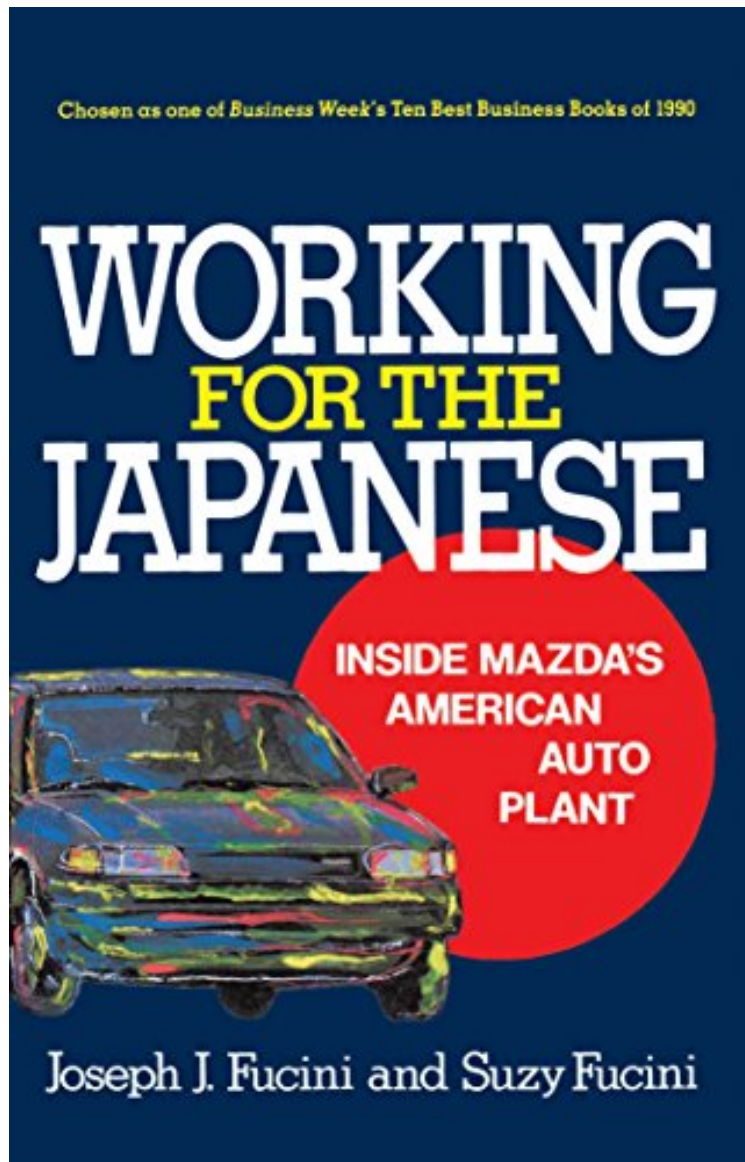


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Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda's American Auto Plant

Joseph J. Fucini

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Joseph J. Fucini : Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda's American Auto Plant before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda's American Auto Plant:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss...?By GrubgoatI really enjoyed this book, it was well written, and also pretty evenly balanced toward both sides. I worked at the Flat Rock plant for about 3 years ('03 to '06, maybe?), so there was some personal interest for me. I'd heard the stories from the original workers, but the stories were 15 years old, and the plant had obviously changed in that time. The main line is

STILL an ass-kicker, I turned into stone on that line, but I know full well that it was harder when the Japanese ran the show. I didn't get the feeling that the author of this book actually got to go inside the plant. Unit 15 is literally a giant Hamster Wheel, the entire floor rolls along with the cars, and you step on the moving platform to do your work, then step back and run back to your starting point. After a week of this, I went to step into my shower one night and almost fell over, because the bathroom was "moving" just like the line did. Sitting on the couch watching TV, the TV would seem to "move" right to left. I also felt like the early chapters of the book laid out some great local history, as well as a bigger picture of the automotive industry at the time. What was most interesting to me is that all the arguments and complaints and issues discussed in this book printed in 1992 are the EXACT same as the headlines and commentaries in a current newspaper of 2016. I'd really like to see an update to this book, to really see and understand the aftermath of all of this (as I said, I know some of these people personally, and there's a lot more to the story than what the authors had access to). One of the issues (and the Japanese really come off as arrogant and childish here) to me is this idea that the Team System and "kaizen" was somehow going to do away with the need for a Union, they'd found the Magic Elixir, and frankly it's so simple and obvious, Why can't you silly Americans see it? And what they really found, was that the Union comes to exist for a very REAL reason. In fact, what happened at this plant was a complete replaying of the original birth of Organized Labor. Henry Ford II said that "Mass Production by its very nature creates conflicts of interests that Unions are needed to address". And it's true. Given free rein, a major corporation WILL try to take absolute advantage of its workers, and even of itself - it can't help itself. For instance, the Team Leader position is a VERY POWERFUL position, both today and also when this book was written (but he's just an hourly guy, nothing special). The book illustrates how the Team Leader could cancel worker's days off or not accept a Doctor's note on a whim. Conversely, if you're in good with the Team Leader, you can get away with crazy stuff. Mazda appointed Team Leaders, and quickly they realized how to profit off and prey on the workers under them. By the time I was at Flat Rock, Team Leaders were voted in. This changed the game completely - rather than playing favorites, the Team Leader had to at least appease EVERYONE on the line, and I met MANY GREAT Team Leaders there, because they took care of everyone, and had done so for years (thus they kept getting voted in). They made whole thing flow easily. Newsflash, today Ford is systematically eliminating voting on Team Leaders from ALL its plants. Because they want to control the workers, and pass jobs out like favors, which is exactly how it's done. The spoken goal of "teams" is to level the field, it actually makes it less level, unless checked. Like the young workers that Mazda recruited, you start out wanting to believe the mantra about "Teamwork" and "We're a Family" and "Quality", but the second that the company needs to screw you (or has a part shortage and needs to run junk parts) then all the cooperative language starts to get twisted and manipulated. You tow the line and try to make it work; but having given them the inch, they WILL go after the rest of the mile. Eventually, Conflict is inevitable, in fact it is REQUIRED, in order to push the company back to a balanced level that you were supposed to be on all the time, because we're "Partners". I'm not describing my personal "philosophy" here, I'm describing a natural progression that I've witnessed myself, you can disagree with it all you want but as Mazda has proven to us again it is inevitable. I don't mean that War is inevitable. I mean that the dichotomy of "Salaried" vs "Hourly" workers will always create these conflicts. The salaried people consider themselves superior to the "unskilled" hourly, but also they need the hourly, because they sure as hell can't do the work themselves - that's why they got their degrees in the first place, to avoid being one of us "low monkeys". Mazda arrogantly thought its Production System was superior, and even as it failed miserably, they refused to "Kaizen" the thing, which was the WHOLE POINT of their philosophy. Their New Improved system was nothing more than the same abuse of power and trust and goodwill that the early Auto Industry created, Mazda just put a new name on it and made some Buzz Words up, and everyone sucked it up because they weren't around for it the first time. The Big Three even created their own "Production Systems" to copy the Japanese models; NOT because they believed in them, but because that's what Wall Street wanted to hear, "we're copying the Japanese". But in reality, all the Japanese seem to have had was a Native Populace that didn't mind working in near-slavery, that's their culture. They didn't have Great Ideas, they had weak-minded pliable spineless drones that they were extorting from callously, and these drones had been being programmed literally since birth. But in the end the almighty all-knowing Mazda just couldn't hold on, and the Flat Rock plant is all Ford now, all the hype was just that, Hype. This book really should be read more widely, there are GREAT lessons in here, and as usual most people won't learn them. I have no doubt that in another 10 years or so the next "New Idea" will be coming, and a LOT of hardworking eager young workers will get trapped up in this exact same way again. Great book. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Disappointing Ending By Toshio Fukuhara Among those celebrated Japanese auto makers in the US, the author picked Mazda, because it is the only unionized Japanese transplant with reasons. This book starts out with nothing but a prize on Mazda's management and production systems, filled with the Mazda's official lines and a stereo type commonly associated with Toyota. It reads like one of those PR books for the Japanese automotive company, which made me wonder whether I should continue reading further. There are reasons why Mazda lags way behind Toyota, Honda, Nissan and Suzuki, and it all sounded too good for Mazda. Then the reality check starts. The author starts describing in detail how Mazda's system proven in Japan failed to work in Michigan the way it intended. The real value of this book lies in this reality check, which occupies about the two thirds of this book. Simply put, despite the cooperation of

local UAW, the Mazda's production system could not be transferred to Michigan as such, because it relies so heavily on the Japanese way of life where you find virtually no single mom and the wives - who tend to be full time home makers - take on the entire family responsibility so that their husbands can devote their entire time and career, if necessary and expected, for the success of their employers. But the author ran out of time. In two years that the author took to cover the developments, Mazda Flat Rock Plant remained in difficulties and kept making compromises with no improvement in sight. The book ends abruptly when all parties involved are still complaining at each other. It could well be that the author could not afford to continue covering the further developments before the plant started to show positive results. This book fails to cover how Mazda Flat Rock Plant eventually overcame their difficulties. This is where the lessons could have been learned. I wish the same author would cover how Ford has taken over Mazda's entire management and preformed to bail it out. Ford's experience with Mazda exhibits a sharp contrast to Renault's undertaking with Nissan, which has come back strongly under the French leadership.

This book is an exploration into the relations between Americans and Japanese at the Mazda-Flat Rock plant. The presence of Japan Inc. looms larger than ever for millions of American managers and workers, as hundreds of Japanese companies open plants and offices in local communities across the United States. What is it like to work for the Japanese? Can Americans, with their strong tradition of individualism, adjust to a Japanese "team system" that emphasizes harmony and close cooperation? How do Americans and Japanese resolve the misunderstandings that arise from differences in language and culture? Journalists Joseph and Suzy Fucini sought the answers by studying relations between Americans and Japanese at the Mazda plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, the first wholly-owned Japanese auto plant to employ a unionized American workforce. For three years, the Fucinis followed events at the plant, interviewing more than one hundred workers, managers and outside suppliers. The authors conclude that for all its strengths, the team system requires the sacrifice of individual interests to the good of the group, and that no matter how hard an individual tries to become part of the Mazda team, advancement for both managers and workers will be limited by the fact that they are not Japanese.

From the Back Cover This book is the product of two years of research and over 150 interviews with workers and managers at the Mazda-Flat Rock plant, UAW representatives, state and local government officials, and residents of the Downriver area.