

Management General Presents

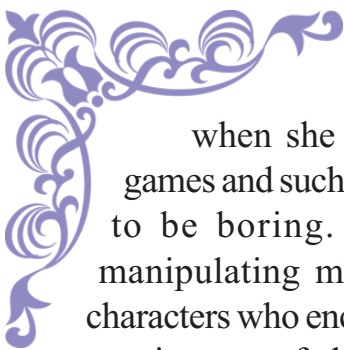


A Fiscal Fairy Tale

By Tom Brown

Gridilocks loved to work. When other children sought escape to the playground or to the movies, Gridilocks asked — begged — for another chore to add to her list of tasks. There was nothing perverse in this; she had tired of playing with sticks and balls and jacks, and her dollhouse all too soon became covered with dust. She even tried playing with toy trucks and soldiers — for a day. Then

Gridilocks



there was the period when she was possessed by card games and such, but board games proved to be boring. Even her interest in manipulating make-believe, electronic characters who encounter dangers and fight enemies soon faded. “Someone else will have to get Mario the stars he needs!” she demurred one day, releasing a sigh loud

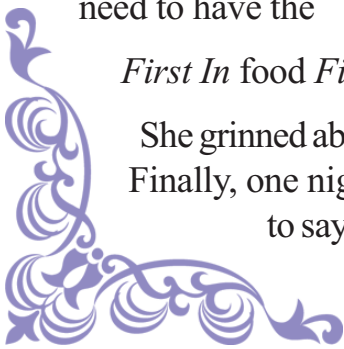
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enough to be heard by her parents upstairs. “I want a *real* challenge!”

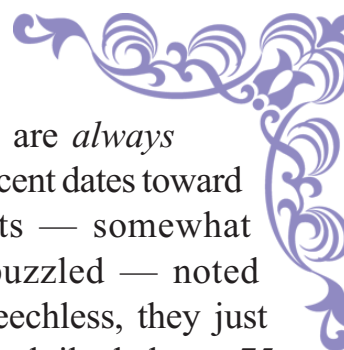
“Then we will have to start giving you some *real* challenges, Gridilocks,” her parents announced. Out of her view, though, her father winked to his wife as he made his pledge to fill his daughter’s life with new ways to test and employ her skills and time.

Gridilocks was true to her pleadings; she sought ever harder tasks to perform — and aced them all. Sweeping and dusting were a snap. Cooking was also fun, but it was organizing recipes and keeping the pantry well-stocked that proved to be most enjoyable. She spent a full week in panic-filled delight wondering if the entire pantry should operate with a FIFO or LIFO system. “No, I should always move the freshest food to the back, unless of course it can spoil. I need to have the

First In food First Out!”



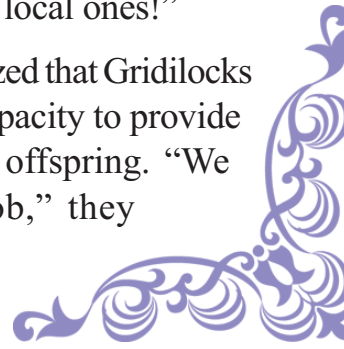
She grinned about this decision for days. Finally, one night at dinner she just had to say it. “Mother, Father, have you noticed how the



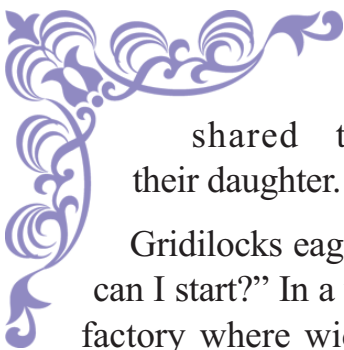
‘sell-by’ dates on all the food products we store are *always* shelved with the most-recent dates toward the back?” Her parents — somewhat bemused, somewhat puzzled — noted Gridilocks’ delight. Speechless, they just stared at her until her head tilted almost 75 degrees right, a smile fixing her countenance. “Ummm, yes,” her mother stammered. “Ye... ye... yes, your father and I noticed it — why, just this morning!”

In no time, Gridilocks was doing the family budget; she used her computer programs to automate all aspects of the family’s income and outgo. She also set up calendar reminders for servicing the family car, for ordering holiday greeting cards, for changing batteries in all the smoke detectors — even for turning the mattresses on every bed in the house (including the guest room) so that no coil would dare to bend out of shape under her watchful eye.

Month after month, challenges were set and met. The only time Gridilocks was not found bouncing and smiling around her work estate — er, home — was when she argued furiously that she *was* capable of doing the family’s annual taxes, thereby saving the onerous cost of an accountant. “No!” roared her father. “No!” screeched her mother. Gridilocks was so incensed, she even stamped her foot. “Well, if I can’t do the federal and state taxes, I should *at least* be allowed to complete the local ones!”



Mother and father realized that Gridilocks was outgrowing their capacity to provide new horizons for their offspring. “We must get her a real job,” they moaned, after much



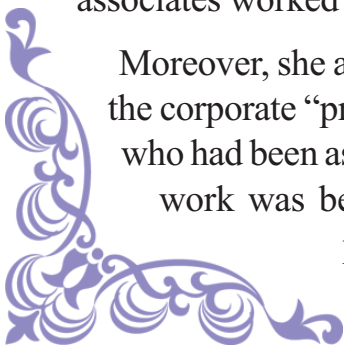
discussion. Then they shared their decision with their daughter.

Gridilocks eagerly replied, “How soon can I start?” In a week, she was at a huge factory where widgets of all kinds were manufactured. Just as you would guess, Gridilocks was a hit. She blasted through the elementary assembly jobs first assigned; soon, she was making so many suggestions for improvement that she won the Suggestion Box Award for a record 36 times in a row!

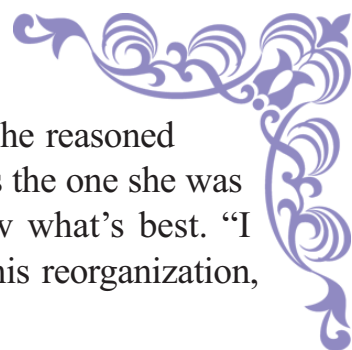
Gridilocks was never happier. Then, *it* happened. A memo was read at an impromptu meeting of all workers and managers at the end of one work day: “In order to improve efficiency and make sure that our company operates in a seamless, boundaryless way, we must reorganize.”

Starting the next Monday, Gridilocks found that she now needed to check with three separate “sign-off” supervisors concerning any changes that she wanted to make or any new ideas she wanted to implement.

First, she needed the approval of her immediate supervisor. That was seldom a problem; he was encouraging and supportive in almost every endeavor Gridilocks proposed. Now, however, she also needed to secure the agreement of the “product manager” who oversaw the selling and shipping of the products Gridilocks and her associates worked on.



Moreover, she also needed the initials of the corporate “process control specialist” who had been assigned to make sure that work was being done as quickly as possible. These multiple



“A-OK!” checks struck Gridilocks as odd, but she reasoned that companies as big as the one she was working for must know what’s best. “I don’t see the merit in this reorganization, but I bet that I will!”

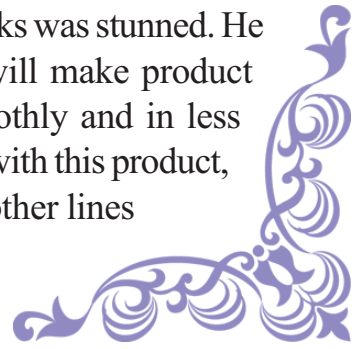
Gridilocks plugged on. By the end of the week, absolutely nothing had changed in her work area. Such operational smoothness innately disturbed Gridilocks’ sense of perpetual improvement. By Friday morning, she astounded even herself by imagining a

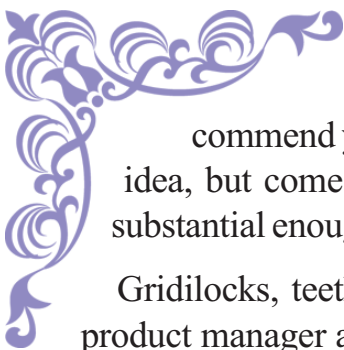
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completely different way to stock parts so that workers could access them in half the time usually required. “Golly!” she yelled. “The bosses will love this!”

As before, she collated the data and packaged her proposal with utmost care and with scrupulous detail. Her immediate supervisor *did* in fact love her idea, but he felt that a change this great was just a little too big to implement. “Sorry, Gridilocks, I think we’d better wait on an idea of this magnitude.”

Gridilocks didn’t give up. She was beginning to see the merit in having other managers to consult. So she ran upstairs to the product manager. “Ha! You call *this* an improvement?” Gridilocks was stunned. He continued, “Sure, this will make product assembly go more smoothly and in less time. But if we can do it with this product, then what about all the other lines in the plant? You’re not





thinking big enough! I commend you on the start of a good idea, but come back when you have it substantial enough to merit my backing.”

Gridilocks, teeth clenched, thanked the product manager and went immediately to the process control specialist. “Wonderful, Gridilocks, just wonderful,” the specialist smiled as he reviewed her proposal. “This is just right. We can make this happen where you work, study the impact, revise and revamp as needed, and then perhaps export this new way of working to every plant — worldwide. *Let’s do it!*” Gridilocks had not been this happy since she FIFO’d the cereals at home.

“So I can do it?” she queried, shaking her head up and down, adding physical energy to her mental readiness. “Well,” the specialist shot back, “what did your supervisor and the product manager say?”

Gridilocks, as always, spoke the truth. “One thought my idea was too big; the other thought it was too small.” The specialist slumped into the office chair. “Well, then, you *can’t* do this — yet! Go back and tell them what I think; they’ll come around.”

Actually, the three bosses whirled around. It took a series of meetings, but soon her supervisor was ready to implement her idea. The product manager almost switched to a “yes” and then stammered that he needed more time to think. A week passed. Then two. After three weeks, Gridilocks appealed to the former “Yo! Go!” process chief (who had since been swayed by the product manager’s belief that such a bold idea could contaminate current levels of

plant efficiency).

“Gridilocks, I’ll call a meeting of the four of us to hash this out.”

The next morning, Gridilocks found herself in a hurricane of pros and cons bandied about with such fervor by her three bosses that she sat for most of the meeting stumped at what else to say. At the end, the consensus of her bosses could be reduced to three words: “Needs more study.” They commended Gridilocks for her energy, said they’d appoint a committee of workers and managers from all levels of the organization to study her proposal, and asserted how valuable she was to the company.

“Sure,” Gridilocks murmured to herself, “sure.”

That very night, and for many nights thereafter, Gridilocks began having forboding nightmares: she would be trapped inside a dank, dense forest. Whenever a shaft of light revealed a pathway, it also illuminated a lumbering bear of one size or another — sitting, then standing up, roaring at nothing in particular, then sitting once again.

The bears always smiled, but they never moved out of her way.



The End

Illustration and layout by Mac Thornton

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