inside:

MOTD
By Rob Kolstad
Regrettably, human nature and our culture being what it is, we’re more likely to observe reactions like:

“Rats, more stupid managers.”
“Oh no, now I’ll be even more of a cog in a machine.”
“These people have always been known to be bozos.”

Now why is that?
I am absolutely sure that some of these sorts of negative reactions are cultural – both organizational and occupational. Organizationally, they were de rigeur in the past and are perpetuated as each new employee acquires the company or career culture. In the occupational context, I know that as a trained engineer I can spot problems a mile away. Unfortunately, I have as much trouble as anyone convincing management that the problems truly exist and that appropriate resources (funding) should be devoted to attacking them. So, I tend to react negatively when I don’t think an idea’s creator (or even announcer) has thought through the “big picture.”

Is negativity just human nature? Is it a rational learned response/reaction to a long history of missed expectations in the engineering field?

Whatever it is, it is truly a pain if one believes that “vision” is important. Consider: “Let’s have a conference on XXX.” “Nah, no one will come.” That sounds contrived, I know. Here’s a real example I received an email last week from a 20 year old intern at a Large Computer Research Lab: He says in a meeting: “Let’s go ahead and sort the ten PC prices in our program.” They respond: “No, the database has optimized sorting algorithms. We don’t want to rewrite the database. Besides, it will take a long time to sort the numbers.”

Of course, sorting ten numbers is a sub-millisecond task. Amusingly, the note to me was entitled “I am working with idiots.” As it turns out, he was, in fact, working with idiots, as near as I can figure.

So I have a proposal for all of us. One of these days when the workload is no more stressful than usual and you feel like you have a slight excess of “good energy,” give it a try. For that day, see if “making your partner right” is a reasonable strategy. Support people’s ideas with your own constructive suggestions. Encourage them to apply themselves most fully in their visions and ideas. See if you can help them with your own style and expertise.

Let me know how it goes – I’ll publish the most interesting responses.