

# The Birth of a Vision

By Jeff “SKI” Kinsey

This is a very short story—about a small slice of time—with the potential for huge ramifications. It is the story of TOCreview magazine.

About 1992, I read a magazine review of *The Goal* Immediately, I checked the book out of the library and began to consume it. Like many people, when I finished the text, I remarked out loud, “common sense.” But, it is anything but common sense! It is profound. One digression is in order at this point. In 1988 I discovered the UNIX computer operating system. It changed my business focus. At that time my computer consulting firm used Novell for “serious” networking. Within three months, we converted every major client to SCO XENIX—it was that

good! So, when I happened upon *The Goal*, I understood well how seemingly simple changes could make huge differences.

As a businessman first and a computer consultant/programmer second [okay, maybe third or fourth!], I have always sought out the experts in general business practices, so you can appreciate my enthusiasm in discovering Eliyahu M. Goldratt’s book. Way back in the early 1980’s I heard Zig Ziglar speak in person. I was amazed at the simple wisdom of “making a decision” to be positive in life. The next month, I heard someone who would forever

change my world, Charlie ‘Tremendous’ Jones! His presentation did not have the polish or glamour of a Ziglar production, yet it was many times more memorable. I recall his words as if it were only yesterday:

“Five years from today, you will be the same person that you are today, except for the people that you meet and the books that you read!”

*The Goal* challenged me. More accurately, it challenged my assumptions about business, something I became acutely aware of not long afterwards when I found myself working for a large state government agency that had identified TQM (Total Quality Management) as the way to “fix” government. Goldratt pays tribute to Dr. Deming and, of course, in college I was exposed to the Deming Method. But somehow, it was not enough. The breakthroughs Goldratt speaks of are rare in business. Later, I discovered *It’s Not Luck*, *Critical Chain* [and attended The Avraham Y. Goldratt Institute’s course on Critical Chain Project Management] and finally, I read *Necessary but not Sufficient* (NBNS). I attended the NBNS conference in Indianapolis in November 2000 and heard Eli for the first time. He is even more compelling in person than through his books!

Driving back to my South Carolina island paradise from the conference, I thought, “Why isn’t TOC moving faster?” I wondered what I could do to help. The words of another great business leader came to mind. Former Vice President of IBM, Buck Rodgers advised, “Every businessman has a civic rent to pay!” To conclude this history of mine, by the time I reached Hilton Head Island, it was 2a.m. and I had made the decision to launch TOCreview

## Identify the constraint

There is an exercise that states, “What do I know that you do not know?” I happen to know that magazines are extremely powerful tools of persuasion. One of my clients is a publishing and conferences company. I have worked for them in various roles on various projects and have been a featured speaker on the subject of eCommerce at one of their conferences. In fact, I have had several articles published in



their monthly business magazine. By now, you probably see where this is going. To me, the constraint was starting a national business magazine without any real cash and to do so quickly enough to freeze any competitors from jumping into the marketplace.

I could insert a nice multicolor cloud here and diagram the constraint, but I am of the opinion that my conclusion is obvious. Some might even say “common sense!” And so it was—an opportunity was born—and a constraint was identified!

### **Exploit the Constraint**

What do I know that no one else in the TOC realm knew? Simply put, I knew how to create, staff and direct a national business magazine. I was part of an existing model that was efficient at the numerous functions required to produce and deliver a national business publication. A mentor was willing to share his own successes and failures freely with me, to cheer me on to my own success. I watched the personal computer industry grow from 1979 to the present creating massive successes [and yes, massive failures] in the magazine arena. Most recently, I observed the Linux movement demand the creation of national magazines. I thought that no less was necessary for TOC. Without disclosing too many trade secrets, let it suffice to say that I felt inspired. But I knew that I would have to move quickly. After doing several mental exercises, I determined that three months would be sufficient to create TOCReview and that this accelerated time line would thwart competition. I fired off an email to Eli asking if he would “support my efforts if by no other method than not resisting me.” He agreed. And, he offered to help promote the magazine to would-be contributors. The rest, as they say, is history!

For those who would like a little more

detail in my ‘exploitation’ phase, let me offer three observations. First, I knew that the role of Editor was critical to a magazine worthy of TOC. So I hired the best by offering her more than I could afford, but more importantly, more than she could refuse! Second, I started seeking contributors and “got the word out” that the magazine was going to happen, and happen quickly. Third, I leveraged my talents and the resources at eDivision.net LLC, my computer solutions business, to use the internet as effectively as possible for all things. Yes, we want to give back to the TOC movement, but we need to make a profit now and in the future too. Just like eDivision, TOCReview has no employees. It has no fixed assets of any kind! Thanks in great part to my study of the Open Source movement in software development, my business ventures are unique. Let us close this section by stating that our monthly break-even point is measured in hundreds of dollars. Not thousands or tens of thousands!

### **Subordinate to your decision**

This was the fun part. Once the decision is made, life is easy. Just as Steve Jobs and Eli Goldratt are great visionaries, I am great at focus, even to a fault, some may say. Hence, I make great effort to observe King Solomon’s words of wisdom, “There is safety in a multitude of counselors.” To summarize, most every decision made since November was weighed against its impact on printing the magazine within 90 days. I have taken some flak over not initially accepting mail-in subscriptions. Advertising sales have suffered from my demand for the staying the course. However, the magazine has been created on schedule and outside investors unfamiliar with TOC are absolutely ‘clueless’ how this feat was even possible, to say nothing of it having been accomplished! Focus is

great tool. It has allowed, no, forced TOCReview to spring from the realm of the “what if” to the here and now!

### **In closing**

I could wax poetic at great length about the “rest of the story” but I would simply be making it up as I wrote it! Why do I say that? Because we have just begun! I have not had time for the other two steps of TOC [Evaluate the Constraint and Implement a Process of On-going Improvement]. But we thought it too important to share with you now how this magazine came to be created and ultimately directed into your hands to hold the story back until it evolved more completely.

Does our effort even count as an implementation of TOC? You, the TOCReview audience gets to decide. For my part, I think it does. Why? I have applied the theory to the best of my ability, adapting it to my personal habits and beliefs, using it simply as a tool. Nothing more. Nothing less. The real test will be next year about this time. How will TOCReview evolve? Will it merely report the activities of others, or will it seek some higher calling to advance the theory? Only time will tell.

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“SKI” is founder and CEO of eDivision.net LLC, the parent organization of TOCReview. He is also our Publisher and a nationally recognized speaker.