

Outlook

The Middle of the Road

In 1917, Dr. June McCarroll, a California physician, was nearly run off the road by a truck while driving her Model T Ford. The stretch of highway she was on had no lane markings, and authorities paid little attention to her concerns about the road's poor safety record. Frustrated but undeterred, she took matters into her own hands: she painted a white line down the center of the road along a bad two-mile stretch just outside of Indio, California.

The good doctor did not stop there. She campaigned tirelessly for years for improved road safety, and in 1924 California made painted centerlines mandatory—a safety measure that would spread across the country and save countless lives. Today, a stretch of Interstate 10 is named the *Doctor June McCarroll Memorial Freeway* in her honor.

I find this story to be a perfect example of how some problems only get solved by making the matter visible, by pushing the issue at hand right out there into the middle of the road.

In our Glenair factory, we have, on occasion, run into process problems that resisted being solved. Operational problems that the team may have attacked by writing new work instructions, changing our approach to job scheduling, or even authoring reports for upper management.

A perfect example, one that all factories deal with, is late orders. Now the conventional approach is to go down the Resource Planning Database route with a team of implementers who spend their day reviewing workflow on portable laptops. I think most of you know that is not how we roll.

No, our call was to put the actual, physical jobs, complete with their bins of constituent parts, Bills of Material, and color-coded job cards out on a late-job table smack-dab in the middle of the factory floor where EVERYONE could see them. And let me tell you, did things ever get handled quickly when the entire team could see what needed to be done with their own eyes.

Now I'm not saying you can't attack business problems the conventional way: by adding more checks and balances, tightening shop-floor procedures, posting weekly reminders in the lunchroom, and so on. But for our money, what really works is far simpler: you make the problem **visible**.

If a single missing component is holding up an entire build, that absence needs to be made obvious to everyone in the loop—not hidden away on a laptop. As our business continues to grow, this same approach will matter more, not less. People can't respond to what they can't observe. But they will step up and take action if critical work is laid out for all eyes to see. Just like Dr. McCarroll's centerline-stripe was, down the middle of that road in Indio, California.

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