

OH floats an idea

*In which ... Our Hero displays his
new ideas to someone who
usually knows better ...*

The Nun often noticed OH having coffee with Mike, one of the older cruisers, at a local bakery shop where Vi met with other young professionals from the company (the bakery provided cappuccinos and bran muffins for such folk). There was plenty of coffee available in the cruising area, so Vi eventually wondered what was going on, but was a little reluctant to ask OH. “Simple solution”, she thought, “I will just ask the cruiser about it”. Cruisers, she felt, would feel compelled to inform her. “Tell me - what are you and OH working on?”, she asked. “Not much”, Mike replied, “just some half-baked ideas OH came up with. They won’t work ... but he does try hard and we appreciate that”.

*Well now, thought The Nun, I don’t think I would characterize OH’s ideas as half-baked, although she did think they were offensively practical and simplistic*¹. She knew that OH had quietly made some very basic changes in the way things were done in the inventory section, and she felt a bit threatened that people with advanced degrees could be thought of as “half-baked”.

Impulsively, she told the cruiser this. He stared at her for a moment, as if mildly annoyed by a mosquito, and finished filling his coffee cup. “Well, you can always ask OH about it if you think you can hold up your end of the conversation”, he replied, and he wandered off before the comment fully registered with Vi. *Indeed I will*, she thought. Catching OH in the hallway, she asked him what he was working on with the cruiser, and he replied “I was just floating some half-baked ideas about changes to the field methods”. Thinking that a lady with a dropped jaw might indicate a receptive mind, he decided to expand his response.

“There is a reason for all this, Vi. Mike has been working in the woods for 35 years. He knows how long things take, how much they cost, what

¹ It took years before Vi thought to ask herself why such “simplistic” solutions had never been developed before.

needs fixing, and how it all links together. I am *never* going to know that. He keeps me from making terribly logical, perfectly reasonable, but stupid mistakes that would embarrass me. I never go forward on *anything* without his approval”. “Are you telling me that a guy without a college degree *approves* your work?” she asked. “No, Vi, a guy who knows far more than I do about a great many things does me the *favor* of keeping me on track because of things I would never have anticipated”, he responded. “You might profitably do the same during *your* career”.

“For instance, the other day you circulated a memo about changing the number of digits used for the Plot Radius Factor in the computer. Am I right”? “Yes”, she verified, “we were changing to metric, so the time seemed right to improve the procedures². Nobody paid adequate attention, however, and I am hoping that it will eventually be considered by others in higher positions” (her tone indicated that she was a bit offended and hurt about this).

“Well, if you had discussed it with Mike (as I did) he would have reminded you that they only use 3 digits for the Plot Radius Factor when they check borderline trees. Therefore this is the *correct* number of digits to compute the actual circle around each tree, and is used to compute the exact Basal Area Factor of the angle gauge. The angle gauge (or a Relascope) is only a rough tool, made precise by the way you do these checks in borderline conditions”.

This sounded vaguely familiar to The Nun, but she put it aside for a moment to stay with her main line of objection. “My point is that your cruisers will probably not understand the technical math and reasoning that leads away from his traditional procedures, and is likely to cling to some of the myths you often say are holding back the profession”, she said (trying to sound patient).

“Granted” said OH, “Mike probably will not understand some technical details, at least initially. He never argues about me being *correct*, because he respects my technical knowledge, and I do not argue about whether it is a *wise* idea because I respect his judgment. For much of the time he just listens quietly to my ideas. I explain the technical aspects he does not understand. He then patiently tells me that my latest idea will not work, but he is typically unable to say why. My response is always the same. I say that *the idea is dead until we both agree on something that will work*. Then, we go our separate ways”.

“In about a week Mike will show up at my cubical and ask if he can buy *me* a cup of coffee. We sit down and he will spell out a series of about

² The Nun had this idea right, at least. When you switch to the metric system you have a chance (and a budget) to clean up a lot of loose ends. Be ready for it.

10 connections I would never have made, which points out a problem with the approach I was suggesting. At the same time, he normally offers a practical solution. Normally, that solution is simple and easy to add, and we go ahead with the process.”

“Let me give you an example, Vi. Last month you suggested a requirement that would limit the number of measured trees on each plot. You got resistance from only two of the crews, who wanted to measure lots of trees on a few plots, rather than only a few trees on many plots. There was a bit of a dust-up until they were allowed to do it their way”.

“Exactly”, she said. “I said that distributing the tree measurements throughout the stand is more efficient. Having just a few crews hold out on this change was only a matter of them not understanding the theory and opposing change”, she explained - somewhat resentfully.

“Did you notice which two crews did not want to make the change, Vi?” “Yes”, she replied, “it was the oldest two cruisers, who apparently have the most trouble with new ideas”. “Yes”, said OH, “they were indeed the oldest cruisers. Because of that, they are the ones who are training the new compassmen coming up through the ranks. To train them effectively, the best field situation is to have quite a number of trees in a cluster so they can point out trees that show appropriate contrasts. Otherwise, the training slows down – and training is one of the *main purposes* of those two crews. Did you miss that aspect of the situation, Vi?”

“Well - yes I did, but all they had to do was tell me that and I would have considered it”, she complained.

“They did not *know* it at the time, Vi. They knew instinctively that it was a bad idea for their crew, but needed a few days to know exactly why. You rushed them. You wanted to argue about the mathematics of all this, and never saw the practical problem. They did. As it was, you butted heads, wrote the draft a few more times, tried to get it forced on them, failed, generally beat your head against a wall, and then lost without making any friends.”

“I, on the other hand, went out for coffee with Mike. Get the point, Vi?”

To her credit, she eventually did.