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On Being a Department Head

EVERY BUSINESS CONCERN requires efficient management of its daily work, intelligent administration of its financial affairs, and competence in dealing with men and women. More businesses fail, say the authorities, because of management oversight or shortcomings than from any other single cause.

But other groups of people also need someone with managerial proficiency if they are to operate efficiently and smoothly — schools, churches, civic associations and families. Everyone is forced into the role of leadership at one time or another, as parent, teacher, foreman or manager.

The principles are fundamentally the same whether you are managing an army, a nation, a branch of a great business enterprise, or a suburban home. Managers are people who make things happen in the best way to arrive at desired objectives. They originate, plan, and push things through.

This is a skilled occupation. The manager must have competence in managing not only things and people but situations. He needs to practise certain fundamental principles of good administration.

There are three management levels in business: top management, which makes policy; middle management, which carries out policy; and supervisory management, which has charge of the working force.

The department or branch manager is somewhat like the helmsman on a ship. He receives the sailing course from his superiors, then he stands sure-footed at the wheel, easing the spokes this way and that, using a mixture of expertness, craft and guile to keep his ship on course.

It is impossible for a person to manage a department efficiently unless he knows the big picture of which his department is part. The manager of a technical or engineering or clerical subdivision of a company needs to know the principles of business, if he is to fit his department into it. He must know precisely what the executives expect of him in the way of operation and effort toward a definite objective.

Department heads should be consulted during the making of plans affecting their departments, and they

should be given the authority needed to carry out the projects. Prime Minister Churchill told the House of Commons on July 2, 1942: "I am your servant, and you have the right to dismiss me when you please. What you have no right to do is ask me to bear responsibilities without the power of effective action."

Business will be done smoothly and competently when functions are clearly set out for each management position, and kept up to date. "Function" includes responsibilities, authority and relationships — responsibilities to the firm, authority in the department, and relationships with other departments. These must be known to workers.

Leadership

The manager belongs to one of the world's scarcest species: the leader. Everyone on his staff has a practical stake of the most concrete kind in the quality of his leadership.

Leading a group to an understanding of a complex problem and securing its co-operation in working it out is one of the highest forms of management, and most rewarding. It stamps you as a person of influence as well as of action.

A bustling manner and a commanding voice are not evidences of good leadership. The leader does not say "Get going!" He says "Let's go!" He leads all the way, always a step in front. As Wilferd A. Peterson wrote in *The Art of Living*: he carries a banner, not a whip.

A dictator may point, with some justification, to certain advantages in his system, such as speed of action and vigour in execution, but the factors against acceptance of dictatorship far outweigh the benefits. Instead of winning people to his side the dictator plays upon feelings of unease, anger, apathy and despair. He has no friends but who are friends for fear.

The competent manager is custodian of the firm's interests. He has technical qualifications, a broad intellectual outlook, a high sense of honour, and appreciation and understanding of human relationships. He is not only a clever man, but a superior person.

Men who have the mental and moral strength required for good leadership have sincere tolerance of other people's race, colour, creed, nationality and idiosyncrasies. They do not, on the other hand, tolerate in themselves such traits as grouchiness, impatience, temperamental outbursts, prima donna attitudes, arrogance, favouritism, or inconsistency.

One of the critical qualifications for leadership is the ability to take substantial risks with reasonable equanimity. The manager cannot be submissive, depending upon others to lead him by the hand, or dilatory, waiting for the whiplash of authority to goad him to action. His drive is within himself.

He is flexible. He examines and re-examines the performance of his department in the light of changing conditions. He grasps the essentials, decides what is to be done, makes clear to all concerned what he intends to achieve and how he will do it, and then sees that his workers get on with the job.

This demands poise, wisdom, suppleness of mind, courage, energy and determination, and the ability to keep going under frustration and disappointment.

The art of management

Management is a professional enterprise. Visionaries are people who let their thoughts fly out into the wide blue yonder without attempting to harness them. The manager's constructive imagination is governed by an orderly mind, viewing the possibilities, analyzing the difficulties, and controlling the execution. He is both a dreamer to plot a new path and a drummer to get his people marching on it.

The manager must be an organizer. Good organization is the heart of a successful business operation. It means the distribution of duties or functions among sub-units and among individual employees in such a way as to operate at high efficiency, with production and service of the required volume and quality at the required time, by the best method and at the lowest cost. It is the manager's duty to detect any discrepancy between a worker's potential productivity and his performance, and to see that the gap is made smaller.

The manager who takes an inefficient branch or department and makes it run effectively experiences an emotional lift of no small magnitude.

It is obvious that if this could be done by the rule book there would be no special quality needed in a manager. Rules and directives can take you so far, but they do not provide the incentive to get things off the ground, the courage and stamina to lead the way through difficulties and around obstacles, or the competence to wrap up the project successfully.

Handling people

If businesses fail because of poor management, why do managers fail? Seldom because of technical incompetence; mostly because of lack of skill in working with human beings.

The functions of a manager are greatly involved with fundamental understanding of people. It is here that administrative intelligence meets its greatest challenge and earns its greatest satisfactions.

There are four key rules to guide the manager: treat his employees like human beings; harness their desires; teach them how; and criticize constructively. These add up to something big: they show the manager's desire to make something out of his employees.

The successful manager has learned to transform "power over people" into "power with people". He makes his workers want to do the right thing in the right way for the good of the company. He has patience with the inefficiency of men and women who are trying.

As a manager, you need insight, which is a sort of 3-D or stereoscopic way of looking at people and events. With your eyesight you will see things wrong in an employee's work; with your insight you will see the cause. This is "empathy", or imaginative projection of your consciousness into another being.

One can tell a great deal about a department head by observing those who work for him. Are they happy in their jobs? Are they ready with a smile? Are they free of job tension? Do they give the air of being glad to be working in this department, for this firm?

Part of the manager's strategy is giving adequate recognition to individual achievements. He praises loudly — that is, where others can hear — and blames softly, in private. He does not praise indiscriminately, or lay it on with a trowel. The worker knows when he has done a good job; if you praise every job he knows that you are using a technique and discounts even commendation that is merited.

Keep in mind that all people have latent abilities. Periodically, give a worker a job slightly over his head, one at which you know he can succeed if he tries.

Be the sort of manager who wants every worker to make good, who helps him to make good, and who rejoices when he succeeds. This is very far from toadying to the all-too-common spirit of making things easy. The happy worker must be a productive worker. Employees should not be encouraged to become so contented that they do not permit work to interfere with their gracious living.

The head of a department must avoid becoming so wrapped up in his own operations that he loses sight of the big picture.

The manager needs the support of the other men in the management group. He will avoid intradepartmental jealousies, which prevent effective co-operation, and rivalry for status, which is bound to affect business and productivity adversely. He will talk with the other supervisors, not about them.

Something about status

Favourable recognition of your work will not consist in your having a title, but in your good administration

directed toward the benefit of the company. That administration can be done without flaunting your authority or developing a superiority complex that seeks to surround you with visible evidences of the superior rank you are claiming. Wear your title lightly, but make sure that your workers know that you will discharge your responsibilities.

How democratic should a manager be? He should associate with his workers sometimes, and show himself an example of courtesy and friendliness. Nevertheless, he should maintain the dignity of his position.

He will allow others to share the limelight, and will delegate responsibility to them. Some supervisors make the mistake of assuming that the job will not be done right unless they do it themselves. This failure to deputize is inefficient.

Delegation comes easiest to the man who has a strong sense of the end result. He sees his objective clearly, and strives to attain it through others while giving a clear lead and firm guidance.

This requires good communication both ways between supervisor and worker. The effective manager is one with whom employees feel free to discuss important things about their jobs. A worker who has something to say likes to think that he will be heard. It confirms his belief that his job is an important part of the organization.

Don't communicate with workers exclusively on a high management plane. Identify the ideas, facts and changes with the job of each worker and his environment. Talk over important matters with workers. As Matthew Arnold once said, "Persuasion is the only true intellectual process." There is no problem, from writing a constitution for a nation down to designing a new office form, that cannot be solved by discussion around a table.

Dialogue is the key to harmonious departmental work. What you know about the work that your employees should know but don't know will damage or slow down work. So will the things your employees know that you haven't found out. The solution is to tell your workers promptly and clearly what they should know, and listen interestedly to what they have to say that has to do with their jobs.

Be particularly careful to explain when you have occasion to introduce a new order of things. People are not often successful in carrying out plans that they have not mentally assimilated. Anticipate possible objections and state them in your presentation, together with the reasons. By looking at the change from the worker's viewpoint you see the things which need to be cleared away so that he can appreciate the good points of your proposition.

State your thoughts simply and make your instructions definite and specific. Crises sometimes develop because someone got the message wrong.

If a subordinate makes a suggestion, tell him what action you have taken, and why. If his suggestion is not

adopted, he will accept that fact with full understanding when you show him that the reasons for rejection are clear and sound. The cause of offence is not the rejection of an idea, but the rejection of it without careful consideration and discussion.

About asking questions

It is a sign of strength, not of weakness, to admit that you don't know all the answers. Research is needed in even the most routine-bound office or shop. It should be directed toward building and revising a sound structure so that it tends toward the most efficient discharge of work.

Research may consist merely of standing at the door, looking at the activity of your staff, and asking: "What is the result of all this action? Is it all necessary?" Questions, even though you do not get the answers immediately, are valuable because they imply the existence of another viewpoint. One great foe of efficient management is the belief that things are all right as they are.

A problem is a challenge to understanding, and all problems in business are management problems.

The secret of problem solving is to collect and analyse the facts, segregate the essential elements, and put them together in a related and meaningful way. Your superiors and your staff may admire the resulting solution as intuitive brilliance, but you know that it is the result of thorough, painstaking investigation resulting in evidence considered and plans made.

Keep your thinking organized under pressure. You have to know about pressures and tensions and stresses created by the management job, but you can minimize them if you make sure to see your problems clear and whole and tackle them with optimistic confidence. Fussiness is a great hindrance. It happens every day that a manager who carries the heaviest responsibilities with calm efficiency is sent to hospital by trifles he has not learned how to handle.

Decisions and discipline

The making of decisions, discussed in the *Monthly Letter* of January 1963, and discipline, the subject of a *Letter* in May 1958, are vital management functions.

The time has not yet come when decision making can be turned over to machines and their technicians. Management decisions are based primarily on judgment. The machines produce facts, just as the instruments on an airplane provide information, but the pilot must interpret them into solved problems.

The maintenance of discipline in business is a clear-cut, indisputable obligation of management. There have to be rules, but they do not need to entail regimentation, which destroys personality, standardizes thought and action, and stultifies the spirit.

Some supervisors impose strict disciplinary measures not because they are needed but because they think it

is good for their workers to learn to obey. That is reminiscent of the Spartan custom of beating children regularly, not because they had done wrong but in order to teach them how to bear pain.

Be resolute in enforcing the principles in which you believe, but yield in matters of custom which make no difference to the success of your department. Waste little time in finding fault, and make clear that your supervision is designed not only to uncover bad work but also to bring good work to light. This is management by inspiration, not by repression.

Bolster the faltering worker and give encouragement toward improvement. There is no management distinction to be gained through firing people, but there is honour attaching to building people.

Morale

Above all, be fair. Tyranny degrades not only those who suffer it but also those who exercise it, and partiality is loaded with dynamite for the supervisor who indulges in it.

Good morale in a department cannot be imposed or bought: it must be earned. It is the product of consistently high management character.

Morale is the worker's emotional stance toward his work. It may be measured by the degree of satisfaction of four basic wants: a sense of security, a sense of achievement, a sense of justice, and a sense of participation. A manager can look himself in the face if he answers affirmatively this question to himself: "Have I done something today deliberately to improve employee relations in my work unit and give my staff a feeling of satisfaction in their work?"

Something new every day

Management is not something that you learn once and have the art forever. The explosion of knowledge in the past few years demands that managers keep learning and relearning.

Learn something every day. Even abstract knowledge on all kinds of subjects is helpful. It may be foreign to your line of work, but it provides background and room for growth. A well-stored mind makes you capable of doing your own thinking. It gives you size.

No person will have the cyclopedic knowledge for handling all management functions unaided. He must know, as a primary qualification for management, where to find the answers. Some will be in his firm's statements of policy, its staff handbook, its rule book, and its periodical memoranda to managers.

Much is to be found in books. *Business and the Man*, first volume in the Alexander Hamilton Institute Modern Business texts, has become widely recognized as a business classic. If the manager's field be selling, he has a complete reference book in the 1,000-page *Sales Manager's Handbook*, by Aspley and Harkness,

published by the Dartnell Corporation, Chicago. A treatise on the psychological approach to better business management, prepared by the staff of Rohrer, Hibler and Replogle, industrial psychologists, is entitled *Managers for Tomorrow*. It is published by the New American Library, New York, and General Publishing Co. Ltd., Canada.

An executive development programme of the University of Buffalo used as study material the following Royal Bank *Monthly Letters*: How to Get Information, Business Development, Strategy in Working with People, Making Work Better and Easier, On Saying What You Mean, On Writing an Article, Analysing a Problem, Merchandising Your Wares.

As to inspirational material, consider this evidence from a questionnaire sent out by a business magazine listing 49 classic literary titles. The one hundred business leaders who were questioned had averaged 26.4 books; one executive had read 42 of the 49. The first ten books on the list were: *The Bible*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Works of Aristotle*, Homer's *Iliad*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Plato's *Republic*, Goethe's *Faust*, Confucius' *Classics*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

So that is management

Management does not consist in having an autocratic mind, leading to arbitrary government, but in judgment and reason and knowledge of people.

It is among the most interesting occupations in the world, because it challenges the manager to administer the most difficult creatures on earth — men and women. He has to do so with fair play, appreciation of people's problems, and knowledge of business principles and practices: planning, organizing, controlling and supervising so as to mesh these in his company's interests.

This is not a life of ease, whatever status may attach to it. There is still a connection between effort and reward.

The manager is judged by his skill in effective action under varying conditions. He must avoid what is unfit as diligently as he observes what is suitable. He finds, like the plane-master in de Saint-Exupery's *Night Flight*: "If I slack and let events take charge trusting routine, always mysteriously something seems to happen."

The standard for both management and staff is to do your best with enthusiasm. That gives zest in living, and makes many things bearable which otherwise would be unendurable.

When all is said and done, when you have read the books and essays on how to do it, you come down to the moment of action. Recall what Admiral Lord Hawke, aboard the *Royal George*, said to his pilot at the battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759: "You have done your duty in pointing out the risk; and now lay me alongside the French flagship."