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The Good/Bad Administrator

Timothy Kingsbury, secretary of the State Department of Natural Resources, considered it a coup when he hired George Krittenbrink as director of the Land and Water Resources Survey. The survey had grown in importance as the environmental consequences of increasing population became more worrisome, yet staff positions had been difficult to fill because the work was highly technical. Krittenbrink was a nationally known figure in his field and Kingsbury thought he could turn the survey over to him and devote his attention to matters that he knew more about.

For his part, Krittenbrink was glad to take the position, for it gave him an opportunity to ride his hobby horse of long standing: high- and low-altitude photography and remote-sensing pictures obtained by satellites circling the earth. He was a pioneer in applying such information about the earth to better use of land and other natural resources and had contributed authoritative articles to technical journals.

Krittenbrink's interest in this field had begun with aerial photography studies while studying geography in college and he had been excited by the prospects for obtaining more information about the earth's surface from hand-held cameras in the early Gemini and Apollo space flights. Later he familiarized himself with the advances made in 1972 when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration launched the first land-resource survey satellites—Landsat-1, -2, and -3, which provided a wealth of information about the planet.

The Land and Water Resources Survey had done more than most comparable programs in other states in the practical application of electronically recorded and transmitted data via satellite. Krittenbrink determined to make it the foremost program in the nation. When visitors inspected the survey and inquired how its work would help the state, Krittenbrink had a speech prepared for them, as if a guide in a museum. "There are roughly 230 million Americans depending upon approximately 2.3 billion acres of land," he would say. "This means that the per capita land share now is about 10.8 acres compared to a per capita share of nearly 17 acres in 1940. By the

year 2000 the per capita land share will be $6\frac{2}{3}$ acres. We need to use our land resources more effectively as our population grows and the amount of land taken out of production each year by highways, airports, and urbanization increases.”

Satellite data, Krittenbrink would continue, would enable planners to identify land-use patterns and changes over time. He envisioned additional applications: monitoring crops for pest infestation and disease, solving hydrological problems, forecasting snow runoff, measuring water characteristics, providing regional indices of water availability, evaluating wildlife habitats, assessing damage in burned-out areas, identifying climatological patterns and trends, mapping thermal pollution, identifying soil characteristics associated with mineral exploration, predicting flood damage, locating new sources of fresh water, forecasting crop yields, conducting soil-conservation studies, detecting archeological sites, and assessing timber-stand vigor.

The day Krittenbrink took over as survey director, he addressed a staff meeting to explain his management policies and goals. He stressed the importance of completing projects expeditiously, of teamwork, and of meticulous attention to detail. The staff quickly learned that he was a strong-willed, nose-to-the-grindstone type of manager who believed that efficiency and organization produced successful results.

The staff of eight scientists and engineers came from diverse regions of the country and represented varied educational backgrounds, including geology; geography; civil, hydrologic, and electrical engineering; computer programming; and planning. Much of their work consisted of preparing and analyzing maps produced from information transmitted from satellites to the Goddard Space Flight Center, where it was placed on computer compatible tapes and readied for use in research and experimentation.

Each time the survey received a request from a city, county, or state agency, Krittenbrink evaluated the work to be done and assigned the project to members of the staff. He expected all projects to be completed on schedule and to meet his stringent quality specifications. When they were not, he was sharply critical and sarcastic in reprimanding the offender.

The most frequent victim of Krittenbrink's criticism was James Cartmill, a young, wisecracking geological engineer who, the survey director thought, lacked the serious purpose and devotion to detail required in scientific pursuits. On one occasion Cartmill failed to meet a deadline. The work had been proceeding according to schedule until the main-frame computer broke down, making Cartmill two days late in completing the assignment. Dismissing Cartmill's explanation that the delay was not his fault because it was caused by a computer malfunction, Krittenbrink angrily replied that he wanted results, not excuses.

The next day Krittenbrink called Cartmill to his office and brought up

the matter again. "Cartmill," he said, "you're capable of good work but you've got to change your attitude. Science demands a holy dedication to work. It has no place for fun and games. You waste not only your time but that of others when you chat and joke with them."

Cartmill attempted to explain that the delay in completing the project had nothing to do with his relations with other staff members. A vital computer had malfunctioned, parts had to be flown in from Boca Raton, and a specialist had been called from Atlanta to make repairs, he said. "Cartmill, a man must take responsibility for the circumstances of his life," Krittenbrink replied. "He cannot let outside forces rule him. A man must anticipate external problems and control the exogenous forces in order to succeed." Recognizing that Krittenbrink was not going to accept his side of the story, Cartmill apologized and promised that in the future he would try to be the master of his fate.

Cartmill thought the matter was closed and was shocked when at the next staff meeting Krittenbrink scolded him before his fellow workers for nearly fifteen minutes. That Cartmill had taken lightly the injunction to control outside forces, Krittenbrink said, was clear from a flippant comment on being master of his fate. "Deadlines are a necessity of life," Krittenbrink said. "Without them we would not know what to do or when to do it. This is one characteristic of modern organizations that distinguishes them from the older ones. The professional engineer and technician pays attention to schedule and engages in contingency planning." The staff members returned to their work areas in quiet disbelief.

In the next few weeks Krittenbrink frequently reminded Cartmill of the need for adhering to work programs and once blamed him for the breakdown of a photographic copying machine because he had not followed a careful schedule of preventive maintenance. After a few months on the job, Krittenbrink extended his fault-finding to Donald Fletcher, a young engineer and friend of Cartmill, and three other staff members who all had excellent work histories and records for reliability. Toward the end of Krittenbrink's first year as supervisor, two engineers requested and received transfers to other departments. Cartmill, however, remained in the division, saying that he liked the work and could put up with the fault-finding of his superior.

It was not easy, for Krittenbrink had informed Cartmill that he was recording all work-related problems and transgressions in his personnel file. Cartmill's treatment did not go unnoticed by other staff members, and one morning during a coffee break they decided that, for self-protection, they should keep careful notes on the work they performed, on all problems associated with receiving computer tapes and related data sets, on machinery malfunctions, and on all regulations and project specifications ordered by Krittenbrink.

Joyce Harman, a new employee who had worked three years in the in-

terior department of another state, observed the low morale in the division and the tense atmosphere that made it difficult to meet the exacting standards that the tasks required. Priding herself on being a well-educated and independent woman—she was active in the women's rights movement—Harman was not one to submit to the petty tyrannies of a male supervisor. When Krittenbrink made general criticisms of her work, she demanded specific proof. Krittenbrink, accustomed to the submissiveness of the other employees of the division, usually had no concrete justification and retreated to commenting on the need for expediting projects and for scientific accuracy in the work of the division.

After holding the job for three months, Harman took the initiative in arousing the division staff to protest Krittenbrink's unreasonable demands, selective persecutions, and general denigrations of them as people and professionals. They compiled a list of grievances with documentation that they submitted to Kingsbury, the Natural Resources Department secretary, requesting that Krittenbrink's supervisory behavior be evaluated and a formal hearing be held so that their concerns could be discussed. Kingsbury was surprised to learn about the trouble in the division. He had felt lucky to have as the director so dedicated and knowledgeable a person as Krittenbrink, who was praised by state agencies using the services of the survey. It now appeared to Kingsbury that efficiency and productivity might not be the sum total of good administration.