

Gung Ho!

By Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles

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By Ken Blanchard

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Gung Ho!

Ken Blanchard / Sheldon Bowles

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Dedicated to the memory of

ANDREW CHARLES LONGCLAW

1940-1994

AND

HIS BELOVED WIFE, JEAN,

AND SON, ROBERT,

TRAGICALLY KILLED

September 1965

THE GUNG HO STORY

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

—ROBERT FROST
“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

I'd been set up.

Me, Peggy Sinclair, head-office rising star!

I should have realized it when Old Man Morris told me I'd been named General Manager of Walton Works #2.

The excitement of getting my own plant blinded me to what must have been obvious to everyone else. I'd never been in operations before. Always in a staff position. I knew the theory all right but I'd never done it. I wasn't trained or ready to run a plant. Even one doing well. And this one wasn't.

I thought I'd been forgiven for the staff study I'd authored which concluded that Old Man Morris's new strategic plan had a fatal flaw. He wasn't happy. But he acknowledged the problem and this saved the company \$1 million. I thought Walton Works #2 was my reward. It was—just not the way I had it figured.

Tuesday, September 4, 8:00 A.M., I arrived at the Walton Works #2 plant full of energy and enthusiasm. By quitting time it was clear that I'd been had. Everyone knew the plant was the worst in the system. But I had never imagined anything this bad. The plant survived only because of the antiquated way our head office cost-accounted, and that was changing. This plant was in major trouble.

Six months, a year at the most, and it would be closing. Gone! And I'd be going with it. The perfect scapegoat for Walton Works #2.

It didn't take a genius to see why productivity was so low. The company treated the raw material piled in the yard better than it treated the workers.

As I met with my management team, I found only one bright spot: the 150-person finishing department. In spite of the problems with Walton Works #2, no other department in our whole thirty-two-plant system was so efficient! That meant about 10 percent of this plant's workforce were gems. The rest appeared to be lumps of coal managed by Neanderthals intent on self-destruction.

Then, when I met with the Division Manager to whom the manager of the finishing department reported, I was told all wasn't well, even there.

"You'll want to get rid of the operations manager there fast," the Division Manager advised.

"Really? Why?" I questioned. I also wondered why this was my responsibility and not his, but right then I was mainly interested in why this operations manager should be fired.

“Andy Longclaw is bad news. Indian guy, you know. Now, I’ve nothing against Indians and this one’s a bright brave. No doubt about that. Got an MBA even. But he’s a troublemaker. Real thorn in the side. That department will be even better once he’s gone. Indians!” he added with evident distaste. His next comment was far worse.

I didn’t know if Andy Longclaw was a troublemaker or not. But I did know this Division Manager wasn’t going to last while I was around. I might be fired myself in six months, but I didn’t have to spend it in the presence of narrow-minded fools like him.

At day’s end, come 4:30, the office emptied out so quickly you’d have sworn the fire alarm had gone off. I hung around another half hour, then left myself.

There was still plenty of daylight left, so I decided to take a long walk. I started down Main Street. I didn't have a destination. I was just wandering and thinking. I noted the town had two supermarkets, two drugstores, and a statue in front of the town library. Reading the inscription I discovered that unlike the statues in most towns, it didn't honor a famous warrior or long-dead politician, but instead an artist. Apparently Walton had been home to Andrew Payton, a Native American wood-carver, who had won a number of international awards for his beautiful wildlife carvings.

I continued to Seventh and crossed the bridge. A green field led to the river edge and a lone bench sat looking across the river to where the factory stood grim and lifeless. A good metaphor, I decided, for what was happening inside.

I started down toward the bench, thinking I didn't have any idea of how to turn the factory around. I knew I was a fast learner. It was the only positive I could think of. Trouble was, I didn't even know where to begin.