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April 18, 2001

Management: Bosses Make Cost Consultants Out of Blue-Collar Workers

By JULIE FLAHERTY

MILFORD, Conn. — At 2:15 on a Friday afternoon, as the production lines churn out pens, razors and cigarette lighters, 15 employees of the Bic Corporation abruptly leave their posts and file into a conference room. Machinists pull up chairs next to their managers at the table.

Charlie Tichy, an hourly employee with a tattoo left over from his service days, takes a seat at the head of the table. "Everyone ready?" he asks, although he has their attention. Mr. Tichy, who holds the title of employee-involvement administrator, begins reading aloud from the slips he has pulled during the last week from the plant's suggestion boxes. The ideas range from buying a \$2 "gutter scoop" for cleaning underneath a pen-point machine to redesigning the factory's packaging area, with a hand-drawn diagram showing how.



Thomas McDonald for The New York Times

As a result of a Bic employee suggestion, a medical emergency box, top, shares space with a suggestion box.

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