

until a junior executive
has the supervisors announce
that the machinists will begin a walking
heads-to-the ground sweep of the asphalt roadway
around the offices and then
of the mile-square company parking lot
in order to pick up paper and cigarette butts.

Whew.

Another dangerously out-of-control situation
among the machinists
averted
by quick-witted management.

NO EXCEPTIONS

At the end of his shift
the machinist spends an hour
cleaning his machine,
sticking the tip of the barrel of his airgun
down into each trough and way
of the machine table
and blasting them clean, blowing chips out and up
into the air where they rain down
all over the floor around the machine,
running his airgun barrel
up and down each trough and way
and blasting
until every last chip is blown out,
then lifting the covers to the coolant drains
at the bottom of the troughs
and blowing out every last chip and drop of coolant
there,
at last wiping down the table
with rags and towels
until it shines spotless and clean as new

so that the machinist on the next shift
can come in
and immediately begin covering the table
and filling up its troughs and ways
with new piles of blue coolant-soaked
steel chips
as he continues the job
they have been running for weeks.

THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT

Lincoln never accomplished anything.
He just walked around his machine all night
with his hands closed up into fists
sticking his chin out

defiantly
and talking back
to the foreman whenever the foreman told him to do anything,
until finally the foreman one day
standing atop the big inch-thick slab of steel
bolted to the table of Lincoln's milling machine
suddenly began shouting at the top of his lungs,
"You cocksucker Lincoln! You you cocksucker you don't do
a Goddamned thing I tell you you cocksucker you son of
a bitch. Every day I have to listen to you bitch and you
never do a thing, I say you COCKSUCKER Lincoln EVERY day I
have to hear you bitch you cocksucker YOU COCKSUCKER
LINCOLN — "
on and on for 5 minutes
at the top of his lungs.

And 10 minutes later
Mitch went over to Lincoln
and asked him how it felt
and Lincoln shrugged coolly and said,
"He was just blowing off steam."

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Whenever some machinists cutter blows up or rips into a
part
screaming and tearing the part off the machine table
and bringing the machine spindle spinning at 1000 or so
r.p.m.
to a slamming halt that sounds like a gunshot,
machinists all across the shop
let out with loud
wolf whistles of admiration
and screaming hoots of crazed delight
like a rodeo rider makes as the bronco he rides
breaks out of the gate,
and loud sustained applause,
leaving their machines
and slowly approaching the disaster in a closing circle
like fans
seeking out the star of a show,
as the machinist who had the accident trembles and stares
blinking
with shock at the jagged stub of a cutter
and the ruined part and torn-up tooling,
doing his absolute best
to keep that smile
he has forced across his face.