

# The Ministry of COMMON SENSE

## PULL QUOTES

### INTRODUCTION

*What I didn't know was that I'd be spending the next 45 minutes trying and failing to extract my headphones from its package.*

*Companies are so entangled in their own internally generated issues, and further beset by reams of invisible red tape inside employees' heads, that they lose sight of this core purpose—and inevitably pay the price.*

*When I ask the people in charge how many “common sense issues” there are in their organizations, most say not many. The truth is that in large organizations, the number of “common sense issues” is actually off the charts.*

### CHAPTER ONE

*If a business is, at its core, a group of people networked together under a common purpose, everywhere I looked those networks seemed to be coming undone. And the first and most obvious casualty in all of this was common sense.*

*Alan Mulally, the former CEO of Ford, once told me that during his first two weeks on the job, he knew his company had gone off the rails when he found that the majority of the cars in the employee parking lot were ... well, not Ford cars!*

*The TV remote control in my hotel room had infinite tiny numbers, a multitude of buttons and three separate numerical keypads. Why were there two On buttons? What did Source mean? What did a-b-c-d mean? The answer? Each department inside the company had an allocated space on the remote.*

## CHAPTER TWO

*In my experience, the lack of common sense in companies (and in life) has a clear if indirect connection to the increasing disappearance of empathy.*

*The difference between “sympathy” and “empathy” is the difference between me seeing you throwing up—and maybe handing you a napkin—and me feeling so bad about what you’re feeling that I throw up myself.*

*A year ago when I was in London, something similar happened but in reverse. [seems like this refers back to something happening which I - as the reader is not aware of - can we kill the first sentence?] Someone asked, “How are you doing?” and as an experiment I answered that things actually weren’t going all that well, and that my dad had just died. (Which was true.) “Good to hear it,” he said without breaking stride. “I see you brought the good weather with you.”*

## CHAPTER THREE

*Halfway through your dream, the combination alarm clock-iPhone recharger on the far side of the bed starts playing Phil Collins’s “Sussudio.” The last person who stayed in this room must have set the alarm for 4:40 PM, and evidently housekeeping forgot to reset it.*

*Instead of removing your 2-day old glass of wine, housekeeping covered the top with some kind of frilly white—what would you call it?—paperlet, even though wine now looks like a patch of dried blood, and a family of gnats are whizzing around the rim.*

*You know those thumb-size shampoo and conditioning bottles in the shower? Why is the writing on them so small? You can’t tell which one is which unless you have your glasses on, and who wears their glasses in the shower?*

*If my secret experiment worked—cancelling all their credit cards without them knowing it—the bank’s executives might have the opportunity to see the world from a customer’s point of view.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

*Navigating company politics is a lot like playing chess, the core difference being your opponent has decided to bend the rules, so that nothing is as it seems. Is the king in charge, is the bishop calling the shots, and what role does the queen play?*

*The more inward-focused and preoccupied a company becomes, the less it sees itself with any real objectivity or clarity. It's like an invisible straitjacket.*

*A "political" company is one where management and employees are so preoccupied by their own divisions, hierarchies and metrics that they lose sight of anything outside themselves - that including the customers*

## CHAPTER FIVE

*The company installed a system that shuts off all the lights automatically after ten minutes, when sensors determine that a room has no one in it. Unfortunately, that meant that soon after the start of any meeting, the lights would abruptly shut off, plunging the room, and everyone in it, into blackness.*

*Most of us probably remember sitting around a campfire when we were kids. During workshops, I create my own version of one, and in countless darkened rooms, where no one can see anyone else's eyes, and titles, positions and salaries are irrelevant, employees become.... honest.*

*I might be fully imagining it, and it might be anecdotal, but Today we speak using shorter sentences. We walk faster than we did ten years ago. So what would happen if we didn't have technology? For Maersk, the answer arrived involuntarily when the company became the victim of a major cyber-attack.*

## CHAPTER SIX

*A meeting should last no longer than 30 minutes. One way I ensure this is by bringing in a clock, and telling everyone that the clock represents the accumulated salaries of everyone in the room. "Before even starting this meeting, this meeting already costs about \$15, 000," I say, "and having me here makes it more expensive. So let's start the clock."*

*I once spoke at Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California. There were 200 people or so in the audience. During my 30-minute speech, I made eye contact with literally 4 people. The overall effect was, We have better things to do than listen to you.*

*It probably follows that the best meetings I've ever attended had one thing in common, namely, no PowerPoint decks.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

*It's a fairly safe bet that the longer and more complex someone's job title is, the more bureaucratic and less common sense the organization probably is.*

*A senior officer who'd been with the bank for a dozen years, responded yes to the question, "Have you had sex recently?" After sending back the questionnaire, and assuming that was the end of it, he later found he had to attend a day-long conduct seminar on how to use protection when having sexual intercourse. Remember: this guy wasn't 18 years old. He was a married 38-year-old man with a young family!*

*Does anyone actually read questionnaires? Whenever I go for a massage, and the form asks if I'm pregnant, I sometimes check the "yes" box. No one ever notices. Perhaps I am pregnant!*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*All across the world, "compliance" has become an excuse to protect the status quo, and to ensure organizations remain in place. To not do things.*

*One global investment firm I know of had a policy warning clients that the bank was about to investigate them for money-laundering, which is a little like texting your neighborhood cat-burglar to hurry up and grab the jewelry because the cops are on their way.*

*One Norwegian insurance company, DNB, goes so far as to track employees' bathroom breaks. If an employee doesn't return to his desk after eight minutes, a flashing light alerts their managers that they are abusing the call of nature.*

## CHAPTER NINE

*There is no such thing as B2B or B2C anymore simply because we mix our private and work life into one grey mass. More than anything, instead I tell companies that they need to adapt an H-to-H Theory. H-to-H stands for Human to Human.*

*When a small group of Toyota employees was asked to come up with a few clever ideas on how to save money, one team-member asked a highly commonsensical question: Does anyone know why we burn millions of dollars worth of electricity in our production plants, plants staffed by robots that run 24/7, even when no humans are present? No one had ever considered this.*

*If one-fourth of all emails in employee inboxes went unread, why not refrain from sending them in the first place? Why not kill the CC button?*

## CHAPTER TEN

*A Ministry of Common Sense ensures that the daily, common sense issues that a company has already committed to fixing aren't made out of duct tape, frayed string and bent safety pins—that real change will last, without compromising the business or its employees going forward.*

*The top priority should be to reinstall common sense by saving money.*

*The Ministry of Common Sense should aspire to its own nonexistence or, at the very least, its own irrelevance.*