

Betty Kesmer was continuously on top of things. But as Kesmer saw it, Worthy was mostly an absentee autocrat, making all the decisions from above and spending most of his time at extended lunches with his friends from the Elks Club. Kesmer's first move was to change all that. But in fairly short order, Kesmer established a worker productivity group, a "Suggestion of the Week" committee, an environmental group, a worker award group, and a management relations group. Each group held two meetings a week, one without and one with Kesmer. She encouraged each group to set up goals in its particular focus area and develop plans for reaching those goals. She promised any support that was within her power to give. The group work was agonizingly slow at first. But Kesmer had been well trained as a facilitator, and she soon took on that role in their meetings, writing down ideas on a big board, organizing them, and later communicating them in notices to other employees. She got everyone to call her "Betty" and set herself the task of learning all their names. Kesmer knew the pitfalls of being suddenly catapulted to a leadership position, and she was determined to avoid them. In business school, she had read cases about family businesses that fell apart when a young family member took over with an iron fist, barking out orders, cutting personnel, and destroying morale. When she went to work for her uncle's shoe business, Fancy Footwear, she had been singled out as the most productive employee and the one with the best attendance. In school again, and with three years of practical experience to draw on, Kesmer had gobbled up every idea put in front of her, relating many of them to her work at Fancy Footwear. Kesmer knew a lot about participative management, and she was not going to be labeled an arrogant know-it-all. The workers, many of whom had twenty years of seniority at the plant, seemed surprised by this new policy and reluctant to volunteer for any groups.