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To Become a Manager

THE QUALITIES NEEDED in management have been the subject of many books and essays. These, however, have been addressed to the men and women who have arrived at management desks. This *Monthly Letter* attempts to show that when a person cultivates the qualities day by day on the job he now has he will be ready for the managerial job he seeks, whether it be management of a factory, an office, a store, a school, or a home.

Perhaps promotion today is not so easy as it once was, but education has advanced and enlarged so as to prepare one to cope. It can be said with truth that more is needed than is included in the Horatio Alger success formula: a poor but worthy hero who enters life as a bootblack or newsboy, surmounts impossible obstacles, and achieves the heights of success. But certain fundamentals remain unaffected by mechanical, social and trade revolutions.

To be an efficient manager does not demand high education, but it does require common sense, keen intelligence, and qualities of judgment, temperament and drive. In whatever post you reach you must welcome the call to combat the difficulties that problems impose. You hold your post only as a sportsman holds a challenge cup.

"Manager" is an omnibus term, including men and women who hold a great variety of directive and advisory positions, but it always implies leadership. If you are not a natural leader whom others instinctively trust and obey, now is the time to start cultivating the qualities that will raise you into that class.

The pathway to management rank is much like the hard road followed by a recruit in the armed services in search of a sergeant's stripes. He has to work at menial tasks; differentiate his left foot from his right; be at the proper place at the assigned time; separate a gun into its component parts, shake them up in a blanket, and put them together again; get along with a mixed bag of other service men, including sergeants; learn to help and to accept help; keep healthy; grouch with discretion; develop aptitudes; scorn weakness; grow accustomed to command by obeying, and learn how to lead by following others.

Interest in succeeding is the motive power that will see you through the drudgery and tribulations. You have an end in view, and you accept the means to that end.

All this apprenticeship is necessary if you are to avoid the misfortune of being placed in a management position just because you look the part. Looks count for little in the hard bargaining of labour relations, in the tough going of a crisis in production, in the continuing battle to keep the annual financial statement in black ink.

Ambition

Difficulty is not an obstacle to progress, but a sure doorway to opportunity if you have ambition. It screens out the amateur, the playboy, and the less able. A young man seeking promotion needs some ballast to keep him on an even keel, but most of all he needs a tall mast and a sail.

One element in advancement is strength of purpose. Not all the stop-watch systematization in the world will be worth while unless a man's spirit is blazing with aspiration. This is not made up of a desire to hold power, but to develop the department into something better, to see good plans germinate and grow.

Pride of achievement in your present job is a powerful incentive. Here is something you can tie yourself to when other motivations have failed or have lost their strength. If you can learn to live without status symbols for the time being and rest upon the quality of your demonstrated worth, you have eliminated a hurdle that many men stumble over.

Like the Emperor Hadrian, let your prestige be your own, inseparable from your person, and directly measurable in terms of achievement. Status symbols will come, but to you they will be evidences of inner worth, attained by effort to become yourself to the utmost.

Have a programme for your development, and follow it. Look at these examples of two men who made good, and reflect upon the features that contributed to their success. Dr. Samuel M. Best is a

small-town boy, born in Maitland, Nova Scotia. He worked his way through the schools, graduated from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, joined the Cuticura Corporation and became its President. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was trained for the law against his inclination. After occupying positions of increasing importance in the government service for thirty years he became director of the ducal theatre. As additional interests he took up scientific research and literature. In the one he made important discoveries in connection with plant and animal life and evolved a new theory of the character of light; to literature he contributed ten major works and many beautiful lyrics, ballads, and love-songs.

Both men developed a sense of direction. The chances of blundering into success are so slim as not to be depended upon.

Any person who wishes to become a manager will find starting opportunities right at his elbow. He is a participating member in the success of the firm for which he works. His start toward management occurs when he soaks himself in the facts relating to his job and the managerial job he seeks.

To become a manager you must study the profession of management, learn the lessons, and meet tests. Do not be narrow. Learn from many disciplines: from science, psychology, philosophy, engineering, physics, chemistry, mathematics, ecology, and medicine, as well as from economics. No matter what line you are in, all these have something to contribute to your wise handling of management situations.

Learn to shift your viewpoint year by year, keeping up with new knowledge and new thoughts. If Place Ville Marie were examined by a Grecian architect, accustomed to the lines of the Parthenon, he would find nothing but deformity, while nineteenth-century John Ruskin would see it as stark and unadorned, and would call it "architectural doggerel". Today's business, like today's architecture, has new rules and standards.

Be professional

Once a man embarks upon management he must cultivate the attributes of a professional. Some of the marks of a "pro" are: he does not accept mediocrity; he continues his education so as to keep his performance up to date; he accepts the ethical rules of the game; he keeps looking for better ways to do things; he seeks opportunities to expand and display his skill; he is open-minded, and he is fair in his dealings with people.

If a "pro" is not a universal judge of what is good, he has some quite incontrovertible ideas of what is bad — all things shoddy, all pretentious imitations, all second-hand ideas, all gimmicks, and all things pointlessly decorated. He has a scale of values.

Aim at being a "pro" on the job you have. This means having complete mastery of it. A person can learn much from books and in well-designed courses

in schools, but he cannot call himself a "pro" until he has had actual experience, though the experience may be small-scale.

There is a self-disciplinary cost involved. Refusal to make personal sacrifices for his job holds back many a man. As Cassius said to Brutus in *Julius Caesar*: "Men at some time are masters of their fates; the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings."

The manager is one who must trust his own judgment. The "pro" is not one who has to ask advice before doing anything important, or who leans on his boss. A man's self-confidence measures the height of his possibilities, and no man ever passes his own self-imposed limitation.

Self-reliance is not a single attribute but the combination of many qualities: emotional stability, willingness to face facts and to bear responsibility, practice in making decisions and the courage to abide by the consequences, the habit of depending on one's own resources and ability, and the energy of initiative.

Analyse the situation

One infallible rule for clear thinking in any job will carry over into wise action in management: analyse the situation. Unless you put a problem into words you do not give it form, and if it is formless it does not exist in a shape that permits solution.

In every crisis, however big or little, get all the cards on the table and recognize the total situation. Take nothing for granted if you can check it. Students in biology usually start out with the examination of a plant or an animal; they then proceed to dissect it, to take it to pieces and examine these, to see how the living thing was made up and how it worked. Then it is profitable to return to the whole plant and the whole animal and look at them again in the light of this knowledge.

Ideas and conceptions which seem utterly chaotic when circling and colliding in our minds become clear and separated into orbits and systems when we write them or sketch them on paper. There is in the very act of taking a pen in hand something imperative which the most wandering mind seldom resists.

Keeping records of progress may be a nuisance, but so are many of the other things you have to do in preparing for a management position. No aspiring young man should be content unless his personal book-keeping informs him of his gains and losses. The path of business is littered with the wreckage of men who might have been great if they had done a competent job of cost-accounting.

Get experience

Get experience where you are, and reach out for more experience on the periphery of your job. Experience helps you to do things. When you get to be a manager you will have this point by which to judge

subordinates: do they come to you with decisions or do they expect you to make decisions for them? On the way up you will be judged by the same criterion. Now is the time to practise what you will expect of others.

Fortunately for us, we do not need to confine ourselves to our own experiences. It would be a dreadful prospect if every child entering the world had to wait and learn by experience the burning quality of fire, how to catch and cook his own dinner, and that he cannot tackle a lion bare-handed.

The man who depends upon his own experiences has relatively few materials to work with. That is why trade papers, textbooks and biographies are useful — to make available to us knowledge of the techniques and practices used effectively by others.

The managers of departments are expected to push their specialties, but in a rapidly changing world versatility is a priceless asset. Too early specialization can be hampering. Instead of concentrating on many facts about one subject, learn a few important facts about many subjects. To be a manager you need knowledge and sensitivity in a broad field.

Knowledge and expertness are not the complete requirements for management. The manager is more of an effective dreamer than a perfect machine. He has to originate, to think creatively.

This is something that can be learned on the most humble job. If you are a creative pace-setter in your present work you have the makings of a creative-coach in a managerial job.

To be creative means finding means to improve the job and your part in it. From there you will go on to make trial runs beyond your daily job. You will imagine a problem that might arise in your work — or in your boss's work — and solve it. This is far and away better than finding faults and pointing out difficulties.

The most degrading poverty in a human being, and the greatest obstacle in the way of the person who seeks promotion, is poverty of the imagination. To raise new questions, new possibilities, requires creative imagination and marks real advancement. Do not be afraid of allowing your mind to take flights of fancy.

Communicate clearly

The person aspiring to management level must — and it is an imperative must — develop his effectiveness in communication. This includes ease, clarity and appropriateness of what he says and writes and the thoroughness with which he listens.

In *The Pyramid Climbers*, a novel by Vance Packard, the report is given of a group of college seniors who were about to go into corporations as managerial trainees. Every man who scored in the top quarter in vocabulary while still in college became an executive within five years, while not one in the bottom quarter on vocabulary reached that rank.

Faulty communication has much to do with the disorder in offices and factories. It is not communicating if you merely tell something so that it can be heard. The language and depth of thought must be adapted to the receptive system of the hearers.

You have the obligation to be intelligible. If reasons are needed, here they are. (1) For efficiency: unless people understand what you are driving at they cannot respond in keeping with what you desire. (2) For courtesy: you have no license to talk in such obscure words or in so low a voice that people must strain to get what you are trying to convey. (3) For your personal satisfaction: if you are muffled, either as to sound or language, your instructions — and even your jokes — will fall flat, and that is always disconcerting.

Make no mistake about this: every communication a manager makes does two things: it conveys ideas and it generates feelings. The reader's feelings, needs and motives must be considered as well as his literacy level.

Listening is important. By listening, we reduce misunderstanding, argument and conflict. We also draw, to our advantage, on the experiences and opinions of others.

Proper communication is part of co-operation. Every person should develop his capability to walk alone if need be, but he should guard against making self-dependency an obsession. Co-operation within your group, your office, or your workshop, is vital to your survival as a manager and to the success of your enterprise.

There have been many examples of shocking failures and disasters that resulted when people were not tuned in on one another. One was the escape of the German battleships from Brest through the narrow English Channel to a home port. It is told about in detail in John Deane Potter's book appropriately titled *Fiasco*. The British navy, army and air force were jealously hugging their secret information to their breasts, shutting their ears to warnings, and closing their eyes to evidence.

Three good qualities

The aspiring manager will profit by cultivating patience, modesty and enjoyment of work.

Impatience can tear holes in any plan. Plutarch, who wrote a monumental biography of twenty-three Greeks and twenty-three Romans, declared that "it seems to be without doubt that Brutus might have been the first man in the Commonwealth, if he had had patience but a little time to be second to Caesar."

Patience in business includes being big enough to see your suggestions pulled apart by a committee without becoming upset; waiting for an idea which seems clear to you to take hold in a superior's mind;

going back to a discarded plan to see what can be salvaged, revised, or revitalized; and listening without obvious petulance to a colleague whose contribution to a discussion is incoherent and confused.

As to modesty, wear every promotion lightly. A man may ruin his prospects by throwing his weight around when he is given a little authority. Take delight in effective action rather than domination, and do not try to cut too wide a swath. Lord Beaverbrook, when advising young people, said: "This rule is the most important of all. Many promising young men have fallen into ruin from the neglect of this simple principle."

The manager must be a doer of things, a worker. The opportunities he sees from his executive desk have no meaning unless they are buttressed by his activity. A man may have talent and knowledge and the wish to progress, but these are futile unless he has driving power.

Have an open mind

The manager needs not only an open door policy but an open mind. This is not something that is picked up the day you are promoted: it has to be cultivated now.

Being receptive to other people's opinions and beliefs does not mean being complacent about the things that matter. Tolerance distinguishes what is essential and what is not. It enables you to extend your knowledge over great stretches of life so that you are better able to understand the small part that falls within your jurisdiction.

When a man has managerial responsibilities he must not allow himself to be diverted by side issues, however attractive they may be to him. This is a quality that should be cultivated on the way up, so as not to be side-tracked by things that are of no consequence in your programme.

Many successful men in the business and technical world today are men who have made the most of only average ability by keeping their eye on their objective. They did not carry excess baggage; they did not let promotion and prosperity grow fatty tissues around their ambition.

They did have boldness to use their imagination. Man would never have stood erect had he not shattered the shackles of precedent in a great experiment. One must have the spunk to stand on his own two feet. He is not of managerial rank if he declines to undertake anything unless he has positive assurance of success.

We recall that in Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* Queen Elizabeth gave Walter Raleigh a diamond ring, with which he wrote on a window pane: "Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall." The Queen completed the couplet: "If thy mind fail thee, do not climb at all."

Have a philosophy

Single-minded ambition should not be allowed to deprive you of the colour, flavour, poetry, passion and the infinite variety of life. Even the most hard-headed managers need philosophy, art, literature, and ethics in order to be human.

Philosophy is not an ivory tower diversion. It is engaged in penetrating to the principles and meanings of things, and these are of pre-eminent value to a manager. Philosophy teaches you how to tell truth from falsehood, fact from opinion, the phoney from the real, and the beautiful from the tawdry. It provides you with criteria enabling you to use life in a way that gives inner peace, and the ability to act out in life your own ideals for yourself.

On reaching maturity

A man's emotional maturity determines his ability to work effectively with other people. There is no credit due you for being old in years: that is something that just happens. But to be mature in thinking is a credit to you because you have worked toward it and developed it. Maturity is a state of mind, not a date on a calendar.

One sign of maturity is that a man is not cock-sure. There was a hunter in the Musquodoboit district in Nova Scotia who shot a moose. He leaned his rifle against a tree and went to look at his trophy. The moose, merely stunned, leaped up and charged him.

A manager is only as good as his actual performance proves him to be. As a worker you are tackling one job at a time and coping with one problem at a time. When you become a manager you will be at the focus of many jobs and many problems.

Some of the precautions observed by the manager when entering upon an enterprise are like those taken by a military commander: enter no undertaking without reserves; make your base secure, so that you have a strong fixed point around which to manoeuvre; take account of your strength honestly, and discount heavily your estimate of the stupidity of your opponent.

When you are seeking promotion to managerial rank your life consists of activity, planning, aspiring, doing, and pressing on. You will become sensitive to problems, fluent with ideas, flexible as to means, and restless for results.

Not all men are so eminently qualified that they can reach the very top of the managerial tree. But anyone can rise to a better job in which he will be making the most of his talents. The path is never an unbroken series of successes. There will be disappointments and reverses that must be met staunchly.

After all is said, the way to win success was put as clearly as need be by a little boy. When he was asked how he learned to skate he replied: "Oh, by getting up every time I fell down."