



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

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THE YOUNG MAN IN BUSINESS

YOUNG men leaving school and university this year are starting now to reconnoitre, to survey, and to choose their places in the world.

They will, for the most part, be seeking ways to make their living, but that is not all they seek. Work is a large part of our living, and should be chosen so as to provide the greatest possible satisfaction. The man who enjoyed himself only in his leisure hours and during his annual vacation would have a skimpy time of it.

Parents find this season no less perplexing than do the youths themselves. They hesitate about using their influence, yet they feel that everything today is so complex that the young people cannot be expected to pick and choose sensibly.

This Monthly Letter will try to tell about one sort of work in a way that will help both young men and their parents to choose wisely. It does not pretend to give rules for success in the business world, but only to summarize points which have been observed by successful men.

Business is a strange amalgam of "practical common sense" and idealism. In it, a young man may perform his allotted task with consistent but dull efficiency, or by applying his imagination and using initiative he may make of it a great adventure.

The last thing desired in business is routine thinking. Business wants men who can not only find answers to problems, but can think up new ways of doing things better, thus producing problems to be solved.

Selecting Your Place

There are many openings in industry and commerce (for convenience we lump industry, commerce, finance and allied activities together as "business") and this year's graduates from high school and university are given a wide choice. Whatever ability they have can be used—mathematical or literary, artistic or scientific. They may be the office type or salesmen, introverts or extroverts.

Out of all these opportunities it may seem difficult to choose one which may provide the most satisfying life work. We don't want to flit blindly from one job to another, but neither do we wish to flutter like moths around the first bright light that catches our attention. Biologists tell us that after a chick hatches out of the egg it pecks at every small thing within its range. It has an instinct to peck, but it has no instinct to peck at the right things to eat.

Usually the fledgling in business life has an instinctive urge for three things: opportunity to advance, security, and satisfaction. There was a time when these three were harder to get together than they are today.

Security is not an obsessing problem to the ambitious young man, who knows that fulfilment of his aim will take care of it. There is no occupation that is guaranteed against all hazards of epidemic, flood, fire, war, depression and other cataclysms. But a reasonable caution should be observed to make sure of getting into something where every tiny upset of equilibrium does not bring on a crisis.

Satisfaction is not wholly dependent upon the type of business one is in, but more upon what one does in it. It is perfectly true that one job can be more interesting than another, but not nearly so true as that one mind is more interested than another. Care in selecting a working place that gives scope for our abilities can be an important factor in ensuring that we can look back after years of work with happy recollections.

Deciding What To Do

It is not only in science, but in all life, that advantage is gained by stating problems precisely. The problem may be said to be half solved when its factors are clearly known.

In deciding what activity to follow through one's life, the rule holds. The factors are: what do I want? what can I do best? where can I find the opening?

Everyone has a certain foundation of good points, of assets, and of strengths. Some may not be particularly bright in book learning, but they have the knack of learning from experience. Some may not be forceful personalities, but they have a way of clarifying situations, of getting down to the nub of a problem, and of finding answers. Some may be diffident in writing, but forceful in personal contacts. The variety is infinite: sincerity and honesty are needed in making one's own appraisal of oneself.

The danger is, in many cases, one of over-estimating. Those who over-estimate their knowledge and ability risk unhappiness. They are forever straining to live up to the false picture they have of themselves. They feel they are "failing", when in terms of their true ability they are doing very well. These are the really insecure people.

Making a Plan

Wherever a young man decides to go, he is starting from where he is now. The golden milestone in the Roman Forum, from which one could begin his journey to the four quarters of the globe, has its counterpart in every man.

The young men who plan with discretion and vision will be in positions to take advantage of every circumstance that will help them on their way: those who do not know clearly where they are going cannot even recognize opportunity when it comes to them.

Confucius put it this way: "In all matters success depends upon preparation; without preparation there will always be failure. When a line of conduct is previously determined, there will be no occasion for vexation."

Personal capability, personal tastes, and capacity to meet requirements of a job need to be taken into account without exaggeration. But unless a man undertakes more than he possibly can do, he will never do all that he can do.

Planning must allow for change. One needs to persist in carrying out plans, or they are of no avail, but flexibility is wanted, too. A detour here and there may be a good thing, to gather or to share experience, so long as the general direction shown on the map is followed.

Ambition

Not nearly so many people as some imagine stand in the way of an ambitious man. We meet a great number who believe that things have been already settled for us, or that distinction comes from destiny, so when we show initiative—the ability to think and do new things—we often find a clear run in a broken field.

Ambition is not envy of successful men. It is no simple willingness to receive. It is the sharp hope of attainment, positive, purposeful, energetic, and creative. It is the spirit that digs through the layer of

known and accepted ways of doing business to pioneer new frontiers. It is something that restrains a man from imposing upon himself bounds or limitations that prevent him from becoming the best he can become.

Ambition is not fretful. We became accustomed, during school and university days, to a great variety of experience and accomplishment. Those days were crowded with new things. But business demands a lot of repetition and sameness. Sales and deals and columns of figures have a way of following patterns. These things have to be done, and done well even for the thousandth time and even by the most ambitious man.

On Starting Small

Variety and thrills and great successes are not to be expected of the first job a young man gets in business. Some persons think that because they majored in commercial subjects at high school they should have preference, or that because they graduated in commerce from a university they should start several rungs up the ladder. Business is not like that.

The first job is a starting line. You are taken on the staff and given an opportunity to do certain things. Your first task is to perform well those designated duties and to gain the confidence of the men you will have to deal with. The right to move up to a higher level must be earned.

Every succeeding job provides a new opportunity to gather yourself together for another advance. Professor Erwin Haskell Schell, of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says in *The Million Dollar Lecture* (truly a gold mine for young men starting in business): "The period of acclimation gives unique opportunity to master fundamentals and to develop skill, to study parts in relation to the whole, to grasp the problem of administration in its entirety—to learn. The period of acclimation gives unique opportunity to explore the entire terrain of an industry, to study at first hand its human resources—to survey. The period of acclimation offers unique opportunity to concentrate one's talents within a given area, to conquer difficulties largely unaided, to attain results of undeniable significance—to master."

As was remarked in our Monthly Letter *The Personnel Department*, it is to the interest of the personnel director to select the right person for a job, to fill his vacancies with people who are adaptable, qualified and keen. From there on, what a man becomes is dependent largely upon his own ambition and capacity.

One thing is sure: every job and every promotion and every success have a common ingredient—work. To praise hard work has a moonlight and madness sound, but it makes sober sense to a business man.

The person who has a job that interests him either because of its nature or because it is a step toward

something bigger must scratch his head in wonder when he hears people lamenting the need to work.

There is, too, a value in work itself, regardless of what it accomplishes. A business man recognized this truth when he advised: "Do the wise thing if you know what it is, but anyway do something." Every business executive has seen studious youths spending their time reading *How to Get on in the World* and letting everybody pass them as they stumble along with their eyes on their books.

Efficiency

Efficiency pays. There would not be much fun in life if everyone received equal reward for unequal energy and ability.

Efficiency is not a thing in itself. It is preceded by principles and followed by work and developed by imagining roads to new efficiency.

No fancy titles will make up for lack of competence. An "expediter" may have an office and a staff, but his efficiency is not judged by his high rank. He stands or falls by his ability to get goods out the door, goods so well made and so well packed that there are no returns.

In other words (to quote the philosopher Socrates): Kings are not those who hold sceptres merely, but those who know how to rule. To gain promotion, a young man needs to show that he has qualities of some sort or other which others have not. The manner in which he meets certain situations will show his capacity and decide his advancement.

Continuing Education

Taking a position in business does not mean that your education must stop. When Henry Adams wrote the story of his life he called it *The Education of Henry Adams*.

In addition to the habit of thoroughness and the zeal for your business, you need to augment your opportunities by intelligent study and the fostering of broad interests.

Men who limit themselves rigidly to their official duties become sluggish in their reactions and develop blind spots. It is a mistake never to think of a business concern in terms any bigger than one's own personal position in it.

There are many roads to learning, and few hindrances. Night schools, correspondence courses, university extension classes, study groups—these are all open to anyone. The building of a well-used personal library is a fine investment, and in these days of Penguins and Mentors it is available to everyone.

Merely having a bookcase full of beautifully bound volumes does not mean anything, but to read them and then link up your study with business experience will give a sense of pleasant accomplishment.

The great hindrance to study is the sense of "I have no time". Everyone has all the time there is, and the excuse means simply that study for advancement is not considered so important as some other time-user.

Another way to increase the length of your strides toward success and perhaps to speed them up is simple, too. It is doing the little bit extra.

Life is activity. It means doing things, planning, aspiring, dreaming, and then making the dreams come true. Where else than through extra work can a man show his initiative and enterprise?

These Ideas in Banking

Now, let's see how one business measures up in detail to the principles about which we have been writing. We will take banking, because that is the business we are closest to.

There is a dignity and power about Canadian banking which appeals to young men. It is a great constructive force behind the other three functions of business: production, distribution and consumption, and it would be difficult to overestimate the opportunities for broad public service offered the young banker.

Banking attracts men of high character. When a young man enters banking he knows that he may remain in, and progress upward in, his bank throughout his whole span of business life. This enables him to plan his future with accuracy, and he can measure his progress chart by the charts of those who have passed along the road before him.

Maintenance by the Canadian banks of a high standard in the quality of their personnel, coupled with the professional nature of their business, has resulted in the bank officer enjoying a prestige which is by no means the least of the advantages offered him. That is why a bank manager who had retired wrote with pride: "My son has chosen banking."

Banking Jobs

The salary in a bank at commencement is sufficient to place a junior clerk on a self-supporting basis. Wherever he may be, his salary will be in keeping with the salaries paid in his community for comparable positions. Salaries are reviewed at least once a year, not only by the young man's immediate superior, but by a chain of authorities right up to the top executive. And, of course, salaries are increased when officers are promoted.

In addition to the "take-home" pay there are other benefits. Most banks have pension plans whereby upon payment of a moderate assessment based upon salary the officer becomes entitled to retirement, disability, widows' and orphans' pension. Group life insurance is provided, and, generally, accident and health, hospitalization, and other insurance. There is a generous sick leave policy; officers have liberal holidays with pay, and when conditions warrant there are year-end cash bonuses.

Qualifications and Opportunities

No special training, beyond a good elementary education, is needed to qualify for entrance into a bank. A young man, resolved to work conscientiously and to preserve in inviolable secrecy the business of customers, has every chance to progress. He starts to learn banking from the ground up.

Personal qualities are important, for two reasons: the bank officer is thrown into constant touch with the public, and what he does will weigh heavily for or against his selection for managerial positions. His fair and unprejudiced judgment will count toward his promotion, as will his ability to study all phases of a problem, and to see the whole picture before saying "yes" or "no".

No special preference is given university graduates. Some are engaged every year, and in the words of the personnel director of one bank: "They are given the same opportunities as high school boys, but with their extra education it is expected that for the first few years at least they will progress a little more rapidly."

All the many benefits of bank work will have been noted by the aspiring young man, but he will want to know, as well, "What chances are there of advancement?" Well, banking is a most hopeful business field for ambitious youth.

The better than average man has not only the chance, but practically the certainty, of promotion to the limit of his capability. At first there are required only three things: strict honesty, secrecy regarding the affairs of customers, and a willingness to learn. The novice develops under the tuition of his immediate superiors and his colleagues, and under the friendly eye of the personnel officers in the various supervisors' departments. As to how far he can go, one need only look at the heads of Canadian banks today, most of whom started their careers as clerks.

Patience is needed, as in every other business. It took only four years to get through high school, but that doesn't mean that managership of a branch can be attained in the same time. Responsible posts can be given only to persons who have qualified, not only by study, but by experience. The measure of the opportunity can be seen in the fact that there are 3,855 branch banks in Canada, each with its manager, its tellers and its other officers. In most branches the next in line to the manager is the accountant. This bank alone has 714 branches in Canada and 63 abroad.

The branch system, coupled with the general policy of executives in training their staffs by frequent changes of location, offers opportunities of travel and business experience which are invaluable. By changing from branch to branch a young man learns at first hand the varied economies of Canada and of other countries: wheat, coal, fruit, forests, the precious metals, fisheries, and all the rest.

Leisure-time courses are available to bank officers, the cost to successful candidates being borne by the bank. A junior course is provided by Shaw Correspondence School, and a senior course is under direction of Queens University. A graduate becomes a Fellow of The Canadian Bankers Association.

To sum up: the application of qualities outlined in the first part of this Monthly Letter apply in most other business activities just as they do in banking. Alertness, ambition and eagerness are desired; promotion depends upon aptitude and evidence of enterprise. Age and length of service do not by themselves determine advancement. Fundamentals are important, therefore young men start at the bottom. As a man's special qualities develop and show themselves, he may be selected for particular duties.

About Success

Achievement in business life, just as in the arts, is dependent upon imagination combined with industry. It is necessary for the young man just entering business to do his first job, small though it may be, to the very best of his ability, and at the same time to carry his head high, the better to see far horizons.

To achieve that, he needs to lay aside non-essentials, and to be sincere with himself as well as others in the service he gives. Sincerity, in this regard, means much: honesty of thought as well as of action; self-respect; fidelity to one's own objectives and to those of the employer.

There are few fairy tales in business life. Usually there will be found, behind the success of a man, beneath the expansion of a company, a lifetime of experience put to creative use by the touchstone of an imaginative idea.

Into that experience went work, and the little bit extra; mistakes; rubbing shoulders with many people; study; observation; meditation, and controlled ambition.

Success is not a destination to be travelled to; it is the journey itself, and happiness is found along the way. Those who feel handicapped by their dearth of formal schooling or by any other lack should recall Conwell's wonderful lecture *Acres of Diamonds* in which he said: "Greatness really consists in doing great deeds with little means."

Never before have capacity and talent been less impeded by lack of formal training. But never before has it been more true that he who longs to achieve does not ask whether the seat is soft or the hours short or the weather pleasant.

The real joy of life is not in doing things easily, but in doing them better than others, and the harder a thing is to do the greater the opportunity that is offered to the young man of ambition.

Straight thinking, willingness to work and alertness to problems: these should be the watchwords of this year's graduates. The world of business has a place for them.