

Thomas motor company case study



John Thomas is the Managing Director of the Thomas Motor Company. He succeeded to the position of Managing Director after his father's untimely death in May 1978. Martin Thomas, the founder of the Thomas Motor Company, started off as an apprentice mechanic in a suburban area of Melbourne when he was only eighteen working as an assistant to Fred Luthans. Martin learnt all he knew about automechanics from him. He was a keen and enthusiastic learner and Luthans like people like that. He saw a lot of potential in Martin and once remarked to a fellow worker after Martin completed a job in record time, " That kid is going to be someone someday. By the age of twenty-one, Martin had become one of the fastest and most skilful mechanics that Luthans had taught. Five years later, Martin opened up his own garage in Geelong, a city 70kms west of Melbourne. With his natural knack for automechanics, Martin's small business prospered until it became the Thomas Motor Company we know today. It had been taken for granted that John Thomas would one day succeed his father as Managing Director of the Company. Martin was conscious of this and he wanted John to have a solid background in automechanics. He thus sent John off to a technical school.

He did not want John to be taking on a job which would be beyond his capacities and training when he took over the business. The company's office was based in downtown Geelong, but the workshop was situated some distance away on the outskirts of town. Working in the workshop were the six mechanics employed in the business. Steve Robbins, aged forty-five, the foreperson in charge of the workshop, was a veteran at the Thomas Motor Company. He had been Martin's long time friend and had been with the

company since the day it was formed. He was the most experienced and skilled worker there.

Robbins basically did some administrative work besides the usual tasks at the workshop. He was the one who sorted out the work of the other mechanics, although there was no formal job description for his job. Robbins was an informal sort of leader. He would often join in the fun with the others and treated them as his equal. Everyone at the workshop was a member of a closely knit group and there was little need for Robbins to keep them in line. The atmosphere suited him extremely well. Bob Johnson, aged thirty-four, was the next most senior mechanic on the floor.

He had been with the company for the last fifteen years, and in many ways was considered a veteran too. Like Robbins, he was fast and very competent in his job. Dick Kelly, aged thirty, had been with the company for the last ten years. He was just as skilful as both Robbins and Johnson, but lacked the years of experience which made the two men faster. Jim Richards, aged twenty-one, was the only apprentice in the workshop. The workshop was at the moment short of one mechanic. The last one, Dave Hines, had left for Melbourne, preferring the glamour of a bigger city.

His unexpected departure left the workshop one man short. As mechanics were not easy to come by, Robbins decided to train a mechanic himself. Richards, therefore, was supposed to learn, while helping either Robbins, Johnson or Kelly. He had been in the workshop for the last year. Finally, there was Ralph Turner, aged thirty-six, and a newcomer to the workshop. Hired three months, Turner had been working for his father at the Turner

Workshop. The Turner Workshop had initially handled their won trucks and some trucks from other firms. Lately, however, the Turner contracts with several firms had expired.

The firms refused to enter into new contracts. Soon Turner found that his workshop was in fact operating at a loss. This was due to the fact that they were only servicing their own trucks. Eventually, Turner senior decided to close down the workshop and signed a contract with Thomas Motor Company to service his trucks. This, however, left Turner without a job. Turner thus approached Robbins and asked him if there was a vacancy for a mechanic in his workshop. As Richards was still a novice, and since the workshop really needed another mechanic, Richards agreed and Turner was hired.

In the beginning, Robbins has told Turner about the way in which things were done around the place. Turner seemed very understanding and accommodating. He seemed quite happy and enthusiastic about his newly found job. This was despite the fact that he was the second lowest paid worker there. The pay was calculated by computer, based on both seniority and skill. Turner, of course, lost out on seniority, but he appeared not to mind this. Robbins thought that it was probably because he felt lucky to even have a job. The workshop opens at 8 am daily and the mechanics are assigned jobs by Robins.

At 10: 00 am there is an unofficial coffee-break where the entire crew would go across the street for a cup of coffee. This is looked upon as a social gathering, where the men would get to know each other better. Being an unofficial coffee-break, it is agreed that anyone who does not complete his

first job by 10: 00 am has to forego his coffee-break for the day. Now, Turner seemed to constantly miss his coffee breaks. Although skilful, he was not as fast as either, Johnson, Kelly or Robbins. During his first three weeks there, he only managed to attend one coffee-break.

By the end of the fourth week, trouble was brewing. Turner had become quite alienated and dissatisfied with his job. He tried to hurry through his work so that he could make it to these social gatherings. Also, he did not want to appear to be the slowest around. His hast, however, led to one of the trucks which he repaired breaking down because of a faulty gasket. Hearing about this, Robbins spoke to Turner in his usual mild-mannered fashion. He basically advised Turner to be more careful with his work and to take his time. Turner acknowledged this with an unfriendly shrug of his shoulders.

Over the next few days, Turner's dissatisfaction grew even more as he tried to hurry his work, yet making an effort to be careful. Unfortunately, he still missed his coffee-breaks. At lunch, he chose not to associate with the rest of the crew and there was little communication between him and the others.

Sooner Turner began complaining about various things. He went up to Robbins and told him that the workshop was too dirty. So dirty, that he found it hard to work in it. Robbins tried to explain to Turner that they were understaffed at the moment and, besides, workshops were naturally dirty.

Turner responded by saying, ' It was always clean at my father's workshop'.

Not long after that incident, Turner complained about the noise from the loudspeakers. The mean had always worked with the radio on so that they could keep up with the football and baseball scores. Turner once shouted, "

Turn off that damn thing, willya? How's a man supposed to work in this kind of noise? " By this time the rest of the men had quite enough of Turner and his temperamental behaviour. They ostracised turner from their activities, which led him to believe that they were talking about him behind his back.

One thing led to another, and things gradually wend from bad to worse.

Turner started spying on the others when they worked on his father's trucks and he also complained about Richards to Robbins. Turner told Robbins that Richards was more concerned about going off for the coffee-break and was not at all interested in his work or learning from Turner. These two incidents led the others to dislike Turner even more. His spying on them implied his suspicions that they were not doing their work properly. This insulted the mean.

Gradually, Turner became bolder about his suspicions, and constantly lurked around his father's trucks. He insisted that he, and only he, should work on the Turner trucks. Robbins replied that, that was quite impossible, for sometimes two or three Turner trucks were in at the same time. Turner's reply was that he would work on as many of them as he possibly could. As a result of all these commotions, Turner's competence as a mechanic fell drastically. He seemed to be more careless in his jobs and paid little attention to work other than that on his fathers' trucks.

The final show-down came when one of the trucks which Turner had worked on broke down again. This time the front axle was dislocated. Turner had apparently not tightened the nut properly. The accident could have been fatal if the driver had been driving at a faster speed. To make matters worse,

the truck belonged to the same owner of the truck which had broken down before. Robbins got an ultimatum. The following day, John Thomas paid an impromptu visit to the workshop. There he met the staff and Robbins took the opportunity to relate what had happened to Thomas.

Robbins mentioned that Turner had reached the point where he would do more harm than good to the company, but on the other hand, the Turner account was quite a large one. Firing Turner would mean losing the Turner account, and thus quite a substantial amount of business. But Robbins quickly added, ' If we don't fire him, he may be the cause of us losing even more accounts. I'd prefer to lose one account, large though it may be, but still remain in business, rather than keep one substantial account and eventually go bankrupt.