

Larry Miles Doing Something About How Much Things Cost

BY ANDREW SHANLEY

Readers Digest has called it "The biggest thing since mass production". After putting it into practice and seeing the results, the Navy deemed it significant enough to award the man who invented it the department's highest civilian award. Translated into several foreign languages, the book that details its theories and practices serves as the bible for a worldwide organization.

The system is "Value Analysis and Engineering" and its founding father is Lawrence D. Miles. Miles and his wife Eleanor reside in the Kirkham-Royal Oak area of Talbot County.

It began some 21 years ago, in 1947. Miles was a design engineer for General Electric who felt compelled to ask his superiors: "Doesn't anybody here care what things cost?" Well, somebody did, and at the same time recognized that Larry Miles was the man to tackle the problem.

A month later Miles was working in G.E.'s purchasing department. His great notion was to apply a step by step method to produce efficiency in thinking through

associating cost with function.

It is not as complicated as it might sound. "It is really quite simple," Miles explains. "Here's the thinking—We don't want a refrigerator, we want something to keep our beer cold." And with this thought paramount, driving through every step of production, Miles sets to his task.

The results have been continually impressive. Miles tells that value analysis in 1947-48 cut \$500,000 from the cost of the automatic cold control part of G.E.'s refrigerators. The savings for the consumer in the years that followed are in the many millions.

Value analysis might be best understood as an approach. "It is a way to get more production from thinking people," Miles says. "I guess you could say it is aimed at the management class." Where the efficiency expert's approach slices off edges and simplifies here and there, the value analyst, as Miles compares the two, is searching for alternatives. The questioning mind is praised.

Miles is still questioning,

looking for new ways to apply his method, but now from his quiet, comfortable home—Sedgefield, overlooking Maxmore Creek. "I have a wonderful life here. I'm retired," Miles says, sitting back on the wide windowed porch overlooking the snowcovered cove. "I have the time to do just what I please."

Time to spend with his wife Eleanor is the main thing. The admiration and affection that the two have for each other is abundantly obvious for those who spend time with them.

Miles discovered the Shore while on a month's vacation from G.E.'s main office in Schenectady, N.Y. Cruising down through the Chesapeake he found it "such doggone fine water for cruising." Immediately, he knew this was the place. He never took the boat back. He found a place to store it and shortly thereafter retired and returned for good. "The water brought us," he says looking back.

Though retired, the Mileses stay busy. Eleanor Miles is a gourmet cook. "I read cook-books like novels," she says. "I'm completely hooked on it." Her talent is certainly not

wasted. Miles is founding father and first president of the worldwide Value Engineering Society and the couple do their share of entertaining.

Each year their home becomes the site of the "Eastern Shore Summit Meeting", when the Society of American Value Engineers holds its National Board Meeting at Sedgefield. Mrs. Miles prepares all the meals. "I do all the cooking myself," she admits, "but maybe it's because I just can't stand other women in my kitchen."

An award that the Mileses prize highly is one that the American Society awarded to them both at the 1976 National Convention. It is the 'Value in Living' award and it is given to "the husband and wife team known to be getting the greatest value in living."

Since "retiring" 12 years ago Miles has made many trips to foreign lands, talking about his methods and modes. "Getting people to change over from their established ways is difficult," he says, revealing the motivations in his journeys. "People want to build things by simply modifying what they already

have. I ask them to start at the very beginning and question the whole process."

There have been rewards, as the walls of his study attest. "But value analysis, hasn't even scratched the surface as a world-wide tool," Miles says, speaking of the days ahead.

His book, "Techniques of Value Analysis and Engineering", is used at many graduate schools, but more exciting to Miles now is the news that at least four undergraduate colleges have introduced his book into their business curricula. "This will help us to turn out really good value engineers," he says, enthused. Miles is presently at work writing a workbook to go along with the text.

There are, however, more modest endeavors and ambitions. Each Monday afternoon the Mileses man the information desk at Easton's Memorial Hospital. "Eleanor was the one they wanted," Miles says, remembering with amusement. "They didn't have a place for a man. But I told them that we do things together, so they put me on 90 days probation. I guess I have turned woman's lib around."



Mr. and Mrs. Larry Miles have retired to a quiet waterfront home near Royal Oak, but as the "founding father" of Value Analysis, Miles is happily committed to guiding his many apostles around the world, with home often becoming a hotel of sorts, and Mrs. Miles a one woman entertainment committee. Behind the Mileses, the top bookshelf is lined with the many foreign translations of his book.