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On Being a Manager

MANAGEMENT IS LEADERSHIP, whether you are manager of a home, a business, a factory, a bank or a baseball team. It is a service in which the sense of general responsibility supersedes the spirit of private adventure.

What is your purpose as manager? To make everything you do and everything that you direct net the best possible returns. The prosperity of any business depends upon the well-applied efforts of the human beings employed in it. The manager plans and supervises these efforts.

Romanticists like to look at business success through rose-coloured glasses. Down-to-earth people use a magnifying lens so as to see every part of the operation, and this is the desirable way for anyone who has an eye on making a success of management.

Administration demands unusual capacity as well as natural talent. It is an extraordinary undertaking because of its all-embracing quality: it has to do with people, things, finance, and happenings. It is at the focus of troubles and tests of all kinds.

The manager has to build and operate an organization of men and women with individual skills and accomplishments that are useful. Then he has to provide a climate in which these diverse people can function as a team. His administrative proficiency ranks higher than his technical knowledge. He keeps the organization working purposefully and harmoniously. Though every desk in the orchestra is filled by a virtuoso, there must be a man on the podium who leads.

Besides energy, enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility, the manager needs intellectual power, lively imagination, knowledge of men, a personality which makes other people keen to carry out his plans, and a feeling for justice which gives his workers confidence in him.

The imperatives

If there is any managerial imperative it is summed up in three words: awareness, action, responsibility. These are seen in his handling of problems and dangers

and his seeking of goals. There is a proverb to the effect that an army of sheep led by a lion would defeat an army of lions led by a sheep: but the lion that would rather lead sheep is no lion but only a sheep with delusions of grandeur.

The manager has the ultimate responsibility for whatever happens in his branch or department, whether it be a success or a flop. His function is not to make a good personal impression but to get the desired action. Demosthenes said to a rival orator: "You make the audience say 'How well he speaks!' — I make them say 'Let us march against Philip!'"

No matter what instruments, gadgets, and systems are devised to help in the management of business, the manager's function is still, and will remain, that of directing people. He needs an orderly type of mind and a feeling for humanity; he has to combine the qualities of the dreamer and the practical builder. He needs not only the ability to plan carefully but the dexterity to improvise when plans go wrong. He needs the capacity to introduce new ideas and techniques and at the same time to discharge day after day the many duties required of him by the nature of his supervisory role.

To cope successfully with all these varied requirements — originating, directing and scrutinizing — the manager must plan his course. Without planning he is like a rickety table with legs of unequal length propped up on paper wads.

Solving problems

First and foremost in your duty, if you are a manager, is the solving of highly diverse problems, and life affords no greater pleasure.

Creativeness in management consists in this: it recognizes a problem, it collects pertinent facts, it mulls over the data, shifting it into new combinations, it recognizes a possible solution, it tests the solution for accuracy and applicability.

In simple terms, here is one formula for dealing with a problem: (1) What is the problem? Define it, bring it within bounds, break it up into little pieces,

get at the essentials of it. (2) Put possible solutions into juxtaposition. If you do *this*, so-and-so will result, whereas if you do *that* the result will be something else. (3) Try a solution for size and fit. Is it complete and competent without going too far? (4) Is the solution practicable with your present resources or do you need more money, labour, or space? Are these to be had? If not, go back over your work in search of an alternative solution.

Practise on the little problems attaching to the job you now have, or set yourself problems and work out the solutions on paper. As you advance in rank the kind of problems with which you are called upon to deal changes in nature. They become less specialized and more general and basic, increasing in scope and variety, but the way of solving them remains the same.

Dealing with people

Not all the systems data in existence can relieve the manager from dealing with people difficulties. He has to meet and contend with and resolve all sorts of crisis: from the personality tantrums of an assistant to the fact that last night one of the operators forgot to throw an electric switch and production is held up until the machinery has been repaired.

While being firm in his pursuit of efficiency, the manager needs to be thoughtfully tactful and careful. It would be easy to become carried away in the pressure of reaching a goal to the point of neglecting the people involved. An elephant may tread upon an ant-hill and destroy it without thinking of the havoc wrought among the ants.

The manager achieves nothing on his own. His leadership brings out the best qualities and efforts in others. This complex operation of improving the performance and behaviour of workers requires that the manager shall deserve and retain the goodwill of those around him. He must help them to realize that their work is an important and dignified part of their lives.

When you are a manager people are less likely to question your technical competence than they are to criticize your frailty in handling human relationships. Do not, whatever the stress, exceed what is necessary in finding fault or reprimanding. One of the Greek playwrights put the obligation this way: "Our high rank, with greatness long acquainted, knows to use its power with gentleness."

This means being magnanimous. Bear with those who are slower on the uptake than you are; tolerate mistakes so long as they do not go to the heart of efficiency. Even when it seems hopeless to draw anything nearing perfection out of a worker, try to make something of him.

Many managers rule by affection. If you have a successfully operating department or branch you need never apologize for having founded your security on the affection of your people rather than on your dominance over them.

No matter how smoothly work seems to flow, things will arise that need your attention. If a worker is constantly in hot water, or is consistently late with his work, your first impulse is to find out what is wrong with *him*. Do not neglect to inquire whether something is wrong with the *situation*. Is the system giving him the opportunity to discharge his duty efficiently; to show the best that he can do?

Speeches and memoranda are necessary to obtain desired action but you must first have conditioned your audience to have confidence in you as their leader. There is no use blowing the trumpet for the charge and then looking round to find no one following.

In dealing with staff it is better to try to convince and persuade rather than domineer. Help your people to assimilate your plans by talking on their level. Interest them and sell your idea, and listen with courtesy to their viewpoints.

The creative manager is not self-centred. He recognizes that other people have knowledge and ideas that have not occurred to him. He is not required to know everything his subordinates know. He must be able to sew an even seam to draw his workers together, but he does not need to be expert in every detail of their work.

Choosing assistants

You need variety in your closest helpers. The disciples were not chosen because they were yes-men or carbon copies. There was Peter the impetuous, Andrew the plodder, John the poet, Simon the fiery zealot, and Thomas the melancholy. One man will rarely have all the encyclopedic knowledge for handling all management functions.

It is difficult to be a looker-on when the outcome of work is so laden with importance, but that is part of your job as manager. You need to distribute authority as widely as you can, provided you keep a 51 per cent controlling interest. If you give away more than that you may end up like King Lear, who renounced his throne but expected everyone to continue treating him as a king.

The selection of assistants is not something to be casually done. Machiavelli said in *The Prince*: "The first opinion which one forms of a prince, and of his understanding, is by observing the men he has around him." If you surround yourself with mediocrities you handicap yourself in two ways: (1) you will wear yourself out doing their thinking for them and break your back carrying loads they should carry; (2) you will never profit by their mediocre minds because they have nothing progressive to offer you.

You may know your assistants well, but take a closer look so as to recognize their ability to contribute more effectively. Give them a chance to show what they are capable of doing. Persuade them to knock

down a few more of their problems without your help.

Effective delegation serves this twofold purpose: it frees you for constructive work on larger projects, and it is a necessary technique for furthering the growth and development of subordinates. Make sure that the person knows what results are expected of him and that he is on his own and is accountable for full performance.

Be positive

As a manager you need to show a becoming confidence in the outcome of your plans and decisions, displaying a stout heart and a resolute will. When convinced of the rightness of your course, do not be deflected by obstacles, thus emulating the pocket gopher whose principal claim to fame is his ability to run with equal speed either forward or backward.

Be concerned with filling your role. When you enter the ranks of management you attend the funeral of "they". You can no longer take refuge in saying "They want it done this way." From here on the word is "we". Hitherto you have had the comforting thought in the back of your mind that if a decision was tough you could refer it upward. More is expected of you as manager than that you should pipe streams of problems on to the president's desk.

Brave self-assertion is needed. If you doubt yourself you offer your workers no handhold. They want a manager in whom they can believe. You need to keep building your capacity. Your perspective must deepen and your perception must become keener.

Your personal tone and manner, the variety and discrimination of your tastes and interests, the breadth of your general view — these are some basic tools in your equipment as manager. They build the foundation upon which you can be strong and decisive, with a judgment that does not falter at critical moments. You need to be prepared to take calculated risks with a minimum of anxiety. Timidity is out. It is fatal to authority and dignity if you give orders and feel like a small boy who throws a stone and runs away.

Take a wide view

The manager needs a shrewd and wide understanding of the world he lives in. He cannot be a specialist, tightly wrapped up in his job, enamoured of one phase of his business or his department. The suppleness of mind and the conceptual skill of the manager involve the ability to see the enterprise as a whole.

The manager is not only a fact finder but an idea finder. He must sometimes disturb the equilibrium, stir things up. A certain amount of the yeast of youth is necessary to offset settling tendencies.

It is essential to get accustomed to the thought of movement, of force, of velocity, of acceleration.

Sir John Hunt, who was leader of the successful Mount Everest expedition in 1953, gives this recipe for leadership: "Look for some task difficult to do, something which is a challenge to your skill, then go out and achieve it."

A long-range view should be developed as a habit of mind. It stabilizes your performance in your personal life and in your business to look ahead and plan for next year or for ten years hence.

Your position carries with it certain social obligations. You need to see the social consequences of what happens under your direction. To win the friendliness of people around you, outside your office or factory, is of value. As Xenophon said: "It is far less difficult to march up a steep ascent without fighting than along a level road with enemies on each side."

Taking a wide view means getting information. Intuition is a weak substitute for research. You need to ask the right questions, questions that generate thinking, initiate action and spawn improvement. Many devices give information of a quantitative kind: it is the manager's duty to assess it as to its quality and its applicability to the situation under review.

Keep your balance

Above all, keep your balance. Among the most imperative demands made upon a manager is that he must be dependable. Others above and below him may falter, may pass the buck, but to keep his position the manager must be firm on his feet, steady in his stride, and steadfast in his fidelity.

You may not be able at once to realize your purpose. Limited resources, pressure for results, contending claims upon your time: all these may be hindrances. Make a wise alliance with circumstances; submit with good grace to what you cannot help, know when to give in. A philosopher who lost an argument with his emperor said: "I am never ashamed to be confuted by one who is master of fifty legions."

Go about doing jobs in an orderly manner. If there is one thing the efficient man cannot stand it is clutter. Little men believe it to be a sign of their indispensability to have their desks piled high with papers. The efficient manager knows that the steady flow of paper from his "in" tray to his "out" tray is a necessary part of his function.

All this requires that the manager have a contemplative mind as well as an active mind. Very few matters of managerial nature have to be decided on a split-second basis. It is wise, and it is usually possible, to defer your judgment for an hour or two. This permits a rehearsal in your mind of the possible and probable outcome of your decision. The man who will take the pains to think out his plan in a clear consistency will find himself head and shoulders above those whose ideas are muddled by undisciplined thoughts.

How to do it

Is there any mystery about managerial talent? Two persons may attend the same schools and universities, study the same subjects, pass the same tests, but one will be a successful manager and the other a routine worker. The superior worker has the same knowledge as the other, but he has in addition the ability to assimilate, integrate, evaluate and apply all of the data to problems and come up with the right answers.

Anyone who aspires to managerial positions should coach himself to look fearlessly for potential weaknesses and take steps toward correcting them. In his book called *Modern Management Principles and Practices*, Dick Carlson gives some guiding questions. (1) What are my own personal objectives? What do I want to accomplish in life? For what purpose? (2) Why am I striving to do this? Does it have permanent value for me, or only temporary? (3) When is this going to be accomplished? What is my schedule? (4) Where do I stand now? Where am I going from here? (5) How am I going to accomplish my major objective? How can I improve my present performance? (6) Who are my most helpful advisers and critics? Who are the outstanding leaders in my field upon whose experience I can draw? Carlson's practical and stimulating book is obtainable from the Queen's Printer, Ottawa, at a cost of \$2.

These questions will lead you to answers which will direct you to areas of self-improvement even if you are already a manager. The work of management is becoming increasingly professional, as a distinct kind of work in itself, and this demands continuing education, keeping up with trends. No one can afford to sit on his hands, even after attaining managerial rank.

Teaching yourself management skills is not necessarily dependent on courses at a university or institute. You may learn from books even though your job is in a remote outpost. Reading and home study have many advantages if you are interested enough in your advancement to make and follow a programme.

Managers for Tomorrow, edited by Charles D. Flory for Rohrer, Hibler and Replogle, tells in detail about the sort of man who makes a business leader today and what he needs to know and to do if he is to carry his leadership into the increasingly sophisticated world of tomorrow. The Alexander Hamilton Institute programme has some thirty volumes which cover every aspect of management techniques and emphasize the art of thinking creatively and positively.

Management opportunities abound for those who are ambitious enough to make the right use of what they know and work toward qualifying themselves for advancement.

The challenge of change

You have had a distinguished career up to now. Can you shift to a new period requiring not only

different skills but different ways of looking at things?

There is a new continuity to change. It is no longer a matter of spasmodic shakings-up like spring cleaning, but a progressive evolution. You need to view improvement in your knowledge and your work ways as a commonplace necessity. Tomorrow's manager must be able to move surely from policy to action in situations that will be different from anything any generation has experienced before.

Nevertheless, the fundamental qualities of management remain: patience, judgment, decisiveness, commitment, initiative, enterprise, integrity, enthusiasm, vigilance, responsibility. Managerial obsolescence can come about just as readily through failure to measure up in any of these qualities as through resistance to technical progress.

What are the things that contribute to obsolescence of managers? Lack of initiative and enterprise: the manager is satisfied with the status quo, stabilized in his routine, disinclined to experiment, depreciates specialists, convinced that yesterday's way of doing things is preferable to the newer methods. He will not even try on the big league boots required for tomorrow's giant strides.

The manager who is actively withstanding obsolescence takes an interest in his personal growth and learning, has belief in his ability to master new ways of doing things and to improve upon them, and believes in the worth of his job. When someone says to him: "We are embarking on a mighty difficult project" he smiles to himself because it is difficulty that brings out the best in men, and he is ready to be tested. Half the zest and enjoyment in management comes from overcoming obstacles.

A manner of living

The manager's role is a perpetually demanding one. Problems thicken upon him, as on a stormy day a new mass of clouds rises before the last one has been scattered into the blue or swept beneath the horizon.

Management is more than a job: it is a manner of living. The responsibilities of administration colour, and are affected by, everything that a man does. As Professor Schell wrote in *The Million Dollar Lecture*: "The high nervous potential which is the strength of the business leader can be assured only through a proper balance of all activities conducive to constructive living."

Being a successful trustee of the well-being of your department or your branch or your group necessitates having skill, capacity and staying power, alertness, honesty, sincerity and understanding. It means knowing how to resolve entanglements, how to restore continuity after a disaster, and how to recover harmony.

Having achieved proficiency in all these, the aspiring manager now goes on to seek excellence.