

**Review of *Bending Granite: 30+ true stories of leading change*
By Mosgaller, Cotter, Paris, Hallock & Williamson**

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The title of this book, *Bending Granite*, carries a metaphorical meaning. Granite is a hard and solid rock, a symbol of the status quo of how things get done in any organization. These practices and processes have been passed on from one successor to another over a long period of time. **“How we do things here” is so deeply rooted that it can be really difficult for anyone to change even when the status quo becomes outdated and needs improvement.**

In *Bending Granite: 30+ true stories of leading change* (ACTA Publishing, 2022), thirty contributors share their own stories of how they were faced with problems, what needed to be done, what sort of difficulties and failures they had, and how they tried to get approval or support from their staffs and those concerned to fix it. Their stories show how these leaders succeeded in creating positive change.

The types of organizations and fields are various: police, manufacturing, banking and insurance, private sector, military, city and state governments, non-profits, transportation, hospitality, K-12 and higher education, and healthcare. But one common thread is that all of them used some aspect of Deming’s TQM (Total Quality Management) and process improvement methods.

Dr. W. Edwards Deming (1900-1993), an American statistician, taught Japanese business leaders his management philosophy such as statistical quality control and customer focus. He helped Japan’s economy recover and develop after the defeat of World War II.

This review highlights several of the stories of how leaders used these principles to enhance quality, productivity, and success in their organizations over the course of three decades in and around Madison, Wisconsin.

The stories are organized by

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Purpose and Strategy | 5. Managing by Facts |
| 2. Customer Focus | 6. People, Culture, Community |
| 3. Systems Thinking | 7. Leadership |
| 4. Process Design and Improvement | |

Policing

The book starts with the contribution (same title as this book) from David C. Couper, who led the Madison Police Department for more than 20 years (1972-1993). He proved that it was possible to “bend granite....” (p. 15) with a successful transformation of the Madison Police Department using principles of quality and process improvement.

Deming’s Twelve Quality Principles Adapted for Leadership in Policing

1. Believe in, foster, and support teamwork.
2. Be committed to the problem-solving process; use it and let data, not emotions, drive decisions.
3. Seek employees’ input before you make key decisions.
4. Believe that the best way to improve the quality of work or service is to ask and listen to employees who are doing the work.
5. Strive to develop mutual respect and trust among employees.
6. Have a customer orientation and focus toward both employees and residents and businesses.
7. Manage the behavior of 95 percent of employees and not the 5 percent who cause problems. Deal with the 5 percent promptly and fairly.
8. Improve systems and examine processes before placing blame on people.
9. Avoid top-down power-oriented decision-making whenever possible
10. Encourage creativity through risk-taking and be tolerant of honest mistakes.
11. Develop an open atmosphere that encourages providing and accepting feedback.
12. Use teamwork to develop agreed-upon goals with employees, and a plan to achieve them (p. 11).

From: *The New Quality Leadership Workbook for Police* (Couper and Lebitz, 2015)

Mr. Couper did three things using Deming's principles. First, he tried to bring educated women and minorities into a 300-employee organization of nearly all-white, all-male high-school grads (There was only one black officer). He offered higher pay and recruited across the country.

Second, he regarded members of the community as "customers" and personally sent out a "customer feedback" form to persons identified in every 50th case number randomly. Receivers of that form included those who had been arrested and jailed.

Third, he spent a month working side-by-side with front-line officers on all the shifts because he believed that organizational transformations must have a totally supportive leader who is truly committed and seen to "walk the talk" (p. 15).

By doing these things, he created a force that was community and problem-solving oriented and which avoided militarization of police, even in the times of fighting the Vietnam "War at Home."

His transformational work endures. A recent article in [Madison's Cap Times](#) said, "Madison officers mentored by Couper remains evident 53 years after his 1972 hiring."

#DavidCCouper #Modern Policing #PoliceForce #Leadership
#ProcessImprovement #ChangeManagement

Insurance

Bending Granite includes cases of private companies. Jim St. Vincent, Vice President of Human Resources of American Family Insurance (retired), shared his experience in "From Fast Follower to Industry Leader." His company had traditionally followed State Farm and had gotten used to being No.2. However, after the company officially infused the principles and approaches of quality improvement into its management strategy, it grew by leaps and bounds and is now a leader in the industry.

The company launched three small test projects after its leaders attended a Deming seminar: cash handling, phone responses to customer calls, and claim-handling processes. Those projects brought about changes in the understanding and attitude of participating front-line employees who served external and internal customers every day.

At the end of the test projects, the teams had a rare chance to present their improvement proposals to the CEO who approved them and led the top-down effort to transform both strategy and culture. Mr. Vincent quotes Peter Drucker's "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." He challenged that idea, insisting that strategy should drive the culture, and cultural change is intentional, strategic, and aligned among leaders.

#Jim_St_Vincent #Insurance #AmericanFamilyInsurance #ProcessImprovement #OrganizationalCulture #Leadership #Change Management

Moving and Storage

Ben Reynolds generously shares what he learned about implementing change in "You Get What You Measure." After returning to his family's moving company, Reynolds Transfer and Storage, in 2011, he introduced an electronic calendar for scheduling the company fleet of vehicles and personnel.

Though he had provided staff training, months later, no one was using the calendaring software. He learned that an influential manager who didn't know how to use the system had ignored it and told others to do so. By sitting face-to-face with the manager, showing him the benefits and helping him learn how to use it, he got his support. It is one thing, Mr. Reynolds observed, to have strong computer skills oneself and another to enable users to accept and learn how to use new software systems.

Several years later, he wanted to end the practice of paper-filing, but found employees using paper in spite of a new electronic document repository. Mr. Reynolds learned this was because the staff used physical form (paper) as a visual to-do list and a tool for communications.

He officially apologized for his lack of understanding of what employees needed to do their work. Based on how they used the information, a different software was selected that met staff needs and which is in use today.

#BenReynolds #MovingandStorage #Transportation #SoftwareImplementation
#UserNeeds #ProcessImprovement #Leadership #ChangeManagement

Healthcare

As a leader, putting yourself in others' shoes is essential. Dave Gustafson, Director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Health Enhancement Systems Studies, writes about his experiment of "Walk-Throughs" in "From Paths to Recovery to NIATx."

He stayed overnight at a detox and an impatient facility in Madison and New York respectively. His aim was to know what it was like to be heroin-addicted and seeking help. His experiences and findings would be used for a nation-wide program to improve processes in addiction treatment agencies. As a patient, he was told there was no room, but that he should call back once a week to see if they had room. Each time he called, he was greeted with only a voice recording, "Leave a message," no identifier. Seven weeks later he "got in." "He urged CEOs to do a "walk-through" and get "admitted" to treatment in their own agency to get a real sense of the quality of their service.

He and his colleague scoured the literature on organizational change and looked for commonalities in successful organizations. They discovered six fundamental principles (p.32) and used them to improve treatment facilities.

Common Principles and Practices in Successful Organizations

1. Deeply, deeply, deeply understand your customer.
2. Show how your improvement project can help the CEO achieve one of his/her organizational goals.
3. Put an irresistibly influential person in charge of the improvement team.
4. Get ideas for improvement by looking at the work of others successfully doing the same thing, but in other industries.
5. Run a series of small but very fast pilot tests, each building on what you learned from the previous one, until you get it right. (**Until then, you're only trying stuff;** now you are ready to make a change.)
6. Don't collect a lot of data and don't use existing data. Pick one or two things to measure and measure them well and anew.

#DaveGustafson #NIATx #AddictionTreatment #CustomerFocus
#ProcessImprovement #PilotTests #Leadership #ChangeManagement

Walk-Throughs

In “Walk in Their Shoes,” Tom Mosgaller, Quality and Productivity Director in the City of Madison (retired), shares a similar experiment of doing a “walk-through” in a mental health provider’s facility, pretending to be an uncle who accompanied his nephew Brian, a client who had threatened to kill himself with a gun.

On their arrival, they found that the front entrance was under renovation, and there was yellow plastic crime scene tape without any warning signs. At the dimly lit reception area, there was no staff to welcome a patient, and only a blue piece of paper that said, “If you have been here more than 30 minutes, inform the receptionist.” **Their experience in the waiting room was dismal and “the patient” bolted after waiting almost an hour.** Mr. Mosgaller let the executive director know these and other facts from their experience. Improvement efforts kicked off immediately.

#TomMosgaller #MentalHealth #LeadershipInMentalHealth #WalkThrough
#Leadership #ProcessImprovement #ChangeManagement

Banking

Jim Bradley, CEO of Home Saving Bank, writes in “Banking on Quality” that **repeating what was done before is not always the right response in a dynamic world and business environment.** He makes a distinction between a person’s *skills* and *strengths*. The latter is an area of natural interests, personal inquiry and learning and activities that are energizing and fulfilling. He tried to explore employees’ strengths through one-on-one discussions. He found such dialogue the most meaningful and respectful work-related conversation and quite useful in aligning position responsibilities of his employees.

Mr. Bradley also served on boards of such community-based non-profit organizations as the Madison Area Quality Improvement Network (MAQIN) and Sustain Dane. MAQIN, formally incorporated, focused on leadership for quality management and process improvement while the non-profit Sustain Dane, founded in 1999, led the commitment for sustainability.

#JimBradley #Banking #Leadership_in_Banking #Leadership #Management
#ChangeManagement #One_on_One_EmployeeMeetings

Karen Crossley also mentions Sustain Dane in her story of the EcoTeams movement in “One Family at a Time.” She shared its mantra, **“We believe that change happens when inspired people take action” (p. 255).**

#KarenCrossley #EcoTeams #SustainDane

Manufacturing & Production

In “Trouble with Ant Bait,” **Dave Boyer describes how employees solved an unacceptable 5% defect rate in ant bait cubes at his Placon Corp.** which provided the product for S.C. Johnson. A team of line workers studied the problem and found out that differences in the speeds of two machines (*extruder* and *knife*) caused the variation in the cubes’ size. After the Revolutions-Per-Minute of those two machines were synced up, the problem was fixed.

Mr. Boyer writes, “When quality problems came up, we could enable

employees to collect data at various points along the production line, analyze the data, determine the cause of variation, change the process, and monitor the results (the Plan-Do-Check-Act system)” p. 137.

He also proposes a change in the healthcare payment system from the current *volume* of service (the sicker their patients are, the more money service providers make) to *value* where providers are rewarded for maintaining patients’ health.

#DaveBoyer #Placon #PlasticsManufacturing #EmployeeInput
#ProcessImprovement #Leadership #ChangeManagement

City Government

As an employee of a local government in Japan, I read keenly the cases of the quality improvement in the public sector where **“a rather small problem becomes a big problem much faster than it does in the private sector”** (p. 169).

I introduce here six stories from City of Madison government: four from former city officials and two from former mayors. Madison, the capital of the State of Wisconsin, has a population of about 170,000 and hosts the University of Wisconsin-Madison (42,000 students). The City Hall has 3,000 employees working in 30 departments, and 14 labor unions.

City Vehicle Repair Process

Michael Williamson, one of four assistants to Mayor Joe Sensenbrenner shares his experience of introducing Deming’s theory to government in “Never Waste a Crisis.” It was vehicular repair crisis. In 1983, it took 9.5 days on average to get a broken-down city vehicle (725 annually) repaired and back to the divisions in charge such as Police, Park, Sanitations, and so on. At that time, there were only translations of Japanese private sector implementation examples to learn from and no one had tried these techniques in government, not even in Japan.

Mayor Sensenbrenner decided to support this method to address the backlog crisis. Bill Hunter, a statistics professor at the University of Wisconsin-

Madison, was called in and had a frank discussion with a garage foreman and union leader, Terry Holmes. **Department heads assumed that the delays were caused by union mechanics being “lazy.” This assumption turned out to be wrong** after the improvement team learned that the complex purchasing and ordering process was the main reason for the delay. After their efforts, they reduced the downtime to 48 hours, reduced 28 steps for purchasing for repair parts to 7, and saved \$750,000.

The epilogue of Dr. Hunter’s funeral in 1987 helped me imagine how Dr. Hunter earned the trust of those mechanics in the First Street Garage and became a partner for improvement.

Mr. Williamson shared six lessons learned.

Leadership Lessons from Process Improvement

1. For every complex problem, there is a simple solution. But it is almost always wrong. In this case, it was pouring money in to hire more mechanics.
2. A crisis is definitely an opportunity with lots of cracks. Use that crack to create a different future. The stakes in city hall were high on this one, but that’s what made the situation an opportunity.
3. The 85/15 rule exists. It suggests that only 15% of the improvement opportunities rest in the hands of the workers, while 85% reside with management who have the power and the ability to control the process. Deming said it was 94/6.
4. In God we trust; all others must get good data. One of the primary tenets of quality and process improvement is, “The data will set you free.” The improvement team collected solid information before, during, and after the improvement effort.
5. Watch for unnecessary approval steps that slow processes.
6. Ask and then listen to the line employees because they understand the process better than any manager.

#Michael Williamson #UrbanVehicleRepair #Process Improvement #Leadership
#Change Management

The Urban Forest

Guy Van Rensselaer introduces another challenge the City of Madison faced in “The Urban Forest.” How to trim timely 90,000 Terrace trees, and 50,000 trees in 200 parks, and how to collect disposables after storms? Two city units—the Forest Unit in charge of tree maintenance and the Streets & Sanitation Unit which is responsible for picking up brush after storms—each established improvement teams of employees.

Both teams reviewed their own assumptions, which had become “knowledge” without being verified. By experimenting, the Streets and Sanitation team learned that garbage trucks which had historically been used to collect branches and brush were the *least* efficient way to do this. The Forest Unit learned that they needed to do a better job of educating citizens. This led to providing up-to-date information about the state of the trees in the neighborhood and the city, and educating citizens about trees through various methods such as one-on-one meetings, flyers and brochures.

#Guy Van Rensselaer #UrbanForest #ProcessImprovement #SystemsThinking
#ChangeManagement

Community and Convention Center

In “The Shirtless Dancer Guy,” Connie Thompson, Executive Director of Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, describes her experiences of opening and operating the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center. It was designed originally by Frank Lloyd Wright, and its construction had narrowly been approved by referendum (51% vs. 49%).

This facility hosted 1,051 events and served 361,000 participants in the first year of operation, 1988. Her team worked together to get through the hectic period, and as a result, customer satisfaction was 98% and the rebooking rate was 61%. From the retailing field, she knew how to help

staffers get on board and the importance of customer feedback.

Still, there were challenges and issues to be resolved. Room set-up accuracy and consistency was one of the most difficult problems. Tom Mosgaller from the Mayor's office came to teach the staff how to use Plan-Do-Check-Act to fix the problem. It took a year to get all of the systems, policies and procedures and training in place, **but room set up was no longer "Morning Madness."** Thus, quality improvement processes were initiated at Monona Terrace and produced results—not only customer satisfaction, but also employee satisfaction remain high.

#Connie Thompson #Hospitality #ConferenceCenterManagement
#Leadership #ProcessImprovement #ChangeManagement.

Two former competitive mayors share their own experiences and views in the final chapter "Leadership" of this book.

Mayor Joe Sensenbrenner

In "It All Came Together," Madison Mayor Joe Sensenbrenner (served 1983-1989) elaborates how the city of Madison adapted TQM and garnered a reputation for remarkable achievement and success in the city's services and projects. He attended a two-day Deming seminar on the second day soon after being sworn-in. This was at the request of his assistant, David Miller, who had attended it on the first day. The mayor was impressed with the approach and decided to adopt **TQM philosophy in the city government, the first trial in the world.** In the first five years of his six-year tenure, hundreds of employees engaged in a process improvement team.

Nevertheless, writes Tom Mosgaller who was hired by Mayor Sensenbrenner despite his lack of experience in government and who was introduced as a "Quality and Productivity guru," **not all the managers in Madison City Hall open-heartedly welcomed their new mayor and his ambitious ideas.**

In “Good Enough for Government Work,” Mr. Mosgaller says that on his first day, one of the department heads said, “Mayors come and go. They each have their pet projects. This Quality and Productivity thing is one of this mayor’s projects, so as a department head I play along...Just don’t expect anything to change, guru. The buck stops here with the department heads. **We make and break mayors**” (p. 245).

This duplicitous attitude (pretending to obey, but betraying in the end) may represent the common feeling of public officials when they have a new boss.

Still resilient, Mr. Mosgaller held over 200 one-to-one meetings with department heads, leaders of 14 labor unions, city council members, middle managers, and front-line workers. He asked many questions in order to learn about them and their work. In the end, he helped many projects including the Monona Terrace work mentioned above to succeed. He continued to work for the city even after Mayor Sensenbrenner left in 1989.

#JoeSensenbrenner #CityGovernment #Leadership #ProcessImprovement
#ChangeManagement

Mayor Paul Soglin

You may wonder what the next mayor did about the quality improvement programs. Madison Mayor Paul Soglin (1973-1979, 1989-1997, 2011-2019) offers his own perspectives in “The Harambee Collaboration.” **Harambee is a Swahili (Kenyan) word meaning “All pull together” and was used as a symbolic name of his major project:** providing public healthcare for poor non-white residents including pregnant women in south Madison.

He recalls a meeting with Dr. Deming and TQM-committed department heads including Police Chief David Couper during his two-week transition period that included 125 appointments. Though he supported quality improvement principles such as using data to make decisions and listening

to the people who do the work, he felt overly pushed to go ahead with TQM programs. The meeting ended disastrously because he said he didn't receive the data he needed. He was suspicious of TQM and halted any new improvement initiatives while allowing ongoing projects to continue. After an audit showed that most TQM projects in the previous three years were successful, he came to trust Mr. Mosgaller.

Mayor Soglin was focused on poverty and race. He tried to reduce racial inequity in the southside of the city by helping nonwhites who were living below the poverty line. He and Pat Gadow, a retired Navy Lieutenant nurse and Director of the Department of Public Health, found that institutions that had provided health care service were all white, male-led, and they did not have the trust of communities of color.

After "*listening to the customer*" (women of color, south Madison alderman, and community and church leaders), the City decided to establish a community healthcare facility on the southside in the heart of Madison's lowest income areas, in the midst of the city's largest black population and the growing Southeast Asian and Latino communities.

The staff committed themselves to respect and serve their customers (patients), and the community leaders inspired "*trust* needed to attract those fearful patients" (p. 332). After some twists and turns, the City received federal funds and cooperation from the UW Hospital and other hospitals and clinics for staffing for Harambee.

It was reported that Dane County's African American infant mortality rate sharply declined in 1998. **It continued to fall as low as the majority infant mortality rate** in 2002. In spite of these positive outcomes, after Mayor Soglin left office, the city government stopped funding this project, and the healthcare organization was disbanded in 2009. He ends his contribution with "...Leadership transition—whether fueled by ignorance or neglect—has an even more debilitating impact on unempowered communities that are not in a position to determine their own future" (p. 333).

A new Harambee Village opened in 2014 after he returned to the City Hall for

the third time in 2011.

#PaulSoglin #MinorityHealthcare #Harambee #CustomerFocus #Leadership
#Change Management #Collaboration

Higher Education

As an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison where I had the privilege of taking Mr. Soglin's Advanced Public Administration class at the LaFollette School of Public Affairs, reading Maury Cotter's contribution "Pull v. Push," renewed my respect for my alma mater.

Hired from the non-academic world as the first Director of the Office of Quality Improvement, Ms. Cotter used a *pull* strategy instead of *push* approach. As she describes it, **a *push* involves directing, requiring, judging, but a *pull* involves inspiring, inviting, clearing paths and even incentivizing through recognition.** Not challenging academic sacred tradition, she rather played the role of a facilitator, connecting key players. For example, she created "Chair Chats" where department chairs could share problems and solutions.

Ms. Cotter offers a comprehensive description of numerous improvement projects under three great chancellors: Donna Shalala (1988-1993), David Ward (1993-2001), and John Wiley (2001-2008).

Graduate School Admission Process

John Wiley, who was named by Chancellor Shalala as dean of the Graduate School in 1989, writes of his experience in applying Deming's improvement methods to the problem of a very long decision process in "Working 99 to 5."

About 15,000 people applied each year for the Graduate School, but some of the best and brightest chose other universities partly because of the lengthy admission process averaging 99 days. Dean Wiley approved the improvement team's recommendation to eliminate the unnecessary process of manually calculating GPAs from all the institutions applicants had ever attended after high school and to ease the requirement for multiple transcripts to requiring only

those from the last two years. As a result, UW-Madison shortened the period for the Graduate School application decision process from 99 days to five days.

#JohnWiley #MauryCotter #HigherEducation #ChangeManagement
#GraduateSchoolAdmissionsProcess #ProcessImprovement #Leadership
Bursar Services

Chancellor Shalala regarded students as customers, so when **she saw a line of students outside waiting in a long line to pay their tuition**, she immediately directed the Bursar's office to solve the problem. Its employee team used quality improvement tools to streamline the payment process.

Time-to-Degree

UW-Madison shortened the Time-to-degree (TTD) from six years to less than four years for an undergraduate degree using process improvement. TTD was a big issue nationwide, and **UW-Madison took a systems-improvement approach across multiple-fronts** including "...advising, timetables, addition of classes in gateway courses, residential halls as learning communities, summer orientation, policies that protected space for freshmen in key courses, etc." (p. 234).

#HigherEducation #Time to Degree #SystemsThinking #ProcessImprovement
#Change Management #Leadership

Academic Department Administrative Operations

The History Department improved its administrative operations using process improvement. The department staff had been notoriously problematic with a high rate of turnover for over 20 years. Each staff member did his or her own job separately such as scheduling classrooms, managing hiring, document production, budgeting, advising, etc. **If one of the staff was on vacation, his or her work was on vacation too.**

Ms. Cotter worked with Department Chair Ken Sacks to enable the staff to work together as a team, transforming how they provided administrative

support to the department. The improvements included establishing systems, streamlining processes, identifying backups for critical functions, updating position descriptions, redesigning office space, and leveling workload peaks and valleys. Their results became a model for other departments.

#AcademicDepartmentAdministration #Department Chair #HigherEducation
#CultureChange #ChangeManagement #ProcessImprovement #Leadership

After talking with Department Chair Sacks, Warren Porter, Chair of the Zoology Department, which had two distinct faculty groups at odds with each other, led planning and improvement efforts by focusing first on guiding principles and strategy. The Department defined its shared identity and aims which strengthened the academic missions of education and research, resulting in across-the-board collaboration.

#AcademicDepartments #GuidingPrinciples

Cross-Disciplinary Cluster Hires

“Cluster Hires” is the achievement of Chancellor David Ward. In this innovative model, three or four faculty from different disciplines would be hired together to form a “cluster” focused on a particular complex problem or emerging issue. **He invited departments to submit proposals in collaboration with other departments for faculty to research new areas of knowledge that crossed disciplines.** Those selected would receive three to four new faculty lines to share. Thus, with this model, he created competition for new faculty appointments and engaged faculty in inter-disciplinary collaboration.

#DavidWard #FacultyHiring #Innovation #CultureChange
#CrossDisciplinaryResearch

Epilogue

Reading this book reminds me of the Grand Canyon where I visited in the summer of 1999. A continuous flow of the Colorado River for millions of years created a crack and schism and shaved and changed the shape of the stones or rocks, resulting in the marvelous landscape today which attracts millions of sightseers every year.

I personally believe that accumulation of small improvement efforts will ultimately bear fruit, keeping in mind that there is always room for improvement. I also agree that “...we need others in order to be successful ourselves” as described in “Disaster at the Ritzy Restaurant” by Kathleen A. Paris (p. 263).

Special thanks to the editors of *Bending Granite* for compiling those 30+stories that took place over three decades, organized by important themes. The methods for improvement and change management described in these stories are robust and essential for addressing today’s complex problems. I appreciated the stimulating “Questions for Reflection and Discussion” after each story which let me think deeply and widely.

#FumihiroOno #Leadership #Process Improvement #Change Management

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