



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## *A Business Man's Qualities*

THE TERM "BUSINESS-LIKE" is one of the most expressive in any language. It is made up of attributes such as efficiency, reliability, integrity, and a sense of values.

The activity to which it refers covers a wide range of human affairs: all occupations, pursuits and callings. It involves earning our living and spending our money to the best advantage. It is an occupation in which brains, both human and electronic, have to be stirred up.

You cannot become a successful man of business just because you like the idea. You need to develop your desire by studying and practising, so as to learn to deal not only with the routine of everyday affairs but with the complexity which occasionally envelops them.

This involves a good grounding in the primary principle of business: the objective is to make things turn out beneficially while shouldering the risk of loss. You need to have a trading instinct so as to assess the true worth of any article or service for which you are going to exchange your own goods or services. An investment in anything, from a stack of shares in a big company to a cake of soap for the kitchen sink, is based upon the hope that your investment will produce a benefit.

It takes more than a competitive spirit to be a success in doing business. It takes more than intelligence, too. A person may rate high in tests of knowledge and aptitude and all the rest, but fizzle like a damp squib in transacting a bit of business. He may know the economic principles by heart, but he has to know when and how to use them. It is like playing a sonata: you cannot play a sonata simply by pushing down all the keys on the keyboard; the essential thing is to play the notes in their proper turn and with melodic variation.

This skill is developed through practice and through relating continuous learning to one's own personal background and environment. The information obtained by reading and learning is not yet wisdom, but must be used for thinking through to wise decisions. The dictionary says that wisdom is "the ability to judge soundly and deal sagaciously with facts". It in-

volves value judgments, and in judging values we must keep ourselves far away from whim, caprice and prejudice.

### *Use imagination*

It is when we have accumulated many facts of indubitable accuracy, and applied thought toward putting them into manageable order, that we start to use imagination. This is the "without which, nothing else" of the business man. It puts into service the experiences of yesterday to anticipate the happenings of tomorrow and to work up nebulous foreshadowings into profitable ideas. Everyone who uses imagination knows that his mind can be trained and guided and deliberately stocked with things to be imaginative about.

As an exercise in using your imagination, consider the data you have collected about some course of action, and take time to assess its possible value. Then express it in new terms, or old-fashioned terms, thus giving you several paths to explore. Change the order of the data and the terms, putting things into new connections with one another. This is the plan followed by many inventors, all advertising people, artists, and people engaged in research.

Break the conventional barrier once in a while. Instead of doing a usual job in the accustomed way, toss aside the accumulated practices, methods and techniques. Start thinking at the beginning. You may end up with a simplified process or procedure, or a cheaper way of doing as good work, or you may discover something entirely new. You will, whatever the outcome, have engaged in an exercise apart from routine, thus brightening your working day.

Of course you must discriminate. There are some things in which you are skilful, but this does not mean that you will be equally proficient in other areas. A cultivated art of discrimination will enable you to choose the fields in which you can think and work to the best advantage. Nothing is ever achieved except by limitation. No artist can paint all creation; he has to confine himself to the size of his canvas. As one writer commented: "Utterness ends in nothingness".

## *Work systematically*

These virtues — a trading sense, the acquirement of knowledge, the use of imagination, freshness of approach, and discrimination — are necessary to proper administration of business of any sort. Operations are conducted wisely by those who have the capacity to use the right assumptions at the right time, and to weigh the reliability of their assumptions against the risk.

Knowledge that has been gathered and stored in a systematic way enables a man to discharge his duties so as to contribute to his success. There is a difference between specialized knowledge and systematized knowledge. Specialized knowledge is narrow; systematized knowledge may be as wide as the world, and its elements combine to form the generalized knowledge which business requires.

This was given dynamic illustration years ago when a member of the House of Commons rose to ask whether Donald Gordon, newly-appointed chairman of the prices board, had experience in the production and distribution of food or other commodities. The Minister of Finance replied: "The chairmanship of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board does not involve the production and distribution of food or other commodities, but rather broad executive and administrative experience."

The business man must be able to apply good standard practice to ordinary functions, and to add a touch of genius when a key activity seems to need something special.

Some people look upon planning as merely the outcome of statistical forecasting. It is true that to plan we must have reliable figures, but we need to add sound analysis, good judgment, and confidence in our appraisal of the circumstances.

Planning is helped by system. Napoleon said: "When I want to close off one matter, I push in its file, and pull out another. I never get them mixed up, and they never bother nor fatigue me."

Routine may be killing to some people, but routine is the basis of successful operations. There comes the time when theory and policy terminate in the cutting-edge of direct action, and unless the basis has been well laid by planning and routine preparation you cannot look for sure success.

It is at the point of action that craftsmanship shows itself. There is no escaping the fact that a man must know his job and take an interest in doing it well. He is judged on the results of his performance. His instinct for workmanship causes him to do well, as a matter of course, what he has undertaken to do.

To all other qualities we must add perspicacity. Many people wear bifocals to improve their near and far sight; our minds need bifocal vision also. We have to examine situations in detail and in depth so as to see the job we are doing and its place in the world in which we are living.

## *Apply common sense*

Having been resourceful in gathering information, having put this knowledge into orderly form, discriminating the relevant from the irrelevant, it is time to apply common sense thinking. Being bright is not everything; one needs mother-wit.

Common sense has its anchor in experience. It throws a spotlight on the problem in hand so as to show up its weaknesses and highlight its possibilities.

The fate of a piece of business is not determined by the quivering needles over red and black lines on dials, but by the decision of the responsible person. Once the technical facts have been established, the economic aspects charted and appraised, the production problems analysed, and the human factors weighed, you must decide to get on with the job or not to do it.

You should know where to turn for help. There are times when you may doubt your own judgment, when your experience seems to be woefully short of what is needed. But you will have established sources of information and will know people with whom you can talk about what bothers you.

If your decision does not seem to others to be sound and adequate, take another look at it from the beginning. There is no dishonour in rethinking a problem, but there is disaster in pursuing a wrong course.

It is at this point that courage determines events. Courage is knowing how to conduct yourself in dangerous circumstances. Timidity is a serious detriment, because it will make a man hang back at the very moment when he should be forging ahead. Watching the championship jumping at the Royal Winter Fair or on television, we have seen more than one failure result from pulling in the horse while he was leaping.

To be brave is good, but the business life is not for people who have no consciousness of danger. They must know when the path they are taking is risky. A man of spirit relishes encounters, but the wise man of spirit enters upon them only after careful reconnaissance and with his eyes wide open. Then he has every chance of meeting challenges successfully.

Consider that day in the Battle of Britain, September 15, 1940, when, with Churchill in the operations room of the Fighter Command Station at Uxbridge, the air force sent up its last squadron. Churchill asked the commander: "What other reserves have we?" The reply was: "There are none." As Churchill wrote: "The odds were great, our margins small, the stakes infinite." It was enough: the enemy, too, had put in his last.

## *Develop enthusiasm*

In the ordinary course of business, doggedness must give way to enthusiasm if the best results are to be obtained. There should be nothing passive about business. Associate it in your mind with motion, energy, going places. Enthusiasm is a sort of demon-



stration of dedication to a purpose. It carries you over the ridge that separates success from failure.

There are even times to be flamboyant. An officer who tucks his swagger stick under his arm and calmly marches ahead of his men toward the enemy is not being needlessly showy: he is doing the inspiring thing.

When the need arises, you must press for action. Some conventional tools of business waste much time. The business man is not a lover of conversation for its own sake: he wants to get something under way. That is why some firms place a time limit on committee meetings, and why some enlightened parliaments put a time limit on speeches.

While using the services of many assistants and workers, a man should be able to shift for himself. Self-confidence is not conceit, but a feeling of certainty in the outcome arising from knowledge of planning well done, buttressed by abounding power within yourself. Shakespeare, in many of his sonnets, which gave him the only opportunity he had to speak of himself, declares with confidence that what he writes is immortal.

You have an obligation to do your best, even if your best is twice as good as is expected of those around you. While waiting with Caruso for their cue to go on stage, at Metropolitan Opera House, Edith Mason noticed that the most idolized of tenors was trembling. She asked incredulously: "Are you nervous?" Caruso replied: "Madam, other singers must sing 100 per cent; Caruso 150 per cent." Napoleon, too, was conscious of his worth. When he was told that the enemy outnumbered his troops by three to one, he answered: "I have fifty thousand men. Add myself, and you get a hundred and fifty thousand."

### *Discharge obligations*

Pushing business through to a successful conclusion is not everything in life. A man with unusual intellectual capacity, or with special opportunities, owes something to society. His honour puts the prominent man under an obligation as binding as necessity is for other people.

When a business man issues instructions he cannot do so like a small boy who throws a stone and runs. He is the responsible person and he must see that his instructions are carried out, he must stand by the people who are doing the work, and he is accountable for the results of what they do.

Difficult situations will arise, and the turmoil may be fierce, but his self-discipline will keep his judgment intact, his nerves secure, and his mind sound.

Sometimes he may obtain relief by laughing at himself, a great way to get over tribulation. When you are making a table in your home workshop and find that one leg is shorter than the other three; when you add up a column and find that it is the wrong column; when you assert loudly that someone has taken the report you want, and find it in your own desk drawer: what else can you do but laugh at yourself?

You will be on your guard against influences that will tend to make you self-satisfied. Small examples are: the secretary who keeps telling you: "You write a beautiful letter"; the accountant who says: "You are mighty fast with figures"; and the advertising writer who consults you about an illustration because "You have such an eye for form". These little flatteries, harmless in themselves, must be recognized as influences tending to undermine your objectivity.

### *Improve performance*

Long-term success demands constant improvement. Business would stagnate if it did not have people with new ideas and the gumption to try them out.

First of all, you need confidence in your ability to do a job well, and then seek a better way of doing it. Give yourself a crisp going-over once in a while to make sure that you are producing effectively under existing circumstances. What was good production of business five years ago may no longer be good enough; what were bright new ideas five years ago may need polishing up. Measure your performance. Is it up to the standard that you would set for other people in similar position?

One must keep up. There are people so far in the rear of the progress of their businesses that they imagine themselves to be leading from in front. A pliant mind is needed, and this demands breadth of viewpoint.

Know what you want. Take time to find out whether your course hitherto has indicated a desire for effective action or the wish for domination for its own sake. Assess the values and the possibilities in these traits. Ambition does not mean competing for leadership on a traffic light change, but desire to progress through constant growth.

Success in a project is not the paramount thing. We have not yet landed on the moon, but already we are planning to reach far more distant lands. Even if you have not at this moment the technique or means by which to implement fully your determination, you will at least formulate your goals.

### *Exercise power wisely*

A business man cannot afford to stop learning when he knows his business practices inside out: there are always human beings to learn about.

Some highly intelligent and resourceful people, capable of formulating excellent projects and organizing plant and office equipment, have no idea how to interest others in their ideas or induce them to carry out their plans.

You do not have to run a Freudian analysis of the significance of the hidden, unseen, and unconscious motivations of those with whom you do business, but you should know what their purpose is in the transaction that involves you.

It is not enough to be obliging and kind to your friends; you must also be gentle with those who run counter to your desires. This does not mean fake

intimacy,

Tact is a quality essential to successful living in any environment. It means being aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations, passions and interests, and being so gracious in acting as to spare others indignity, hurt and distress. Consider as an example the dance at which the lights were turned out during the playing of the new republican anthem because, as a republican leader said, "This is a social affair and we don't want to see who won't stand up."

The good business man's authority is clear to all, and it is not less respected because he scrupulously refrains from using his power when its use is not necessary. To be important in business is not to be enthroned in sceptred sovereignty, exerting a legal tyranny.

How important is it that people should recognize your eminence? Ideally, it is not at all important unless recognition of your leadership is necessary to your purpose and not just to your vanity. Those who insist upon recognition and look upon their dignity as a sacred thing show that they have not deserved what they demand. Far greater than public homage is the knowledge of prestige within oneself.

Arrogance is a throw-back to the pre-Copernican age which believed that all the universe circled around the earth. The arrogant man assumes that he is at the centre of his business, professional or social universe. He has a sense of power run riot. When the prophet Elijah got above himself and boasted that he was the only prophet left, he was put in his place by being told that there were several thousand other people doing the same work as himself and making a great deal less fuss about it.

### *Meet Adversity Bravely*

Every man in business needs to know the virtue of patience in adversity, and he should welcome adversity because it challenges him to be greater than he knew he could be.

In a crowded cemetery beside the cathedral in Dromore, Northern Ireland, is a monument to Bishop Jeremy Taylor, author of *Holy Living*, one of the great churchmen in history. He was imprisoned half a dozen times and persecuted often. He wrote, full of experience, "No man is more miserable than he that hath no adversity . . . Softness is for slaves and beasts, for minstrels and useless persons."

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their work are among their most important possessions. In many cases the success or failure of a company, or any other human project, turns upon the character, capability, and philosophical approach of one man, a man who makes ~~his~~ requirements of his position.

A man in business must not allow the idols of the pyramid climbers to replace the ideals of what men should be. He will make sure that the means he adopts to reach his end are appropriate and adequate and consistent with his character and principles. He will not do anything in the way of business that will damage ~~his~~

All achievement is perilously fragile unless it is based upon enduring principles. Getting ahead in the business world can be entirely consistent with following the soundest rules for successful living, observing the fundamental distinction between right and wrong.

### *Integrity*

The man of integrity has great influence in society. There is no substitute for him. He is the sort of man whom others instinctively trust, because he is the sort of man whose aim it is to live closely to his understanding of how he should live.

All the best maxims of present day morality existed in the Egyptian sacred books several thousand years ago. Here is part of the prayer of a soul pleading in the day of judgment: "I have told no lies, committed no frauds, not overtaken servants, promoted no strife, caused no one to weep, made no fraudulent gains, seized no lands wrongfully, not tampered with weights and measures, have given food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty and clothed the naked."

Such a code as this reminds us that business acts have social consequences, and the care for the public interest is an undoubted duty of business men.

Down through the ages, human life has relied upon an instinctive sense of obligation, on the part of those most widely endowed, to their associates. In his radio broadcast to his people at home and overseas following his coronation, King George VI put this sense into a phrase: "The highest of distinctions is the service of others."

The business man may, therefore, think greatly of the function he performs in society. Business is virile and durable, and its continued existence is vitally important to the fabric of Canadian life.

There is no great acclaim given business men. Scores of thousands of business men lie in cemeteries across the land, men who contributed more to their nation than many of the conquerors, soldiers and knights who sleep under carved sepulchres. They were not people who sought pomp. Like the athletes and actors and statesmen in Greece who treasured the wild-olive wreath above all the voluptuousness along the Mediterranean shores, they were satisfied by doing what they felt called upon to do in the best way they could do it.