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Busting Bureaucracy: How To Conquer Your Organization's Worst Enemy

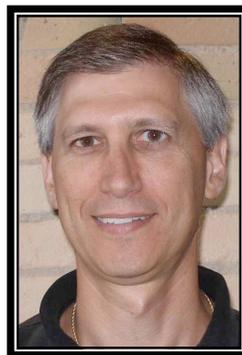
*Barry L. Linetsky
Partner*

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This review of Kenneth Johnston's Busting Bureaucracy (Business One Irwin, 1993; ISBN: 1-55623-878-9) was originally published in the University Of Toronto's Institute Of Market-Driven Quality (IMDQ) newsletter Service Focus, June, 1993. Busting Bureaucracy is currently out of print, but used copies may be available at amazon.com and other online retailers. I wrote it when I was employed as an Internal Marketing and Project Management Consultant at Aetna Canada.

You know you are holding an unusual book when the very first page is a preprinted memo to "My Boss" imploring him to read the book because it describes his bureaucratic organization and offers support on how to "de-bureaucratize" to improve service quality.

Busting Bureaucracy by Kenneth Johnston, founder and former CEO of the training and consulting firm Kaset International, is a must-read for any manager involved in the process of enhancing service quality, or anybody planning to begin the journey.



**Barry L. Linetsky
Partner**

With the publication of this book, Johnston has fired the first shot in what is likely to be the hot business issue of the decade – how to successfully transform rigid organizational structures to achieve your strategic service goals. Where Tom Peters addresses the need to do so in *Liberation Management*, Johnston takes the lead in showing us the way.

One of the merits of Johnston's book is his attempt to integrate his 19 years of observation and experience as a consultant into wider concepts and principles. (You'll appreciate this if you have ever tired to

The Strategic Planning Group

258 Adelaide Street East, Suite 201, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 1N1

Phone: 416-366-4774 Fax: 416-366-4775



read *Liberation Management*.) By doing so, he provides a path for the reader to follow in understanding why bureaucracy exists and why certain organizations react to it in certain ways. Most importantly, he shows how the quality service concepts and tools can be utilized to remove bureaucratic hindrances to service excellence.

Expert opinion is that 80-90% of quality initiatives are likely to fail. Johnston provides some insight into why this may be so with a significant though seemingly banal observation. His experience shows that when organizations begin to undertake service quality improvement programs, the negative effects of bureaucracy are noticeably reduced. But in later stages, bureaucracy tends to become the primary barrier to further improvement. Departments don't cooperate, internal politics get in the way of fulfilling the mission and decision-making seems to take forever.

Once the bureaucratic veneer is removed, what remains exposed is the core structure that supports bureaucracy. In essence, the enemy is ourself.

Bureaucracy perseveres so well, asserts Johnston, not only because it is the most common organizing model for private and public sector organizations, but also because it tends to produce the highest levels of personal satisfaction for those at the top. These are the very same people, we are told, who must be the most staunch supporters of an organizational change effort if it is to have any hope of succeeding.

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Johnston concludes that the competitive pressure of a free market is the best single impetus to force organizations to become market driven: "In truly competitive arenas, unmodified bureaucratic organizations seldom can earn the customer satisfaction needed to compete."

What is required, says Johnston, is much more than a change in corporate culture. The bureaucratic form must be replaced by flexible, responsive, innovative "mission driven" organizations that have customer friendly policies, practices and procedures. Johnston's vision of a non-bureaucratic mission-driven form and the steps required to achieve it are outlined in the book. Without this conversion, says Johnston, most organizations that are currently engaged in quality programs will be defeated by the underlying bureaucratic structure.

Given the statist nature of bureaucratic structures, it is not surprising that Johnston concludes that the competitive pressure of a free market is the best single impetus to force organizations to become market driven. "Bureaucracies can only succeed," he writes, "when protected by tariffs, patents, copyrights, market positioning, oligopoly, or outright monopoly. In truly competitive arenas, unmodified bureaucratic organizations seldom can earn the customer satisfaction needed to compete."

Busting Bureaucracy is well researched, lucid, and spattered with humour. It is also a thoughtful read in the way it challenges the reader through categorical statements backed by inductive reasoning. Johnston combines concrete examples with conceptual analysis to provide prescriptive frameworks within which solutions can be found. What separates this book from most management books is its refreshing bold assertiveness.



In *Busting Bureaucracy*, Johnston is throwing down the gauntlet. In confronting the bureaucratic kings, his passion is his challenge: “I believe there is no legitimate reason for any public or private sector organization that aspires to quality products or customer-satisfying service to continue using the bureaucratic form.”

In the opening page memo to “My Boss,” one of the options you may select is “I was so excited about this book that I ordered a bunch

to pass around. Please read it and let’s talk.” Not only is this a good marketing technique, it is excellent advice. Take Johnston’s lead. Be bold and fire the first shot in your own organization. Do your customers, employees and owners a favour: make a gift of *Busting Bureaucracy* to your senior executives, and start building a customer driven organization today. Your company’s survival in the 1990s may depend on it.

About The Strategic Planning Group

The Strategic Planning Group (T.S.P.G.) is a full service consulting firm that can provide organizations with a wide range of advice, business tools and solutions. At T.S.P.G. our focus is on helping our clients solve their complex issues to realize their ultimate business potential, whether we are helping to set the overall strategy for the organization or assisting in a particular functional area. Our practical-results-oriented approach to solving business problems, combined with our personal commitment and dedication to providing great value for our clients, makes us the consultants of choice to blue-chip executives across North America.

We aspire to be more than just consultants. For us to be successful in helping you we need to understand how you operate and what challenges you are currently facing. We want to help you achieve your goals and your ultimate business potential. To accomplish this we must be trusted and objective advisors by contributing our knowledge, experience and thinking in ways that have a positive impact.

We want to be *your* consultants of choice – as we are for other senior executives – for all of your strategic business needs.

How to Reach Us

The Strategic Planning Group
258 Adelaide Street East, Suite 201
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1N1
Tel: (416) 366-4774 Fax: (416) 366-4775
www.tspg-consulting.com