In 1996, Darius Mehri traveled to Japan to work as a computer simulation engineer within the Toyota production system. Once there, he found a corporate experience far different from what he had expected. Notes from Toyota-land, based on a diary that Mehri kept during his three years at an upper-level Toyota group company, provides a unique insiders perspective on daily work life in Japan and charts his transformation from a wide-eyed engineer eager to be part of the Japanese Miracle to a social critic, troubled by Japanese corporate practices. Mehri documents the sophisticated culture of rules and organizational structure that combine to create a profound control over workers. The work group is cynically used to encourage employees to work harder and harder, he found, and his other discoveries confirmed his doubts about the working conditions under the Japanese Miracle. For example, he learned that male employees treated their female counterparts as short-term employees, cheap labor, and potential wives. Mehri also describes a surprisingly unhealthy work environment, a high rate of injuries due to inadequate training, fast line speeds, crowded factories, racism, and lack of team support. And in conversations with his colleagues, he uncovered a culture of intimidation, subservience, and vexed relationships with many aspects of their work and surroundings. As both an engaging memoir of cross-cultural misunderstanding and a primer on Japanese business and industrial practices, Notes from Toyota-land will be a revelation to everyone who believes that Japanese business practices are an ideal against which to measure success.

My Personal Review:
An insightful book, the story of an American engineer in Japan. The author took advantage of this unique opportunity to tell of his experiences working for a Toyota subsidiary in Japan. In Japan, the conditions seem harsh on the lower level engineering and office staff. Many American business
studies stress the conformity of the Japanese decision making process and the "good-neighbor" policy relationships of corporations to the city councils in the area in which they reside. The author demonstrates from office experiences that the conformity is often enforced by the individual's fear of being ostracized. It is a very top-down hierarchal structure with some values that American corporations would consider politically incorrect, such as the role of career women and how foreign guest workers are treated.

The author explains the concept of tatemae versus honne. In the workplace confrontation is suppressed under the mask of tatemae (the way things are supposed to be). After some social drinking the individual’s "honne", how one actually feels may appear.

I appreciate what this author has done. What I read was so different from what other business books have to say about Japanese management that the reader has to wonder is this author at a typical Japanese corporation. Could one judge all of American corporate culture by working at a subsidiary of General Motors? Probably yes, Corporate Cultures must carry most of the cultural trait of the country.

Any reader from the curious to a business studies major will find this book fascinating. A light book, no analyzing, just the author telling of his office experiences in a radically different culture.

We have all heard of American corporations adopting many of the Japanese business practices. Their strong points seem to be to aid the factory floor. Hopefully their office culture will not be adopted here.