accountability

Chapter 8: It's Not a Fight; It's a Dance

Case Study: From Firing Squad to Dance Floor

A breakthrough product is in serious field trouble, and the war room has turned into a circular firing squad. A new leader rebuilds the room as a collaborative problem-solving environment, where the test of operational excellence is not who is right, but how quickly the team can converge on the truth.

Key topics covered: crisis management, war-room dynamics, cross-functional collaboration, blame culture, meeting discipline, field quality issues, problem-solving cadence, leadership behavior

Chapter 9: Use Formal Systems

Case Study: The Favor That Turned into a Fiasco

A hallway conversation between two colleagues becomes a quick favor outside the formal system. The favor cascades into inventory misposting, scheduling failures, financial impact, and lost customer trust. Formal systems exist because the alternative is invisible, untraceable failure.

Key topics covered: formal systems, informal workarounds, change control, discipline executing ERP transactions, governance, push-back authority, guardrails, cross-functional process

Chapter 10: Develop the Team Through the Pursuit of Purpose

Case Study: The Palace, the Pressure Cooker, and the Ten-Year Deal

A toxicology business in slow decline is housed in a corporate palace that has begun to dictate its own culture. A new executive abandons standard team-building remedies in favor of a non-negotiable consolidation project, builds a team of rivals, and bets that purpose will do what off-sites cannot.

Key topics covered: team development, purpose-driven leadership, culture change during Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), facility consolidation, culture change, regulatory remediation

Chapter 11: No Random Local Optima

Case Study: The Perfect Pallet in an Imperfect Supply Chain

Three IVD companies merge, and the plan is to consolidate everything into the most automated of the three distribution centers. The Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS) is a marvel, but it was designed for the pallet specification and product portfolio of one company, and a supply chain that no longer exists.

Key topics covered: supply chain integration, post-merger integration, distribution center automation, ASRS, pallet standardization, third-party logistics, local vs. global system, change at scale

Chapter 12: Variability Is the Enemy

Case Study: The Shadow Factory

An operations leader discovers that his Japanese country organization has been quietly rebuilding every instrument his plant ships before it reaches a customer. The chapter examines why passing a specification is not the same as being on target, and why variability hides comfortably behind green checklists.

Key topics covered: process variability, specification limits vs. target value, hidden rework, headquarters and country-organization dynamics, quality metrics, statistical process control

Chapter 13: DWYASTD, WYASTDI, TWYASTDI, WYFLION

Case Study: The Broken Chair

A broken chair has been sitting in a conference room for months with a Post-it note declaring it unfit. When a senior operator skips his thermal protection suit during a hot transfer, the consequences are devastating. A study in operational drift, broken-windows discipline, and a culture of making your bed.

Key topics covered: Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) compliance, safety discipline, operational drift, broken-windows theory, supplier audit findings, end-of-month pressure, daily discipline, capacity validation

Chapter 14: Discipline Creates Trust

Case Study: The Price of Playing Favorites

At a Class A site, the annual talent calibration is supposed to produce one ranked list that the whole leadership team will defend. A production manager makes a private promise to a hero supervisor in the hallway, and the whisper threatens to unwind years of cultural investment in collective decision-making.

Key topics covered: leadership discipline, talent calibration, hero culture, integrated business planning culture, decide as one and deliver as one, trust as competitive advantage, hidden cost of firefighting, performance management

Chapter 15: Effectiveness First, Then Efficiency

Case Study: Static on the Line

A new molecular diagnostics platform is hemorrhaging money. Yields are crashing, and the CFO is demanding cost reductions. The Director of Operations decides to be deliberately inefficient in the short term in order to be effective and efficient in the long term.

Key topics covered: effectiveness vs. efficiency, scale-up, automation challenges, manual operations, cost variance vs. customer commitment, hierarchy of operations, expediting culture

Chapter 16: Use Precise Terminology and Expect It from Others

Case Study: Tank Trouble

A single ambiguous instruction sends a hundred-thousand-dollar batch of cardiac reagent into the wrong tank. The chapter follows the investigation into how the words people used every day on the floor had drifted into casual synonyms, and how a small discipline of language prevents a long list of operational risks.

Key topics covered: terminology precision, language discipline, shift handoffs, operator instructions, batch records, asset and tank naming, formulation errors, cross-shift communication

Chapter 17: Rely on Systems, Not Heroes

Case Study: From Heroics to Habits

Every operation has a person who is called when things go sideways. At a conjugate manufacturing plant, that person has become a single point of failure, and the path forward requires replacing his heroics with systems that anyone trained on them can run.

Key topics covered: hero culture, systems vs. individuals, succession risk, knowledge capture, standard work, training and onboarding, scalability, single points of failure

Chapter 18: It Doesn't Count as 'Done' If Not Recorded in the ERP System

Case Study: 120 on the Floor, Zero Room for Error

A pallet of finished product sits on the floor. Physically, it exists. In the eyes of the business, it does not, and it cannot be shipped, invoiced, or counted. The chapter examines what “done” really means when physical reality and system reality have to agree.

Key topics covered: ERP transactional discipline, definition of done, month-end pressure, last-mile transactions, Make-to-Install, field service hand-off, target vs. actual integrity, financial closing

Chapter 19: Apply Minimum Essential Specifications or Acceptance Criteria

Case Study: Forty-Three Promises

A contract manufacturer has spent five years tightening specifications every time a customer raised a concern. Forty-three documented concessions later, the scrap rate is 14%, and the only path forward is to renegotiate commitments that should never have been made in the first place.

Key topics covered: specification setting, acceptance criteria, contract manufacturing, customer pressure, scrap and yield, process capability, supplier-customer dialogue, capital investment trade-offs

Chapter 20: Know the Rules of the Game You Are Playing

Case Study: The Double-Secret Software

A laparoscopic procedure goes catastrophically wrong, and a newly hired COO discovers that the medical device at the center of the crisis contains an unvalidated software capability that engineering knew about and that should never have shipped. A horror story about institutional degradation ensues.

Key topics covered: regulated-industry obligations, design controls, change control, software validation, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) inspection response, ethics and accountability, executive decision-making, post-IPO (Initial Public Offering) governance, design history file integrity

Truth on Time

20 Essential Principles for Operational Excellence

Alex Bourdon and David Finlay

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