



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## *Planning an Event*

EVERY MAN AND WOMAN in Canada is called upon at some time to plan something. It may be a big event in business or social life or a little party for young people. No matter how big or how little, planning can be done more easily and more successfully if a few principles are observed. This *Letter* gives some guidelines.

The first thing to do is decide whether the project will be worth the time it will take out of your life. The superiority of what you do will not come about by accident. It will rest on a solid base of preparatory work, and to this you must direct yourself. Planning an event takes into account the application of proper tools — telephone, memos, letters, and interviews; the selection of workers, the systematic ordering of operations, and sustained control of all that pertains to your project.

The word "project" is used because everything we do has in some degree the quality of something contemplated, devised, or projected. Some events are: meetings, conventions, displays (Scout and Guide displays, for example), concerts, festivals, field days, exhibitions, parades, campaigns for funds, and campaigning against pollution.

Here, in capsule form, are the ingredients for planning any of these projects: Decide precisely what form the event will take; establish the purpose the event is to serve; develop a sound organization of capable people; inspire them with a sense of purpose; and maintain adequate control over the operation.

### *Being a leader*

Whatever your title may be — chairman, moderator, president or manager — you are the leader of the enterprise, and you need to prepare yourself to lead. Analyse the elements of the project and note the points in it where you can use your imagination to introduce originality and your management skill to ensure success. To these you must add hard work, patience and tenacity.

As leader, you are the power centre of the group, setting the pace in work, enthusiasm, drive and efficiency. It would be a mistake to think that you have

to do everything yourself, but you have to enter into every phase of the work of all your helpers.

You will, of course, profit by learning what others have done in similar circumstances, but do not limit your effort to what they did. It is exhilarating to try some untried ways.

Amid the pressing routine of your assignment, allow yourself time to think and to dream. The imagination is not governed by the laws of mechanics or physics. Allow your mind to relax and wander. Alfred North Whitehead, a philosopher who worked with realities, remarked once: "There is always more chance of hitting on something valuable when you aren't too sure what you want to hit upon."

In Maurice Maeterlinck's most famous fairy play *The Blue Bird*, a visitor is shown "The Kingdom of the Future" where the children who are not yet born are sleeping. He asks: "Do they do nothing?" The answer is: "They are thinking of something." "Of what?" "They do not know yet."

When inspiration, an unshaped kind of something, first appears in your mind, it may look like an indistinct photograph: you need to develop and enlarge it. Then ask yourself whether it can be worked into shape to help your project. Brahms, the great composer, is quoted in favour of persons who take their ideas out "for a long, cool walk" instead of sitting in uncritical admiration of them "in which every splutter of the goose-quill looks to them like part of a swan-song."

Nevertheless, be enthusiastic about your brain children. Enthusiasm expressed in action is one of life's great blessings. Get interested in the part of the task on which you are working and enthusiasm will grow on you. Interest is a quality within you, not something that things have. When you put the full sweep of your interest into the job you abolish doubt and anxiety, and develop self-confidence. Henry Fielding wrote a powerful satire called *Jonathan Wild the Great*. In it he has Wild observe that many men fail in wickedness for want of going deep enough in. The same principle applies to those who indulge in good works and important projects.

## *Selling an idea*

When you go before an audience to sell the idea of supporting your project spend ninety per cent of your time thinking of the people before you, and only ten per cent on yourself.

Present your idea in terms of the experience of your audience. People shrink from the mental effort of translating your idea into terms of their own thoughts. This technique reminds us that when a person goes fishing he chooses his bait according to the taste of the fish, not his own taste.

Predigest your plan and your ideas as completely as you can before exposing them to an audience, so that you speak with assurance. When you meet resistance, welcome it as giving you the opportunity to display the soundness of your ideas. Do not appear to rush things: people need time to mull over and consider what you say.

Dramatize your presentation when it is possible. If the nature of your project is suitable, present your plan accompanied by something visual—photographs, sketches, a programme, or a list of events. Combine something new with what is already familiar to the people in your audience and show how they can make this new thing interesting and advantageous.

## *Setting the objective*

Every project must have a purpose: to make money, to construct something, to adorn, beautify or preserve something; to benefit a person, a group or a community.

When you are sketching the first broad outline of your project, give imagination the right of way. This is the creative phase: judgment comes later. See that all who will be working on the project with you, and all those whose support you desire, get the big picture.

Your picture must have a point of interest. Every project needs a purpose, an objective. Of this be sure: you cannot lead a group toward goals you have not defined along paths you have not visualized. Without clearly stated objectives a project cannot possibly be effective and efficient.

Here is a sample of how your project might be outlined for presentation to the people you hope to influence:

*Theme:* Children are becoming people.

*Motivation:* The need to show parents, teachers, children and the general public how Scouting and Guiding contribute to the pleasure, education and social integration of children.

*Objective:* To portray in demonstrations, photographs, exhibits and screen pictures the processes by which Scouting and Guiding perform their functions.

*Organization:* Form groups of concerned adults. They may be called committees, divisions, boards, or groups, each one responsible for a particular section of the project.

## *Planning the event*

A plan that hopes to succeed needs a minimum of detail, flexibility for adjustment, and constant visibility. The method of its working out must show. This means that the leader needs to define the project in exact terms; break down the job into sub-jobs, each defined and limited, and make a count-down chart, starting now and ending on the date of completion.

When you have worked out your plan on paper, look at every part of it critically. Is it workable? Are the steps too steep for the workers?

Making a list of things to be done is vital to your peace of mind. By knowing ahead of time what items are essential and what may be left out you relieve your mind of the nagging thought that perhaps you are falling down on the job.

Write a list of five or six most important jobs and number them in order of their importance. Start working on number one, the top priority item. Stick with it until you have carried it as far as you can: then start number two. When you do this you are always sure that you are working on the most necessary item.

Success of any event depends upon good organization: disorder is an enemy to any sort of plan. Ask about every proposed action: is this the reasonable, most effective and most economic way to do this? Brief every person who will be working with you, so that all will be pulling in the same direction. Imagine yourself writing a play: give your actors cues so that everyone knows when to come on stage and perform his part.

When setting up committees or working groups make sure that they have definite, non-overlapping lines of responsibility. Just as you have to bear responsibility for carrying out the whole project successfully, there should be one person in every group responsible for that group's part of the work. This, as Oliver J. Greenway wrote tersely in *Master-Planning the Small Company's Future*, will avoid buck-passing.

## *Working with people*

Details of a material sort, like arranging for a hall, obtaining scenery for a show, and printing programmes, will be handled by the groups you have assigned to look after them. Your problems will be mostly people-problems. You need to inspire workers, keep up their enthusiasm, direct their efforts, correct their mistakes and keep them pushing toward the finish line.

When you take a genuine interest in people you develop poise, charm and personality. Personality is the sum total of the effect you have on other people, and it counts a lot toward the successful carrying out of your project.

A plan is almost certain to fail unless those who are going to do the work have been involved in its preparation. In serving the public, such as through participation in church work, home and school associations, community improvement groups, and others of that

sort, it is ineffective to draw up a plan and present it on a take-it-or-leave-it basis to the people affected. To be successful, it should grow among and be developed by those who will be doing the work.

You need to recognize every person's importance as an individual. The craving of people for personal recognition is a deep and fundamental need.

Give praise and credit when it is merited. A true leader does not hog the limelight. When we give a person a good opinion of himself we earn his goodwill; we help him to sustain his ego.

When group leaders or workers come to you to tell their troubles, listen with evident interest, and then work out with them the answers to their problems. Concede as much as possible to a worker who is disgruntled. The question to ask yourself is: "Can I yield this point without putting the project in danger?"

### *Selecting workers*

When selecting members of a working group, keep in mind that their potential contribution is more important than their status in society. These workers are the people who are going to give your ideas life. You depend upon them. They must be people who will respond enthusiastically to your needs.

Many persons who plan successfully have found it best to determine the specific functions to be carried out and then select people to fit the functions. They should have the knowledge necessary for the job and a strong sense of responsibility for doing it well.

As a general rule, have at least one other person — preferably the one who will fill in should you be absent — take an intimate and detailed part in the planning. In fact, everyone who will have an important part to play in carrying out the plan should help in its preparation. Being consulted in that way, they are committed to doing their best toward its success.

Listen to what people have to say about the project. Able leaders whose skill has been called uncanny are merely persons who are careful to watch and listen for bits of evidence about other people's reaction to what they are doing. In addition to helping you regulate things that may be going wrong, listening gives you the opportunity to consider suggestions for improvement of the quality and attractiveness of your project.

Thinking up and planning an event can be a happy adventure, but it is one that should include the calculation of risk. Should it become evident that your plan is not going to be effective in reaching your goal, the alternative is another plan. This may be less magnificent, but it may have a better chance of working.

You need to be prepared to face unexpected things. You never know, when you tear open an envelope or pick up your telephone, what new trick of fortune may be about to be played.

Even if you are one of the fortunate few who enjoy encountering obstacles, you will benefit by trying to

foresee the difficulties that may arise so that you have solutions partly worked out in readiness. A helpful analysis to make is that of the "suppose it should happen" type. When you know about the danger spots you will be mentally ready to cope with them.

It is in the difficult spots that you can display your efficiency and your competence to lead, but do not exhaust yourself needlessly. When a problem raises its head, examine it to see whether it is worth the effort to solve it. C. F. Kettering of General Motors and head of the research laboratories warns: "It takes just as much effort to solve a useless problem as a useful one."

### *Write it down*

Many people seem to have an ingrained dislike for writing anything, from a grocery list to a letter, but if you plan to be an efficient organizer of an event you simply must write things down. Without notes of things to do, of what was decided, of actions you have taken, and of what others on your team should do, have done, or have omitted to do, you will be in constant fidgety anxiety through not knowing what is going on.

As the work develops, you will pick up and make notes of ideas that occur to you and of suggestions made to you by others. Make your notes exceedingly clear so that their meaning will be evident weeks from now. Many a person has been annoyed and frustrated upon coming on a note that is obscure.

Besides communicating with yourself, you are involved in communication with others. Direction of a project cannot be done from the high level of a project leader unless he keeps in touch with the operation details of the group leaders.

You and the leaders of the groups whom you have appointed form a sort of "committee of the whole"; or, in army language, a general staff. You watch constantly the progress being made, and confer on improvements that may be introduced, but you handicap yourself if you do not keep written notes.

Here is a fool-proof method. After every meeting at which you preside, send every member of your general staff a condensed report, not more than half a sheet of writing paper, in this form: "On a suggestion by A.B., I am to contact C.D. to obtain . . . ."; "Upon hearing a report from E.F. of difficulty in arranging . . . . we decided to ask G.H.'s group to help." A similar report should be made to you by every group leader after a group meeting.

Committees and working groups should meet at regular intervals to report and check progress. The meetings should be business-like, not squandering time in listening to other people thinking out loud what they should have thought of previously, or making speeches. These meetings should have a chairman to guide discussion, to ensure that every member has a chance to participate, and to make certain that the decisions are understood by all.

Most difficulties in meetings are not caused by the affairs being discussed but by personality kinks in the people present. The most serious differences can be solved if we are willing to keep our egos out of the debate. It is necessary to show respect for other people's knowledge and opinions.

### *Timing and control*

A great deal of waste time and waste effort can be attributed to lack of proper and detailed instructions. Do not be backward about making clear to workers just what is to be done when, and who is responsible for doing it. Certain things are to be done by certain actors and you have to give stage directions. These, when addressed to workers, are contained in action words: obtain, record, provide, check, receive, and forward.

You, as head planner, must pay attention to the calendar and the clock, because time is a most important ingredient in planning.

As the person in over-all control you must know day by day whether jobs are being handled in such a way that they will be completed in time to feed properly into other jobs. This knowledge puts you in position to push the right combinations of activities to keep the programme running smoothly on time.

This is where a count-down sheet comes in handy. Work out calendar schedules for the individual jobs, listing the jobs with their start and finish times. Set down the dates on which sections of each group's job should be completed and check the list daily. Only by such a system can you know with assurance that your objective will be reached on time. The list reveals where you need to put in a word to expedite performance.

A person accepting authority as a project leader must assume the responsibility that authority entails. You alone will be held accountable for final success. Guard against allowing yourself to become immersed in one aspect of the operation. Your good leadership of the *total operation* is the most essential element in the plan.

When you have people working to carry out your plan, expect the best but check frequently to see that you are getting it. An ideal working force would be one in which the leader found it unnecessary to check anything except end results, but few organizations are perfect.

Insist nicely but firmly on knowing the truth about group progress. When a group leader reports that his part of the job is 50% completed, make sure that the "0" has not leaped in there on the wings of hope.

If your co-workers seem to be faltering, do not panic or subside into melancholy thoughts about your trouble. Find out what is causing the slowdown and act decisively to get things running smoothly.

You will learn quickly that being busy is not everything. There is a vast difference between being busy and being fruitful. Some group leaders will give the

impression of working hard, but they are not accomplishing. Persuade them to commit themselves to results. Having undertaken to do their job by a certain date they are in honour bound to deliver the goods.

If sweetness and persuasion fail to remedy the situation you have no alternative, in view of your own obligations, except to say: "This is a job that must be done on time if the project is to survive. Either do the job or make room for someone who will."

The best way to get anybody to do anything is to make him want to do it, and it is therefore advantageous to give suggestions, not orders. Make the person feel happy about doing what you suggest.

If you have to prove a person at fault, do it so adroitly that you give no offence. In certain situations you can say: "I don't blame you one bit for feeling as you do. If I were you I should undoubtedly feel just as you do. But there are other angles to consider."

### *A few guidelines*

Planning an event requires more old-fashioned brain power than it does banks of flashing computers. Planning is the only known method to make sure that you do not overlook vital details, and there is no other way in which you can provide a measure by which to keep track of progress.

Here is a suggested drill suitable to the planning of any enterprise:

*Fix the objective*, plan the manner of reaching it, and set down the steps or levels of achievement to be reached at dated periods along the way. There are six steps involved:

*Assessment*: Gather data to show the present situation and the desirable goal.

*Strategic planning*: Determine the grand design of the project.

*Resource calculation*: What resources are there? Where is the balance to come from?

*Tactical planning*: Decide how and by whom the job can be done best.

*Recruit workers* and get on with the first phase.

*Review*: Make notes in your diary periodically to check progress against your planned schedule and to consider improvements in your plan.

Show confidence in the outcome. You are not expected to sit down with a necromancer's crystal ball and predict the success of the enterprise. You can, however, spread out your planning sheet on the table top and show that, *if everyone involved does his or her part thoroughly and well*, the event or project has a high probability of being successful.

Efficiency in carrying a plan to completion does not consist alone in personal power but in inspiring all those under your direction.

Believe in the importance of what you are doing. It is true that having faith in your objective cannot move mountains by itself, but it does give a decisive impetus to the spade with which you tackle them.