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## Ford Forgets

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# Ford Forgets

**Henry Ford war ein Visionär: Er schuf das legendäre Model T, führte die Fließbandproduktion ein und engagierte sich für seine Belegschaft. Doch in seinen späten Jahren verkehrte sich seine visionäre Kraft in Rückbesinnung – mit schwerwiegenden Folgen.**

Ford, born during the Civil War, began making cars when he was 40. Few roads were paved, and there was no system of service stations. Ford understood that successful cars had to be *rugged*, and you had to be able to fix them yourself.

Ford began making cars the way everyone else did – by *hauling* material to work stations where people did many operations. He first broke with orthodoxy, not by creating his *assembly* lines, but by convincing *stockholders* that cars weren't just for the *well-to-do*. He went for higher production and lower prices.

He gave us the Model T in 1908, the soul of simplicity and *ruggedness*. It was so successful that he didn't have to *predict* sales. He could sell every car he made. So he developed faster production methods. By 1914 he'd invented the moving assembly line.

Workers hated the *dull repetition* of the moving line. Worker *turnover* grew astronomically. Ford innovated again. This time, he doubled wages from \$2.50 to \$5.00 a day. He cut the working day from 9 to 8 hours. He shared profits with his workers.

For that the press made him into a *folk hero*. But he was also becoming a *paternalistic* boss, checking up on workers' home lives and habits. That went more or less unnoticed at first.

By 1927 Ford's company was worth 700 million dollars. But success was working its *mischief*. Ford had built success by looking down the road at the future. Now he was only 63, and he'd long since begun putting up walls and putting on *blinders*. He'd isolated his plants physically, refused to *unionize*, and tried to manufacture his own rubber and steel. Worst of all, he'd stopped looking ahead. He'd stayed with his own formulas for success.

In the early '30s the great Mexican *muralist* Diego Rivera celebrated Ford's factories with a set of *murals*. Rivera showed Ford's plants *spilling* out into the world as a transforming force. He didn't realize how Ford had closed in on himself. By then Ford was pouring millions into a strange museum at Greenfield Village. He moved an entire old watch shop and

pushed away  
hold up  
flood  
quality

covered with bitumen

robust

dragging

building ... shareholder  
rich

robustness  
foresee

monotonous repeating  
fluctuation

\*see list  
patriarchic

downfall

\*see list  
form a worker's union

wall painter

wall paintings  
pouring

a Cotswold cottage from England. He built a private nostalgic dream world.

Even as Rivera painted, General Motors had *displaced* Ford as the premier automaker. The Model A and the V-8 engine couldn't *stem* the *tide*. In the end, historian John Staudenmaier says, the *virtues* of "patience, hope, imagination, humour, and a willingness to fail and to disagree" make us great. We receive those virtues by being open to external realities. Those are the just the virtues Ford cut himself off from – right at the peak of his success. ■

Prof. Dr. John Lienhard, University of Houston

<i>assembly</i>	Montage
<i>blinders</i>	Scheuklappen
<i>displace, to</i>	ablösen, verdrängen
<i>dull</i>	stumpfsinnig, langweilig
<i>folk hero</i>	Volksheld
<i>haul, to</i>	befördern, schleppen
<i>mischief</i>	Unheil, Verderben
<i>mural</i>	Wandmalerei
<i>muralist</i>	Wandmaler
<i>paternalistic</i>	patriarchalisch
<i>pave, to</i>	befestigen
<i>predict, to</i>	voraussagen
<i>repetition</i>	Wiederholung
<i>rugged</i>	stabil
<i>ruggedness</i>	Rauheit
<i>spill, to</i>	ausschütten
<i>stem, to</i>	ankämpfen, stemmen
<i>stockholder</i>	Aktionär
<i>tide</i>	Flut
<i>turnover</i>	Fluktuation
<i>unionize, to</i>	gewerkschaftlich organisieren
<i>virtue</i>	Wert
<i>well-to-do</i>	reich, wohlhabend

Dieser Text ist Teil der Radioserie „Engines of Our Ingenuity“ und wird hier mit freundlicher Genehmigung des Autors und der Radiostation KUHF wiedergegeben. Den Originaltext und weitere 2000 Kurzberichte über die Geschichte der Technik finden Sie unter [www.uh.edu/engines](http://www.uh.edu/engines)