Topics for Presentations

1. The Customer is Not Always Right—I've seen too many customers who hadn't a clue about what they wanted, or worse, who deliberately fibbed when the nice survey taker asked them what they'd like. In addition, customers can't see the future. Nobody in 1940, listening to a furniture-sized radio, ever said, "Gosh, this is nice; but what I think I'd like instead would be a Sony Walkman." For example, advertising agency personnel know that the kind of advertising asked for by a client's ad manager (often someone recycled out of sales) isn't usually the advertising best calculated to move the product.

2. Too Much Quality Can Ruin Your Organization—Quality has become a kind of Holy Grail, chased after by almost everyone. Organizations assume their idea of quality is synonymous with the customer's. It may not be. And when it's not, consumers are bombarded with quality they never asked for, didn't want, and aren't about to pay for (let alone pay a premium for). Find out what the customer/consumer's idea of quality is and limit the quality control to their ideas. This will reduce excessive expense used on unnecessary quality control.

3. Disruptive People Can Be an Asset—They're the irritating grains of sand that, in the case of oysters, every now and then produce a pearl. Disruptive people precipitate breakthroughs, sometimes by forcing an uncomfortable reexamination of comfortable assumptions. Their favorite question is, "Why?" When everybody else is too afraid (or too lazy) to ask it, they ask. These people are the change agents. And change agents aren't supposed to be liked. They're supposed to effect change, which never is an easy or attractive undertaking. A fair number of our Founding Fathers could be labeled disruptive (a.k.a. revolutionaries). Original thinkers—disruptive people unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom—are a powerful asset. "Always stay in with the outs." These are the people who guide the future.

4. Teamwork Isn't Always Good—I'll rephrase that: teamwork can be good. Teams prefer the safe, the familiar, the middle of the road, the well researched. They fear originality. Left to their own devices, groups devote far more time and effort to the practice of teamsmanship (promoting group harmony, compromise, smoothing and protecting everybody's ego) than they do to working. "A camel is a horse designed by a committee."
5. **When Everybody Else Is Doing It, Don't**—The management profession is driven by fashion: conglomerates are in, everyone is making minivans; disaster movies are the hit; tartar control toothpaste is the thing. Everyone is opening a plant in China. Maybe you should, too—but not because everybody else is doing it. Concentrate frequently on breaking the mold. Deviating from what everyone else is doing can result in new discoveries, new methods, and product innovations which can result in more profitable results. The new VW Beetle (and it really isn't the old Beetle, mechanically, stylistically, or colorwise) is a standout, a kind of breakthrough product thought of as a category-buster. Betting on a category-buster takes guts and therefore marketers often settle for what seems a safer course: making incremental changes in existing products. Take Crest, toothpaste. There's Original Flavor; there's Mint. There's Normal Crest as opposed to Tartar Control Formula. Indeed we have Crest in a paste format as well as in a gel. Incremental change.

6. **The Bad News About Diversity and Multiculturalism**—In some organizations managing diversity has unintended negative consequences. For example, when companies develop special programs to encourage women and minorities, majority males often feel they are left out or treated unfairly. Affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to certain groups may stigmatize individuals from those groups if others feel their qualifications are substandard. Management that brings in increased numbers of women and minorities, yet fails to appreciate and reward their contributions, engenders tension throughout the organization.

7. **Your Best Ain't Good Enough**—Best is a non-specific goal that leads to lower performance levels than hard specific goals.

8. **No Good Deed Goes Unpunished**—Frequently in business managers inadvertently punish good performance; for example, someone who does good work at completing reports is given all the reports to do; offering suggestions at meetings frequently results in the person offering the suggestion (good deed) being required to implement the recommendation in addition to his or her other responsibilities (punishment).

9. **The Primary Purpose of Business is Not to Make Money**—Companies that do make a lot of money almost never have as their goal "making a lot of money." They tend to be run by enthusiasts who, in the normal course of gratifying their own tastes and curiosities, come up with products or services so startling, so compelling, and so exciting that customers practically rip their trouser pockets reaching for their wallets. One key purpose of business should be to make the best product on the market at a competitive price.
10. Financial Controls Are Bad—As constituted now, finance and accounting are much too obsessed with imposing tight controls. Tight controls do harm in two ways. First, they can jeopardize an organization's ability to exploit big opportunities. For example, a few years ago a car was getting murdered in the market because it lacked a then high-tech cassette tape deck. It was a matter of spending $40,000 (the cost of engineering and tooling for the tape deck) in order to protect an $8 million business. Finance balked. Second, because measurements are based on past performance, controls tend to sanctify the status quo. They promote a false sense of orderliness and predictability. The future seems only a matter of extrapolation, prompting managers to say such things as, "That can't happen; it's not in the five-year plan." Western businesses have been too much a slave to centralized control, micromanagement, and to quantitative analysis as exemplified in an overuse of financial controls. Overuse of financial controls can also demoralize employees and thwart innovative thinkers.

11. A Little Fear in Organizations Isn't All That Bad—Fear caused by a manager's capricious, personal whims or self-serving delusions of grandeur have no place at all in today's business world. Legitimate fear does have usefulness: e.g., of letting down one's team, of bringing embarrassment on oneself or one's family, and the very rational fear of what the competition will do to you if you let your guard down. That kind of fear should never, ever be ignored or sublimated, because if it is, you can bet that an even bigger fear will soon arise to take its place: fear of survival. Fear keeps an organization awake, on its toes, a little nervous—all of which protects it from falling prey to the FDH (fat, dumb, and happy) syndrome. Tension and conflict are necessary ingredients of a healthy company.

12. What Our Economy Needs are More Nerds—Engineers, computer science folks, and anybody competent in math or the hard sciences is depicted as a doofus or nerd. Our economy, however, is riding on the ability to manufacture things—a process to which engineers, manufacturing professionals, and other scientists are essential. Yet our young—most especially the best and brightest—turn up their noses at stodgy old engineering or manufacturing and scamper off to, say, law school. Our society has denigrated making things yet in Japan and in Europe engineers are revered almost as if they were gods. Engineers and scientists were and are exalted personages in many parts of the world—parts of the world that will be key competitors in our global economy. We need to glamorize "making things" as opposed to merely "making things."
13. Psychobabble: You Can Be Whatever You Want to Be—This is a big lie propagated by the same people who probably feel that protecting an individual's self-esteem should take precedence over objective reality of the individual's work or academic performance. Telling people that there is nothing that they cannot do may lead to increased positive self-image but the self-esteem thus created is, to be blunt, phony and ephemeral. It vanishes the moment the student or the employee hits the real world and is challenged by cues from reality-feedback whose basic message is: "In some respect or other you are not who you think you are." If this contradiction exceeds one's comfort zone, the image is threatened and the usual response is defense. And defensive behavior requires energy expenditure that could be freed and available for more constructive pursuits, such as contributing more productively and creatively to one's organization, family, and community. There seems to be an optimal level for people not to become overly optimistic or pessimistic. Extremely exaggerated views of the self (especially when reinforced by such statements as you can be anything you want to be) may be associated with poor reality testing, as seen in episodes of mania, grandiosity, and delusions of infallibility. For instance, employees with very high self-esteem may not be able to accept criticism about their performance; they may attribute such criticism to prejudice or envy, and their subsequent performance will suffer. A person may not be able to do anything they want, but they can succeed if they recognize their talents, capabilities, and adopt goals that are compatible with them.

14. Why the Golden Rule Isn't A Good Management Strategy—Treating others as we want to be treated is not the best policy; treat others as they want to be treated.

15. On the Importance of Followership—there seems to be an exaggerated amount of interest in leadership and it is important to remember that followers are likewise important. Followers often give leaders new insights which improve their leader's leadership qualities.

16. "If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It": An Improper Management Philosophy—many managers feel that you should address problems (breaks) when some prominent managerial theorists believe that if it isn't broke then you haven't looked hard enough or that you need to break things. Why experiment? Why venture into the unknown? The proper management philosophy should be proactive, e.g., "preventive maintenance." Management philosophy should be to identify where/when problems may occur and prepare/prevent their occurrence.
17. It's Better to Beg Forgiveness Than to Constantly Ask for Permission—
Individuals who feel it's better to ask for forgiveness than for permission tend to take action to influence their environments. These courageous, proactive individuals identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative and energy, assert themselves, embrace (reasonable) risks, take action, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change. "Lead, follow, or get out of the way" certainly fits with their action orientation. Those overly cautious and fearful (fear of failure) individuals who tend to ask for permission often do not identify, let alone seize, opportunities to change things because they are reactively waiting for authorization before doing something action. You can't be blamed for a mistake you didn't make, right? But if, as a leader, you actually "do things" rather than merely perpetuate the status quo, there is a high probability, bordering on certainty, that you will make mistakes and probably ask for mercy. Caution isn't all bad. It's just bad when it's excessive, or when the solution to a problem demands aggressive action. However, good preparation and planning prior to action can give positive results and eliminate the need to beg forgiveness.

18. It's Okay to be Anal (detail-oriented, perfectionist) Sometimes—Being detail-oriented, being punctual, orderliness, having no typos, not misusing words are important. The architect Mies van der Rohe said that "God is in the details." If we take seriously van der Rohe's aphorism, then getting things accomplished requires attending to the small and minute aspects of a job. What of the big picture-doesn't it matter more than details? It matters, but not more. As the saying goes, "Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." Yet where trifles are concerned, we seem to have lost our capacity for outrage. Sloppiness, carelessness, and thoughtlessness go increasingly unchallenged. You see this slacking off in everything from rudeness on the street to a laid-back "Hey-what's-the-big-deal-it-still-works-doesn't-it?" attitude regarding product defects. Somehow we have gotten the idea that it's bad form to criticize (even when the criticism is constructive); that it's not smart to make waves; and that it's somehow tacky to demand perfection, because, don't cha know, demanding it just might inconvenience someone. Even more unthinkable, it might dent their self-esteem! Likewise, there's no need to master the details of grammar, syntax, or spelling, since errors will be caught and fixed by spell checks, grammar checks, and other such programs.

19. “Always be positive—is the worst advice you could ever give or receive.”
Quote from Daniels, A. C. (2001). Other People’s Habits…, p. 44.

20. “If you give people something for nothing, you make them good for nothing.”
Quote from Daniels, A. C. (2001). Other People’s Habits…, p. 77.
21. Treating People the Same: An Ineffective Supervisory Strategy—Managing diversity involves organizations making changes in their systems, structures, and management practices in order to eliminate barriers that may keep employees from reaching their full potential. The goal is not to treat all employees the same but to treat them as individuals recognizing that each has different needs and will need different things to succeed. This approach implies that different people in the workplace should be treated equally but differently. Also, famous business author Stephen Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, seemed to support this view when he quoted what one successful parent said about raising children, “Treat them all the same by treating them differently” (p. 192).

22. Positive Aspects of Punishment—For years managers have been taught to use positive reinforcers rather than negative sanctions (punishment). Negative sanctions are not seen as desirable. Part of the reason may rest with the non-humanitarian aspects invoked by the thought of punishment as a motivator. Human relations and human resource approaches to management assume, either implicitly or explicitly, a human potential or growth-oriented perspective. Punishment implies coercion and restraint, not growth. Nevertheless, there appear to be circumstances where lack of punishment may cause individuals to learn that it is permissible to arrive late, work at half speed, and that slipshod quality is tolerated. Essentially, punishment is a motivator under the following circumstances:

23. “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff…And It’s All Small Stuff” Is A Poor Strategy—Richard Carlson (famous management guru) wrote this to try to reduce people’s level of stress which he believed was too high. This really is not good advice in most professional/job related situations because it is important to sweat the details and get things right the first time. A better maxim for one’s professional life is that of Lexus: “The Passionate Pursuit of Perfection” where they sweat the details. Many organizations have implemented six sigma programs that strive for eliminating defects and where details are considered.