

Re: Ever heard of Potato Semiconductor?

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- *From:* bill.sloman@xxxxxxxx
 - *Date:* Tue, 8 Jul 2008 07:25:56 -0700 (PDT)
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On Jul 8, 8:08 am, "Michael A. Terrell" <mike.terr...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
wrote:

Joel Koltner wrote:

<bill.slo...@xxxxxxxx> wrote in message
news:a83c1ac6-b362-4459-b289-11756d6f22a6@xx
"He doesn't ever seem to have designed stuff for a
living, though he does claim to have fixed complicated gear from time
to time, which isn't quite the same thing."

I seem to recall that many of his "fixes" ended up making his employer's
product more reliable over time than they were when the engineers first let
them loose. That's the kind of guy who's worth even more than a regular old
design engineer...

Thanks, Joel. Bill doesn't seem to understand the difference between
prototypes built & tweaked in Engineering, VS the real world problems of
manufacturing and field support.

Dream on. When I was installing our first voltage contrast electron
microscope at Siemens, it turned out to be sitting in the next
laboratory to the third S.200 electron microscope ever shipped by
Cambridge Instruments, and I got a hard time about its defects, but
since I'd been dragged into the clean-up squad that had fixed the S.
200, I was able to get the factory to ship out the cleaned up lens
current controller board (where I'd found the worst bug and supervised
the layout changes that corrected it) and silenced the carping by
installing it in the S.200

I worked with a couple engineers like him, but I changed their bad attitudes.

Re: Ever heard of Potato Semiconductor?

I've worked with technicians who (correctly) thought that they were pretty good, but they didn't seem to feel the need to change my attitude. Some of the less good technicians didn't like me much, which didn't seem to worry their more competent colleagues at all.

It took a couple years, but after that they called me whenever something was up on any product I worked with. I also tracked problems on the production floor, and spotted trends long before they showed up in the quarterly statistics. With an attitude like Bill's I wasn't the least bit shy to storm into their office, slap some papers on their desk and tell them off, when they continued to screw up.

That did happen to me once or twice – the guy doing the storming had got it wrong in every case – but when I did screw up (which wasn't often) nobody seemed to get excited (probably because I used to walk through the final test area often enough that they didn't have to track me to my desk).

OTOH, I was discrete when a good engineer made a minor mistake. The engineers who were interested in product quality were a hell of a lot better than the ones with ego problems. :)

BTW, some of my ideas were adopted for custom equipment we built for the ISS. They also insisted that I work on the boards & modules for that equipment, because I wouldn't let anything leave my bench if I suspected a problem.

Right. You were a good technician, and – like most good technicians – you have an inflated idea of what you were worth. Good technicians are rare enough that they can get away with bullying the more junior engineers.

Keeping the good technicians happy was one of the senior engineers' jobs at Cambridge Instruments, and we listened to what they told us, ostentatiously took advantage of every useful suggestion we got and kept our mouths shut about the less good suggestions. When management used them for design work from time to time – it did happen – we had to provide quite a lot of unobtrusive support.

Hey, Bill! What is the DC voltage available on the ISS? How much bandwidth is available from the NASA Earth Stations to the ISS? What band is it on? I am as bad as you say, why was I on the team that built the hardware for the pair of European Space Agency Earth Stations, as well?

Re: Ever heard of Potato Semiconductor?

I know as much about what goes on with the international space station as you know about what goes on directly below the anode of electron microscope. If you wanted to answer an equally silly question you might tell me why we needed four separate alignment coils up there when we went over to lanthanum boride electron sources

Or you could tell me why a phased array diagnostic sonar machine needs a hyperbolic function generator. I designed a couple, and got one to work pretty well.

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Bill Sloman, Nijmegen

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