

Advice for New Factory Owners: Other Uses of Autoclave Machines

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OK fellow doctors, you suddenly realise a few things overnight:

- a) The clinic you have worked in for the past 20 years is actually a "factory".
- b) Your 50-year-old clinic assistant who doubles as your wife (in that order and after clinic opening hours) is now a factory "worker" who has rights to safety as a worker, along with her other after office hours rights to your assets, a supplementary credit card, Women's Charter and the supreme right to stealthily dispose of your favourite socks (which are older than the clinic).
- c) The autoclave which is possibly older than your clinic and wife combined (you don't really know since you bought it second-hand from another doctor) is now part of a newly-discovered factory. What is worse, this venerable piece of metal actually works, which is more than what you can say for your wife, I mean, clinic assistant (during office hours).
- d) You now have to pay a hefty fee to register and maintain your autoclave so that your wife and other clinic assistants are amply protected. You vaguely remember that you have not heard of any clinic assistants being killed by exploding autoclaves in the last 20 years.
- e) The chief benefactors of this new development are probably the guys who provide this undesired 'service' and not the clinic assistants, whom this development is purported to protect. Like you, your trusty old autoclaves are now victims of the New Economy.

You conclude that in terms of utility, reliability and harmlessness, you rank autoclaves first, clinic assistants second and preferred autoclave maintenance persons last. Wives are not ranked.

But since you are now a boss of a factory, you have to decide how best to tackle this situation. The situation is complicated by the fact that your wife chooses to extend her rights as a clinic assistant after office hours and tells you incessantly over meals that "you mean you have been endangering my life with the autoclave for the last 20 years and I am a factory worker? I demand a pay hike and a promotion to the position of General Manager of Factory!"

To avoid further confrontation (old socks are hard to come by nowadays), you decide to give her a raise and a promotion. That leaves your factory in a serious cashflow situation; the nett outcome is you now have no money to register or maintain your autoclave in the "factory". This is an excellent example of what they call Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in MBA schools.

The MBA-trained administrators will now tell you that this resultant change in the business environment creates a disjunction in the existing technology platforms that drive the value propositions of your business leading to erosion of your core competencies and competitiveness. This behooves you to embark on the vital strategic business endeavour of change management. What all this MBA-speak means in plain English is that you have to ask yourself "what do you do next?"

The first thing to do is to bring the autoclave home if you do not have any hired help at home. Without employees, a home is probably not a factory. Your wife probably costs you more at home than at the clinic on an hourly basis, but for some strange reason, she is not a worker and your house is probably (I stress - probably) not a factory (unless you have a maid). Your house is also not subject to acronyms like GATT, WTO, APEC, AFTA, AFAS, OPEC, GST, SMC, MOH, MOM, DAD, SMA, FBC, UE, LFT, ABG, PT/PTT, CRAP, MAD, BLUR, etc., and all these stuff about trade and medicine that a factory or a clinic is subject to directly.

But you are still subject to and a subject to your wife, of course. Unless you are a female doctor, other than the female Medical Student quota in NUS, you really have it good. But I digress.

You may wonder why having a maid and an autoclave together in your house is a bad thing. The reasoning (or the lack thereof) is quite simple: While a maid is strictly a domestic worker, we do not want to run the risk of turning your home into a 'domestic factory' (if there's such a thing, you never know) because of the presence of a maid. The clandestine Anti-Autoclave Secret Society (ASS) members may get wind of this unnatural cohabitation of a maid and an autoclave and report this to the relevant authorities which may then take action.

We don't want your District 10 Semi-D classified as a 'domestic factory', with licencing/registration needed for all your high pressure/high heat

appliances, which may include stuff like the pressure cooker, vacuum cleaner, oven, air-conditioner, the humble garden hose and even the bathroom shower head. The bill could run into thousands.

I am joking of course. The real reason why you cannot have a maid and an autoclave together is because your wife may get jealous of the fact that your maid has developed the autoclave skills to de-odourize, de-colourize and sterilize your Xenical-compromised underwear all at one go, while she is still stuck using detergent and bleach.

Once you have the autoclave home, here are some other suggested home uses for it:

- a) Use it as a cappuccino machine. Add milk instead of water. The superheated/ super-steamed milk is great for your cappuccinos and lattes.
- b) Use it as a steamer for your fish. The superheated steam cooks the fish in less than 5 minutes compared to the usual 12. If you prefer a more traditional method, leave the door ajar and it's 12 minutes as usual.
- c) Use it to smoke stuff. Instead of using

water or milk, use tea leaves, sugar and dry rice grains. You can create wonderful dishes like camphor and tea-smoked duck etc.

- d) Use it like a pressure cooker. It's considerably more roomy and can soften a whole leg of lamb, unlike a normal sized pressure cooker, whereby you have to perform a BKA, a Symes and a ray amputation combined before it fits. In non-medspeak, what I mean is that you have to chop a leg of lamb before it fits into the pressure cooker, but not so for an autoclave.
- e) Use it as a storage cabinet for your more precious documents. The autoclave when sealed is really like

a miniature bomb shelter and can withstand some of the meanest blasts.

- f) Use it to steam hot towels like what they do in those Karaoke KTV lounge VIP rooms. All you need now is to find some women who actually look like KTV lounge hostesses and the experience afforded by your new home entertainment set will be complete.

If all else fails, try selling it to an alternative healthcare/complementary medicine provider. They also sterilize stuff sometimes but unlike you, they do not run factories. ■

The Hobbit