



A Tale about Designing  
Jobs Employees Love

# FIXING WORK

DAVID G. HENKIN &  
THOMAS BERTELS

## PRAISE FOR *FIXING WORK*

“*Fixing Work* is a gift for leaders looking for a practical road map to improve employee engagement, productivity, and customer centricity. Read this book—you’ll be glad you did.”

—**FAISAL HOQUE**, founder of Shadoka and best-selling author  
of *Lift* and *Everything Connects*

“In the emerging world of hybrid work, enlisting and engaging employees has become more important than ever. Designing jobs that employees love is going to be table stakes. *Fixing Work* will inspire you to take up this challenge with joy and verve.”

—**GEOFFREY MOORE**, speaker, advisor, and author of *Crossing the Chasm*

“Creating work for employees to thrive in has never been more important! *Fixing Work* offers a powerful and practical approach to designing jobs that keep your star performers engaged and productive, and your company on the path to success. Beautifully written and thoughtfully researched, this book will help you start creating the work your team will love today.”

—**DR. MARSHALL GOLDSMITH**, executive coach and best-selling author  
of *The Earned Life* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“It’s no secret that organizations are more productive and successful when workers see how their efforts directly affect company results and when they are part of a team empowered to improve the way work is done. Making this happen, however, is not easy, though it’s more important today than ever. If you want a compelling story of how to design a joyful, high-performance workplace, *Fixing Work* is the book for you. Authors Henkin and Bertels, longtime experts in the field of work redesign, provide an easy-to-read, dramatic rendition of one manager’s journey from overwhelmed supervisor to transformation leader. If that’s a path that you, too, want to take, then the first step is to read this book.”

—**RON ASHKENAS**, partner emeritus at Schaffer Consulting

“The power of storytelling comes to life in *Fixing Work*, where we gain a front-row seat to what many managers and employees go through every day. Leaders will readily relate to the highs and lows, ambitions and obstacles facing the future of work, where efficiency gains and cost savings intermingle with the quest for talent, productivity, and high employee engagement. *Fixing Work* narrates what to do—and not do—through a delightful read that is as entertaining as it is helpful.”

—**LISHA DAVIS**, CEO at Arable Ventures and adjunct professor  
at Temple University’s Fox School of Business

“I’ve had the pleasure of working with David Henkin for nearly a decade at Vanguard as we helped enable company growth through a people-first culture. Henkin and Bertels have written a must-read primer for anyone focused on employee engagement, motivation, productivity, and customer centrality.

As employees today, we spend most of our waking hours working, but if the pandemic taught us anything, it taught us that life and work can and should be integrated. It taught us the importance of family, friends, and mental health. It also demonstrated, through the Great Resignation, that we all have choices in the types of organizations we decide to be part of.

*Fixing Work* is a recipe for attracting and retaining the best talent. It’s a handbook on what work should be and what today’s employees demand—rewarding work filled with mission, purpose, and a true sense of belonging. Winning organizations of tomorrow will embrace the lessons outlined in this book as a catalyst for success.

The days of leaders maximizing shareholder value have waned and given way to enterprises that have noble missions, value client loyalty, and create incredible experiences for their most valued resource—their people. *Fixing Work* is a must-read for every leader struggling to build a thriving team enabled by an amazing employee culture.”

—**JOHN T. MARCANTE**, US CIO-in-Residence at Deloitte

“I worked in HR for more than thirty-five years in the United States, Europe, and Asia, starting in an entry-level position and ending my career as the EVP of a Fortune 20 company. This book, simply put, is wonderful. It is a great story with real-life situations. Makes me want to go back to work and hand it out to every manager.”

—**PAUL KIRINCIC**, former executive vice president  
of human resources at McKesson

“*Fixing Work* is a great read for any leader interested in making his or her organization both more productive and a better place to work. Henkin and Bertels have captured the secrets of effective work design and made them highly accessible through a story readers will identify with immediately. I often wonder why all workplaces haven’t adopted these principles, which have been around since the ’80s and have proven time and time again to work. The answer may be that the information hasn’t been communicated in an easily digestible form. With *Fixing Work*, there’s no excuse for continuing to waste the precious gifts that employees can offer through creating win-win solutions with their employers. The road to improvement couldn’t be made clearer.”

—**WILLIAM PASMORE**, professor of practice of social organizational  
psychology at Columbia University’s Teachers College

“Anyone who has had leadership responsibility in an organization will immediately recognize that David Henkin and Thomas Bertels feel their pain. The authors share real and relatable world wisdom through the vividly portrayed story of people who have ‘been there’ and ‘done that’ in the daily struggle for integrity and relevance at work. This book is sorely needed. Read *Fixing Work* to better serve your company, colleagues, and customers with distinction.”

—**JEFF WESTPHAL**, former chairman and CEO  
of Vertex and founder of MeaningSphere

“*Fixing Work* is an easy-to-read, engaging story about a fictional company and a manager facing major problems. Henkin and Bertels weave together ideas, suggestions, and proven tactics to help the manager improve motivation and productivity and, in short, show both the manager and the readers how to make work better. Highly recommend this book for its practical and engaging approach.”

—**KEVIN WHEELER**, founder and president of the Future of Talent Institute

“If you’ve worked in a large company, you know Jerry. The authors have effectively captured what’s broken with work environments similar to Consolidated Insurance. They masterfully introduce us to employees who work to implement well-intended but often temporary fixes. Instead of focusing on the symptoms, much like anesthesia numbs pain, the authors guide us along a pathway that helps companies redefine what work should be for their teams—thereby eliminating the need for employers to create pain-management programs to sedate what’s broken—and allows them to turn their full attention to how work can be successfully executed.”

—**ERIC REISENWITZ**, former president of group protection  
at Lincoln Financial Group

“You want a story? You want a business story? Well, here it is. Get a cup of coffee, or a glass of wine, and prepare to learn in ways you’ve never experienced before. *Fixing Work* is a must-read, but not for the reasons you think: fixing work doesn’t have to be grueling; just follow the story. But prepare for a surprise ending.”

—**STEPHEN J. ANDRIOLE**, Thomas G. Labrecque Professor at the  
Villanova School of Business and CEO at TechVestCo

“People, process, technology.” This has been the business improvement mantra for decades, but usually with process elevated to preeminence and people relegated to the lowest priority. If, instead, you like people and figure they’re the true key to business success, David Henkin and Thomas Bertels have authored the book for you. Written as an easy-to-digest business novel, *Fixing Work* illustrates the principles of how improving the employee experience can, in the right hands, make companies more effective and competitive by making how work gets done more rewarding for the people who do it.”

—**BOB LEWIS**, president of IT Catalysts

“In today’s hybrid work world, engaged employees will define the winners and losers of tomorrow. *Fixing Work* is a must-read for every leader who embraces that reality and needs a plan to make it happen. We all know culture matters. Finally, leaders have a case study that provides the action steps and metrics to enable a differentiated culture. Employees will love it and, more importantly, will deliver better results in it.”

—**DAVID DESTEFANO**, president, CEO, and board chair at Vertex

“*Fixing Work* is for anyone who wants to understand the nitty-gritty of the American workplace and how to make work more meaningful, motivating, and productive. Henkin and Bertels’s dialogues and stories make the future of work come alive.”

—**DR. BOB AUBREY**, founder of the ASEAN  
Human Development Organization

“*Fixing Work* is a corporate page-turner that draws you in immediately by capturing anyone who has ever worked in a business system. The authors highlight the typical dynamics at play that challenge even the most motivated employees to stay engaged. They also spotlight what can happen when one leader is curious enough to seek help from an outside confidant and courageous enough to challenge the way things are—to trust his colleagues to find the answers and to ultimately to get out of their way so they can own their work. The result is an easy-to-read and highly entertaining road map for change that anyone can follow to drive results by unleashing the human potential within their own team or organization.”

—**GEORGE BREWSTER**, founder of Gimbal Systems

“Having worked with Thomas on several projects over the past twenty years, I am well aware of his strategic thinking and organizational design capabilities. The authors’ use of storytelling to introduce work design and employee motivation principles results in a thought-provoking yet easy-reading novel. *Fixing Work* is a must-read for any executive seeking to optimize workforce satisfaction while improving productivity.”

—**DENNIS TRICE**, former CEO of Mitsubishi Chemical America

“*Fixing Work* reminds us of our daily challenges and opportunities in our organizations. This a valuable and practical approach to telling a story around challenges we all have encountered. Organizations are seeking ideas on how to win, and it may be right in front of us—improving employee engagement and motivating our employees are connected to productivity and customer satisfaction.”

—**ROBIN M. ALLEN**, senior director of global talent acquisition at Vertex

“What if we thought of work as a product, workers as customers of the product, and managers as designers of the product? The result? More engaged and motivated employees, satisfied customers, and improved productivity. By imbuing work with purpose, autonomy, and feedback; designing work activity for entirety and variety; and ensuring that technology supports that work activity, Jerry Crawford successfully transforms his lackluster group at Consolidated Insurance into a high-performing Mojo Squad. Learn how you can do the same in your organization by reading his compelling transformation story in *Fixing Work*—today!”

—**DR. TONY O'DRISCOLL**, professor of business administration  
at Duke University and author of *Everyday Superhero*

“*Fixing Work* is the perfect book for helping leaders at all levels drive customer centricity through employee engagement. The book addresses how to manage the complex process of team building, rapid improvement, and maximizing the diverse skills within a typical team. The authors understand the whole system in today's workplace—from the value of executive sponsorship to perfecting processes at the operating level. Their step-by-step analysis is spot-on and a rarity in business books. This is an important business primer at a time when workplace dynamics are screaming out for change.”

—**CHRISTOPHER N. DISIPIO**, CEO of Global Benefits Group

“*Fixing Work* offers a road map for organizations to improve employee engagement, organizational effectiveness, and customer experience from vision through execution. To achieve these three goals simultaneously can be challenging, but Henkin and Bertels highlight that, with sustained effort and a long-term commitment, it is possible to have a more engaged workforce, a more effective organization, and a better customer experience. This is a must-have for your leadership library and an especially insightful tool for chief people officers!”

—**JULIE CATALANO**, chief people officer at Bespoke Partners

“Henkin and Bertels offer a masterful conversational dialogue about designing work that matters with a human-first mindset. *Fixing Work* offers timely perspective to organizations on the critical topic of designing work to attract, motivate, and retain a digital native workforce.”

—**BRIAN NEJMEH**, senior operating partner at  
PeakEquity Partners and president of Instep

“I really enjoyed *Fixing Work*. As someone who has implemented transformations involving the design of new jobs across multiple areas, I found that the book portrayed a realistic journey and set of challenges to success. The ability to enhance service quality by empowering frontline workers to completely handle customer requests and align the organization to properly support that service delivery model will always elevate performance. It also creates competitive advantage in your market and a much more engaged workforce. I wish I had read *Fixing Work* before I took my journey, as it would have provided valuable insights about what to expect in driving this type of structural change.”

—**JOE SPADAFORD**, president at J. Francis Consulting

“In *Fixing Work*, Henkin and Bertels dare to demystify the dark art of becoming strategic in your role. Read this if you intend to break out of the darkness.”

—**ED WALLACE**, speaker, managing director of human capital at  
AchieveNEXT, and best-selling author of *The Relationship Engine*

“Is an engaging tale a great alternative to a corpspeak-laden business book on the meaning of work? Is the meaning revolution at work an unexpected pretext to write an engaging tale? Yes and yes! Dave and Thomas are the Shakespeare of management and the workplace. Leveraging a parable format, *Fixing Work* takes us on an actionable meditation with compelling situations where complicatedness is the wrong answer to complexity. They remind us about a powerful truth—that turning the corporate nonsense into a motivating, purposeful, discerning adventure for everyone is the noble quest of modern leaders.”

—**LAURENT CHOAIN**, chief leadership of education and culture at Mazars



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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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## INTRODUCTION

**H**igh turnover. Low levels of employee engagement. Low productivity. Unclear accountabilities. Frustrated customers. These are all symptoms that tell us that in many organizations, work is fundamentally broken.

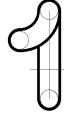
What is at the heart of this? A failure to design work for humans. Decades of research have shown again and again that we all want meaningful work, autonomy, and feedback, but only a small fraction of companies have incorporated these insights into the actual design of work to create intrinsically motivating, self-fulfilling jobs. The vast majority of companies today are stuck in an industrial, assembly-line-era mindset, in which a narrow focus on cost results in highly fragmented workflows and steep, often excessively multilayered hierarchies.

The opportunity to fix and redesign how we work is enormous, and companies that seize it will win the future. Those that don't will find it increasingly challenging to attract, engage, and retain top talent—and they will fall behind in both competitiveness and relevance in the modern age.

There is a better way. We wrote this book to provide people managers at all levels with a realistic example and practical road

map for how to simultaneously improve employee engagement and motivation, organizational effectiveness and productivity, and customer experience and satisfaction. This story takes place in one company and one industry, but its concepts are applicable to every company in any industry. While the characters and events that appear here are imaginary, the workplace and environmental reality that produces them is authentic.

We hope you enjoy the journey, gain and apply useful ideas, and reap the many benefits of fixing work!



---

## RISE AND SHINE

In the early Monday morning quiet, Jerry Crawford takes a deep breath. Awake before his alarm again, his eyes follow shadows across the room, and his mind is already thinking about the workweek ahead. As always, the weekend went by in a flash, and now it was back to the grind. Mindful not to wake his wife, Haley, Jerry silently slithers out of bed and makes his way to the kitchen.

Coffee in hand, he quickly scans through the emails on his phone. Fifty-nine new messages since he shut down the phone last night. Unbelievable. Fortunately, most of it is junk, but two messages catch his attention. The first one is a notice from the Human Resources department reminding him that performance reviews for his team are overdue. Jerry feels his blood pressure going up. As if he did not already have enough on his plate. He scrolls to the second message. Julia, arguably the best performer on his team, has sent an invitation for a meeting in what was the last open slot he had on his calendar all day. For a second, he contemplates declining the meeting invitation, but he knows that his schedule for the rest of the week is already packed as well. No point kicking the can down the road. He



looks at this watch: time to get going. Atlanta traffic is no joke, and the sooner he gets to work, the better.

He puts his cup in the sink and heads for the shower. As he comes out, Haley is starting to wake up. She sends him off with a kiss and the same loving and inspiring message as always: “Be the author of your life. Go write your story forward.”

Fifteen minutes later, he is on the road. On a good day, the commute from his home in Atlanta’s Buckhead section to Consolidated Insurance’s office south of the airport takes only twenty-five minutes, but today is not a good day. By the time he pulls into the parking lot, he is already running late for the weekly status conference call with the sales leadership team.

For Jerry, as the head of client onboarding, the meeting is only informational, and most of the discussion is usually irrelevant to him and his team. Still, he dislikes being late. He goes straight to his office, closes the door, and gets on the call.

Bellamy, the sales VP, is in the midst of a self-congratulatory speech about how successful the launch of the new life insurance product had been. *What a joke*, Jerry thinks—the product launch had been a complete fiasco. Jerry settles into his ergonomic chair and makes sure he is muted.

Consolidated Insurance is a midsize insurance company that sells employee benefits programs, with a focus on midsize companies. These companies could have anywhere from fifty to five hundred employees, and Cons (the company’s humorous, if awkward, nickname) provides them with dental, disability, vision, and now also life insurance benefits.

The programs are sold through brokers, who are supported by regional sales offices. Once a client signs, Jerry’s department is responsible for setting them up on the various internal data

systems for billing and claims management—a complicated, arduous process made worse by computer systems that do not talk to each other and a sales department that routinely promises turnaround times that are completely unrealistic.

When he hears Bellamy mention his name, Jerry jumps up in his chair. “Jerry, could you give us an update on the status of client enrollment? Our account managers keep getting calls from clients and brokers about service issues. Maybe you can shed some light on that for us?”

Ouch. He quickly unmutes himself and responds as diplomatically as he can: “We are looking into what is going on, but we are short-staffed, and we need IT to fix the interface. And—”

Bellamy cuts him off: “Jerry, quite frankly, I don’t care which dog ate your homework. I request that for our call next week, you give us an update on where we stand and how we will address these issues. Is that something you can do for us?”

Jerry immediately thinks of a few sharp-edged remarks he would like to say but knows better than to get into a pissing contest with Bellamy. “Of course, Bellamy, no problem.”

He pushes the mute button again, as the meeting moves to another topic, and walks over to the huge whiteboard that takes up an entire wall of his office and which he uses to keep his top priorities visible. He adds “Service issue update for Monday sales meeting” and “Team performance reviews” to the list. Filling the team’s two open positions is the most important issue, but the performance reviews and the service issue update he just promised Bellamy will require immediate action. Jerry sighs.

As he turns back to his desk, he sees Julia walking toward his office. He smiles. “Julia, how are you? How was your weekend?” Julia has been probably the best hire he ever made.

Smart, ambitious, focused, and energetic—she would certainly go places. Half a year ago, he had promoted her to the role of supervisor, which had turned out to be an excellent decision.

“It was nice, thank you. Gave me a little extra time to be sure about this conversation,” Julia replies. She smiles fleetingly. “I’m sorry, Jerry, but another opportunity has come up, and I’m going to take it.” She places a piece of paper onto his desk. It’s her resignation letter.

Jerry feels flushed and unprepared—and a bit shocked, as he and Julia have had a great rapport. Or so he thought. “Wow, wow,” Jerry blurts out. “Wow, okay. Julia, you’re such an important member of the team. Is this something we can discuss?”

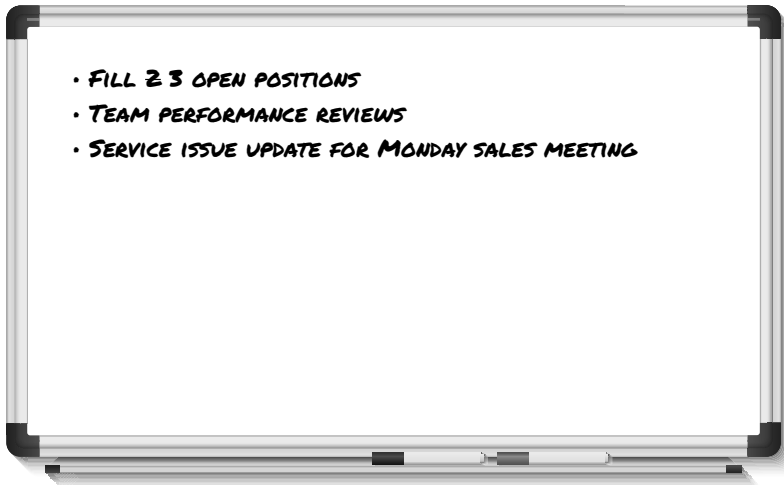
“Thanks, but no, I’ve made up my mind,” Julia quickly replies. “I had higher hopes as well, and I really appreciated the promotion you gave me, but the last few months have been difficult. My notice period is two weeks, but I have a bunch of vacation days left that I would like to take. So, if it’s all right with you, Jerry, I’d like to wrap things up by Thursday.”

Jerry could only nod.

“I really appreciate all you did for me. I do wish you the best,” Julia says, and just like that, she gets up and leaves his office.

Jerry looks at his whiteboard. Three openings now. He feels his pulse quicken.

While his department is frequently criticized for excessive delays in onboarding new clients, the quality issues certainly have gotten worse and are now also showing up in the monthly customer satisfaction survey. Most of the issues are simple mistakes like misspelled names on ID cards, but some of them are starting to have a negative impact on the Underwriting and Claims department. And, of course, Sales. Onboarding clients



is critical to facilitate billing them for the coverage. When his team falls behind, as it has recently, billing is delayed, which drives the sales folks crazy because they are counting on those fat commission checks. All of this also explains Bellamy's present antagonism toward Jerry, as well as that coming from several other upper-level management types in the company.

With three open positions, he knows he is in big trouble. There is simply no way his short-staffed department can tackle the workload in front of them. Everybody is already stretched to the max. He looks through the big glass wall of his office over three clusters of cubicles, one for each team.

The cubicles of three supervisors—Johnny, Mary, and Julia—are significantly larger than those of their team members. Johnny and Mary are both in their early forties. Between the two of them, Johnny is clearly the better coach. Mary drives her team hard, arguably too hard, but she drives herself hard as well. Both teams have open positions.

Johnny's team includes Dakota, Tatum, and Olivia. They

complement each other well. Dakota started only a few months ago, after graduating college. She had been an intern the summer before her senior year, and she seems to have hit the ground running. It has been two years since Tatum came on board. He is diligent, devotes high attention to detail, and is great with clients. Olivia is the longest tenured member of the team. She recently celebrated her twenty-year anniversary. Jerry likes Olivia a lot. She is like the organizational memory of the department—the historian, if you will—whom Jerry can always rely on to explain why things are being done a certain way. This also unfortunately means she is often quite resistant to change. He vividly remembers her response when soon after he joined Cons, he proposed they change the way they track the case status. While she had been very polite, she basically refused to even consider a different way of working. Sometimes, Olivia exhibits the classic “but we’ve always done it this way” mentality.

Mary’s team is a somewhat different story. Skylar is a solid performer. She is in her mid-thirties and a proud mom of twin boys. Rasheed arrived the same month as Jerry. Rasheed is a smart fellow, though his true passion is to become a jazz musician rather than process spreadsheets all day (and who could blame him). Mary’s team also includes Michele, who is early career, ambitious, analytical, and highly capable with high potential. She often shares her thoughts on how things might be improved, which Jerry really appreciates.

And finally, there is Julia’s team: Ryan, Lee, Eric, and Hannah. Ryan and Lee are in their early thirties. Both are young parents, and both love sports. Ryan is a college football fanatic, whereas Lee loves baseball. Initially, Jerry was not impressed with either of them. But since Julia took over the team, he has noticed that both

have seemed a lot more engaged. Eric is an interesting character. Jerry knows very little about him, and Eric seems intent on keeping it that way. Every attempt Jerry has made to learn more about him has been rebuffed. But Eric gets his work done. Hannah is the weakest member of the team, at least in Jerry's eyes. In her late thirties, she is constantly complaining about being underpaid and overworked. When Jerry announced Julia's promotion to supervisor, Hannah was visibly disappointed; it was abundantly clear that she had expected to be put in charge of the team. But Julia had managed to engage her somewhat successfully. And now Julia is gone. Jerry will probably have to step in and take over the group, at least until he finds a replacement.

Jerry's phone alerts him that it is time to get on his next call. The rest of the day passes quickly, with little time to work on the pressing issues staring at him from the whiteboard on the wall across from his desk. He even skips lunch in his effort to catch up on the most burning issues. Thankfully, by the time Jerry is able to leave the office, rush hour is over, though it's small reward for the kind of day he's had. He gets home in less than thirty minutes. As he walks through the door, Haley is preparing dinner.

"Perfect timing, honey! How was your day?"

"Well, Julia announced she is leaving," Jerry begins to share, "so now I have three open positions. The next couple of weeks will be tough."

Haley walks over and gives him a big hug. "You will figure something out, Jerry. You always do."

He nods, although the wry smile on his face surely gives him away. They sit down to eat dinner—a delicious red snapper with rice and sautéed carrots. But Jerry cannot stop thinking about work. How on earth is he going to sort this all out?

# 2

## BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

**T**uesday is Jerry's least favorite day—jam-packed with meetings. By the time he heads over to the office of his boss, Cameron, for his weekly one-on-one, Jerry is exhausted. Cameron is Consolidated's vice president of Client Services, and one time when Haley asked Jerry to describe his boss in one word, the first word that came to his mind was "oblivious." A phrase would be "sunny-side up." Despite being mostly disengaged, Cameron always seems to come out on top. Jerry arrives at Cameron's office a little early, hoping to get some help with recruiting.

Cameron's office has nicer, if oddly uncomfortable, chairs and an outside window. He motions to Jerry to wait while he finishes a call. Jerry paces a bit, glancing back every few moments. Finally, Cameron waves him in. "Jerry, how are you? Nice to see you."

"Well, I've been better. I'm actually hoping to get some help. You probably heard that Julia has resigned. I'm very concerned about how that will affect our ability to keep up."

"I did hear, yes. She was sharp; we'll miss her. But it's so competitive now," Cameron offers.

Jerry continues, “We were already struggling to keep up as it is, and we’re now dealing with three open requisitions. Is there any way we can get help? Our capacity is just not there, and the team overall is feeling it. I’m very concerned.”

“Jerry, do you know what a rock tumbler is?” Cameron asks, taking the conversation in a different direction.

“Yes, I think so,” Jerry replies.

“I just read this article. It mentions Steve Jobs. And it talked about a widowed man who lived up the street from Steve. One day he shows Steve an old, dusty rock tumbler. It was basically a motor and a coffee can and a little drive belt between them. Then they go out back and collect some rocks. Regular, plain, ugly old rocks.”

“Okay,” says Jerry.

“Well,” Cameron continues, “next they put those plain rocks in the can with a little bit of liquid and a little bit of grit powder. Then they close the can, and the older man turns this motor on. The contraption starts making a lot of noise, and the older man tells Jobs to come back tomorrow.”

“Okay,” monotonizes Jerry, as Cameron pauses.

“So, Steve comes back the next day. They open the can and take out amazingly polished, beautiful rocks. The same plain stones, bumping, friction, time, and voilà!”

“Okay,” says Jerry a third time, now getting quietly irritated. “I get the concept, but I’m not sure how that applies here, now? We need to fill our reqs and—”

“Jerry, I’ve got another meeting starting shortly here,” Cameron interjects. “Take that friction and make something beautiful out of it!” Cameron turns away from Jerry toward his computer, abruptly signaling that their meeting is over.



As Jerry walks back to his office, his dread only grows. Not entirely surprised by how unhelpful Mr. Sunny-Side Up was, he is nonetheless disappointed.

“Hey, Jerry, how’s life?” chirps Elrod Tubbs. Elrod works in Cons’ IT department, responsible for the data group. He and Elrod talk with some regularity as Jerry’s team has frequent data issues and much of their process involves data and systems. In Jerry’s early days Elrod had helped explain much of the systems and dataflows. However, as Jerry dug in and asked about improvements and upgrades, especially as the business grew and Jerry’s team grew, Elrod had become less helpful. Things had come to a boil the last time they met, when in response to a question from Jerry about the status of the life product implementation, Elrod had asked him to submit a ticket via the IT service desk. Jerry had come close to losing his temper.

Feigning inner calm, Jerry responds, “Not too bad, Elrod. How about yourself?”

Elrod smiled. “Doing great. With the life product implementation done, we can finally get back to working on the new claims system. That will be a monster, but we hope to get the funding approved next month.”

“A new claims system? But what about the data integration work we requested?”

“Well, Jerry, that work has been put on hold,” Elrod replies. “Gordon has asked us to prioritize the new system above everything else, so we put all other requests on hold. Plus, there is no funding for that.”

Jerry could not believe what he had just heard. “Seriously? We are drowning in work as it is, and the interface breakdowns are one of the biggest problems we are facing. Isn’t there anything you can do?”

Was that a smirk on Elrod's face? "Sorry, Jerry, take a number. But the claims project is the future of the company—and I am quoting Gordon here. You—meaning you specifically—will have to make do. Anyway, nice seeing you!"

In point of fact, Elrod actually works for Ben, Cons' chief information officer or CIO. So he is not exactly at the top of the corporate food chain, and in fact, he and Jerry are essentially peers. *Dropping Gordon's name so flippantly seems a bit much*, Jerry thinks. Gordon is Cons' CEO, and it is not likely that Elrod will be joining Gordon for drinks and golf at the country club anytime soon.

By now Jerry's mood had turned sour. With Cons' profitability declining over recent years, Gordon had invested heavily into updating its ancient systems, but instead of improving things, it had only increased the workload. Many of the new systems did not connect with what was already in place. Jerry had spent many hours with Elrod trying to understand and improve the situation, without much success to show for it.

Jerry briefly contemplates talking to Bellamy. As the head of Sales, Bellamy has a vested interest in the performance of Jerry's group. But given how the call at the start of the week went, that seems risky. Jerry looks at his whiteboard. He still needs to put together an explanation of the service issues for Bellamy by Monday. There was no point in starting to work on that tonight; it was already way too late. He heads home, zombielike in the evening darkness.

As Jerry approaches their house, he realizes he forgot to give Haley a heads-up that he would be running late. As he enters, Haley is just cleaning up the kitchen.

"Sorry, honey, but work is a bit crazy these days," Jerry confesses. "I am down three people, and I completely forgot."

Haley shrugs and points to the oven. “I made lasagna,” she says flatly. “Your portion is in the oven.” Haley works from home as a computer programmer. Their time together has always been a priority for both of them, even if it might simply consist of having dinner together in the evening.

Jerry feels her disappointment. Haley heads to bed while Jerry is still eating. By the time he joins her, Haley is already sound asleep. But sleep doesn’t come easily for Jerry. Thoughts race through his mind, but they keep looping back to the stupid rock tumbler story Cameron had told him. By the time Jerry falls asleep, it’s way past midnight.

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The next day, Wednesday, is highlighted by Jerry’s monthly staff meeting. The meeting is deliberately scheduled to be brief: only half an hour. On his drive to work, he thinks about how to make use of the limited time, deciding that he will go straight to business and try to hit the problems head-on. As he walks into the large conference room, his entire team is already waiting for him.

“Good morning, everybody. I know we have a huge case-load to work through, so I want to keep this short and sweet. But I have three things I want to talk about. One is recognizing Julia, who is leaving us. Julia, we will miss you.” He pauses for a moment.

Judging from the looks on their faces, they all already knew.

“Ryan, Lee, Eric, and Hannah,” Jerry continues, “I will be filling in for Julia until we can find a replacement. For now, please put a weekly meeting for the five of us on my calendar.”

He looks over to Julia’s team and sees heads nodding.

“Second, we need to get these performance reviews done. Johnny and Mary, please make sure you get yours done before the end of next week. Ryan, Lee, Eric, and Hannah, I will be doing yours.” Jerry sees heads nodding in grim affirmation again.

“And third, as you know, we are a bit behind.” Jerry scans the room. “With Julia leaving, we now have three open positions and a backlog of 270 cases. I need to give Sales an update on where we stand and how we plan to address that issue. And that is what I would like to talk about for the rest of this meeting.”

Nobody says anything for a few seconds. Mary breaks the silence. “Well, that is actually not true.”

Jerry looks at her cautiously.

“Our case backlog as of today is 297. I just got a ton of new contracts from National Accounts. They have been busy!” Mary says.

*Ouch*, Jerry thinks. He clears his throat. “Well, so what are we going to do about that? Any bright ideas?”

Ryan is the next to say something. “Well, this might be a little bit contentious. But if we all could focus on the simple cases and hold off the complex ones for a few weeks, we could probably reduce the backlog and at least make our numbers look better.”

Not a bad idea, Jerry muses, but obviously risky. Frustrating the large customers even more would be a surefire way to antagonize Sales. Obviously, Ryan was trying to be pragmatic, if not also provocative, and hey, at least somebody chimed in with an idea. In an effort to be supportive and spur more ideas, Jerry walks over to his flipchart. He grabs a marker and jots Ryan’s idea down:

- *Process simple cases first*

He turns around, looking at the group. “Any other ideas? Nothing is off limits.”

Johnny raises his hand. “What about training? If everybody was familiar with every system, the whole scheduling work would be much easier.”

A bit self-serving, Jerry thinks, since scheduling is one of Johnny’s main responsibilities. And it’s also not very realistic, given the patchwork of systems and the time it takes to train people on them. But Jerry adds the idea to the flipchart anyway:

- *Cross-training on systems*

To Jerry’s surprise, Olivia raises her hand. “Yes, Olivia?”

Olivia carefully shares, “How about we stop asking employers to validate the census before we load the data into the system?”

Oh boy. Jerry knows all too well that, given the long time span between when employers submit their census data to get a quote and when Cons enters the information into its systems, the census information is usually out of date. Some employees at those companies will have left, and new hires will very likely have been added. Simply taking the initial census would, of course, save a lot of time but also create a lot of problems later on for Customer Service. Talk about kicking the can down the road. But regardless of what he thinks about this particular idea, Jerry adds it to the list. After all, he had offered that nothing is off limits:

- *Stop validating census*

Jerry looks at the clock. Only two minutes left. “Well, we won’t solve this today, but I would appreciate if you all think

about it some more. Please add any additional ideas to the flip-chart, and we will talk more about this over the next few weeks.” Team members gather their things and start shuffling their way out of their chairs. “Back to work, folks. Thank you.” Jerry closes the meeting.

The room empties out quickly, except for Johnny and Mary. “Jerry, do you have a few minutes?” Johnny asks.

Jerry’s next meeting was not for another half hour, so he nods yes.

“Great,” Johnny replies and then clears his throat. “Well, I did not want to bring this up in the meeting, but you will hear this anyway. We have a major problem with the life product. It turns out that the interface between the life platform and the policy admin system is not working properly. So, as it stands, the data does not come over. It looks like IT dropped the ball again.”

Jerry cannot believe what he’s just heard. “Did nobody test the workflow before we went live?”

Mary jumps in. “Jerry, we did not. As you might recall, there was this huge push to hit the go-live date. Everybody was scrambling up to the last minute. And Elrod signed off on it!”

*Wow. Really.* Jerry thinks for a second about calling Elrod to find out why he’d signed off. Did he even check or validate anything?

But given his last exchange with Elrod, it would mostly not be a good use of time. *How much worse can this week get?* Jerry thinks. If what Mary and Johnny said was true, then they would have to check all the cases they had already completed.

“How many—” Jerry starts.

Mary does not wait until he finishes the question. “About eighty cases, Jerry.”

“So why did we not find out about this sooner?” Jerry asks, mindful of his tone and trying mightily not to admonish the messengers.

“Well, remember our backlog?” Mary replies. “We launched the life product back in October. And the first deals came in sometime later that month. But since our backlog is so humongous, we just now completed the enrollment of the first groups. And when we did the final check of the policy documents and created the first bill, we realized that life was missing.”

Jerry sighs. “Well, at least we did not send anything out to a client, right?”

“Correct,” Mary states. “But we need to rework all eighty cases. And since the interface is not working, that will require a lot of manual data entry.”

“How long do you think it will take to work through this?” Johnny chimes in.

“Well, it would probably take three people two weeks to get it all sorted out,” Mary answers firmly.

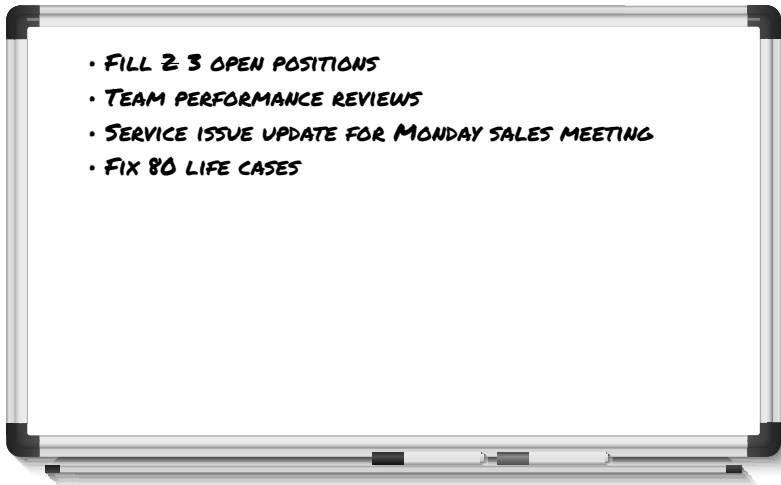
Jerry’s chin drops. “Johnny, that means your entire team does nothing else for two weeks.”

Johnny nods. “That’s right, boss.”

“Okay, I need to process that,” Jerry says, placing both hands on his temples. Johnny and Mary nod and leave the room.

Back in his office, Jerry walks over to his whiteboard and adds “Fix 80 life cases.”

Jerry grimaces. This is becoming overwhelming. They were behind as it was. The life problem just sets them back even further. And the only ideas that would relieve the pressure in the short run would create even bigger problems in the long run.



And even if he could fill the three open positions right away, it would take weeks if not months before the new team members would be able to relieve some of the pressures. There was no way out. He would have to talk to Bellamy. Well, first he would have to talk to Cameron to let him know what was going on. Could this week, indeed, get any worse?

By the time Jerry leaves the office, the parking lot is once again empty under the glare of the halogen street lamps. At least today he remembered to call Haley early enough to let her know that he would be late. By the time he gets home, she is already in her pajamas, reading a book in front of the fireplace.

She gets up and gives him a hug. “Sounds like you had another rough day. Well, we have some leftover lasagna from yesterday. It’s warming in the oven. Go and eat! And join me afterward.”

After he finishes eating, he rinses off the dishes, leaving them in the sink, and joins Haley in front of the fire.

She looks up from her book. “Ready to go to bed?”

“Yes, ma’am, I am done. This was another day from hell.”

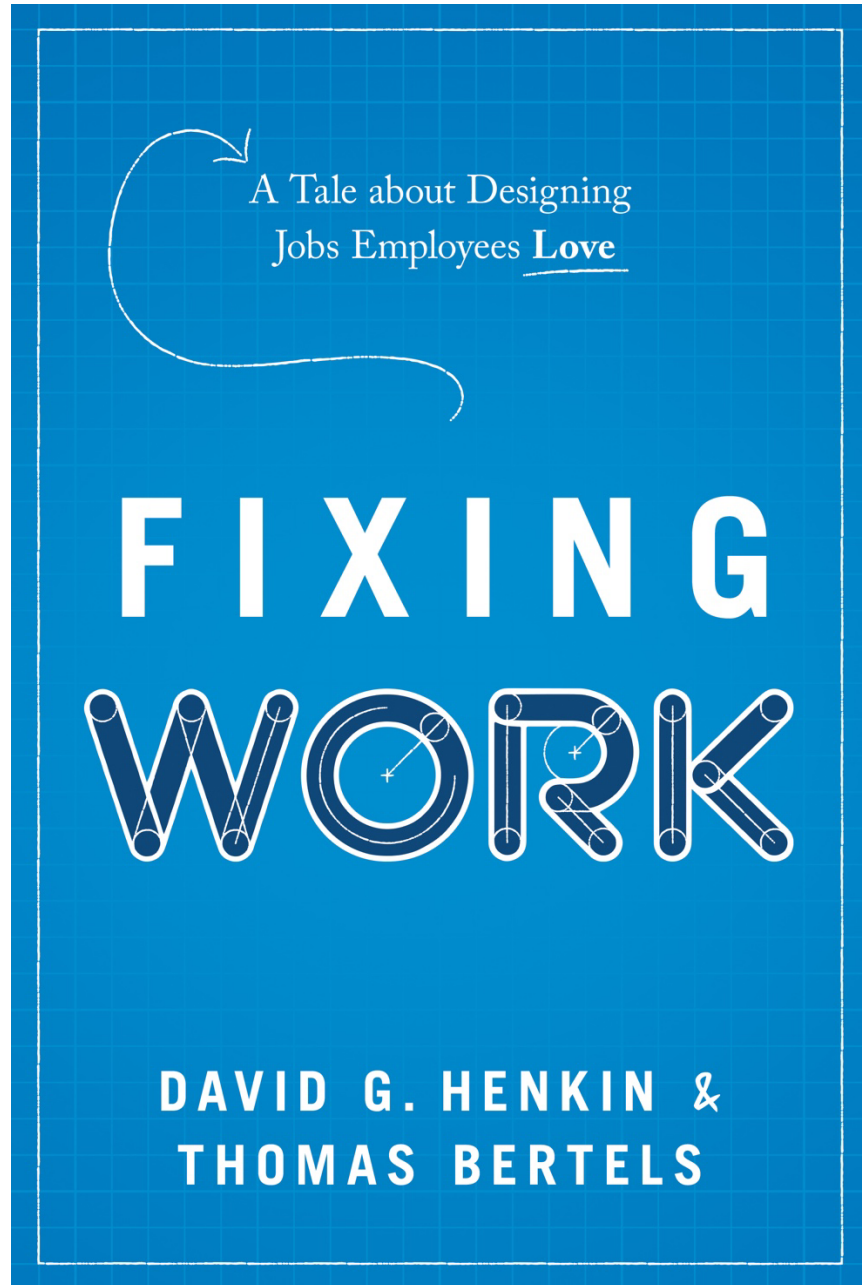


Haley smiles. “You will figure it out, honey. I have no doubts.”

“Well, from your lips to God’s ears.”

They go upstairs, brush their teeth, and climb into bed. Haley gives him a kiss, and seconds later Jerry is fast asleep.

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