Chapter V

George Elder
Tait Electronics Limited

Supplying and servicing world class radio communications equipment

My name is **George Elder**. I am the information and supply chain manager at Tait Electronics Limited.

Personal History

I was born in Dunedin, New Zealand. Soon after my birth, we moved to a small town in the north of the South Island called Motueka. That's where I grew up attending primary and high school. After high school I went to Christchurch and enrolled at the University of Canterbury in the engineering program. After 2 years of study, I decided that university was not for me and went looking for a job to make some money.

I was lucky enough to find employment with Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company. I worked as a tyre builder on shift work. After 6 months I realized that I had to be doing something better. I applied to work in the Technical Services Department. They wanted someone to do quality control and decided I might be suitable. So, I moved into the quality control of the tyre manufacturing process. I was assigned to

the Technical Team and we wrote tyre specifications, built experimental tyres, and commissioned new pieces of equipment. I was the quality control officer responsible for ensuring appropriate production tolerances for product from our production machinery. I learned from the ground floor up what makes a manufacturing operation work. I think this experience has helped me in my current position, but more of that later.

I gradually took on more responsibility in the quality control area and became involved in commissioning new pieces of equipment. I would work with the suppliers regarding new products that required major changes in process and I found it was interesting work. I was also working closely with the guys on the factory floor. I always had a good working relationship with these groups.

About 1976, Firestone advertised for people to join their new Computer Department. I had heard about computers and thought computer programming might be interesting. So, I sat the aptitude test that IBM administered in those days. I came through with flying colours and joined the new Computer Department.

Prior to this, Firestone had another local company doing their data processing. But, it was decided to bring the processing in-house with the acquisition of an IBM 370-115. My first task as a computer programmer was to learn COBOL. I was given a "teach yourself" set of material and put in a room for 1 month. I eventually learned to write "Gotoless" programs which were considered important in those days. Over the next 5 to 6 years I progressed through the ranks as senior programmer, analyst programmer, and finally systems analyst, reporting to the data processing manager. I was involved in writing programs for all the company's major business processes, purchasing, inventory, sales, and all the aspects of general ledger. I even developed a set of programming standards.

As I progressed through the various positions in the Computer Department I began to supervise employees. I learned a lot about managing staff then. I think this experience has helped me in my present position.

After about 11 years of working for just this one company, I started thinking about broadening my experience. One day I read an article about a company called Fact International. They produced an integrated information system that dealt with all the systems I had been working on and struggling with since I had joined Firestone's Computer Department. The Fact system was based on interactive screens instead of batch processing. This struck me as the way these systems should function.

I responded to an advertisement for a position at the Timaru Milling Company, a subsidiary of the Goodman Group, which was a large flour milling and food processing company in New Zealand. The Timaru subsidiary manufactured flour and pasta. They had recently installed the Fact system, but they were not getting what they expected from the system. Before I started, the company had hired an independent contractor to develop an add-on system to present the data in a revised format. This was costing Timaru Milling a lot of money. My first role was to resolve this

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