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Something about Craftsmanship

THE WORD "craftsman" may be used of a competent technician or a great artist. It does not apply to any particular sort of occupation, but to the special sort of way in which a man carries out his job, whatever it may be. The good craftsman constructs his product as perfectly as he can.

Men have done wonderful things with thought and tools, but the inventor, the philosopher, the business executive and the master mechanic need to be first of all and at heart craftsmen.

A man may hide himself from you, or misrepresent himself to you, every other way, but he cannot in his work. His imagination, his perseverance, his impatience, his clumsiness, his cleverness—everything is there in a man's work. If stonework is well put together, it means that a thoughtful man planned it, and a careful man cut it, and an honest man cemented it.

Some will say that in this machine age there is less room than formerly for the craftsman's joy in skilled work; but is it true? There is no reason why the machine should not make nice things if it is given half a chance. One can picture a turner at a lathe finding delight in the design of what he is doing as well as in the exercise of his skilled hands.

A sturdy fallacy

Craftsmen scratch their heads in wonder when they hear people repeating the sturdy fallacy that work is punishment. Some people who do not like to work look for the invention of tricks and gadgets to help them toward their life goal of happiness through do-nothingism. Dr. D. Ewen Cameron calls this "our asinine belief that not to work is to enter into bliss."

If a man doesn't work he will not starve to death, because the welfare agencies will provide for him, but eager young things who caper for joy at the thought that the need for workmanship has gone from the world are letting the enjoyment of life pass them by. The creed of soft living is a creed for weaklings.

If work were reserved for slaves we freemen would clamour for a change of government because we were being deprived of the zest of living. Work well done is our contribution to the maintenance of civilization, as well as the means of earning bread. It gives dignity to life, provides satisfactions, offers opportunity for expansion of our ego, and makes rest and leisure meaningful.

Pride in work

The craftsman habitually does well what he has to do. He isn't prompted by pride in being able to do something, but satisfaction in being able to do it well.

Every job has its own dignity. A person may develop pride in his work regardless of what it is. A man using a wooden "pusher" to unload grain from box-cars found a better way to get his weight behind it, turning a job of the utmost drudgery into a satisfying adventure. A locomotive engineer loves the feeling of responsibility that comes over him when he gets behind the throttle. Carl Sandburg reminds us of the fish crier in Chicago whose face "is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, terribly glad that God made fish, and customers to whom he may call his wares from a push-cart."

Dr. L. P. Jacks declared in his book *My Neighbour the Universe* (Cassell & Co. Ltd., London, 1928) that all a man's imperatives—to mankind, to the State, to the city, to his family, to himself—come to a focus in his work. If he is a cabbage-grower "he must regard himself as commissioned by the universe to grow the best cabbages the circumstances permit of... he is promoting goodness, beauty and truth in the way he is commissioned to promote them."

There is no job in the world so dull that it would not present fascinating angles to some mind. It is true that one job is more interesting than another, but not nearly so true as that one mind is more interested than another.

Personal worth

Craftsmanship enhances personal worth. The work of any of us may matter very little to the world, but it matters very much to ourselves how we do it.

The craftsman gets a certain stir and glow out of self-fulfilment, and his work has for him a perennial nobleness, a sense of maturity. He seems to have in his hand some clue to all the riddles of the universe. There is no other sensation quite like it.

We can master fear and certain kinds of pain through constructive, painstaking, satisfying work. It is the best sublimation for rage and anger, and a perfect escape from self-pity.

Just working at a thing with enthusiasm and with a belief that the job may be accomplished, gives relish to life. It enables us to adapt more readily to a crisis, attaining a healthy serenity. It gives our work a bias toward perfection. Emile Zola said in one of his addresses to students: "It is pleasant to dream of eternity. But for an honest man it is enough to have lived his life, doing his work."

Craftsmanship is work well done, but it has room, too, for thoughtfulness and invention and, where it is appropriate, fancy. In the homes of the cliff-dwellers in Arizona you may see finger-marks left by the women who plastered the cave walls with mud a thousand years ago. Some of the workers were not content to fill crevices, but made whorls and scrolls, enjoying this opportunity of adding art to skill.

Work approached in that spirit, with some feeling of its value and some thought of self-expression, becomes a pleasure instead of drudgery.

Every job may be looked upon as responsive to our ideal, inviting us to infuse new goodness into it. No material with which we work, whether it be cabbages or gold, asks us to be content with it as we find it. It asks us to take it in hand and change it by putting value into it. As Dr. Jacks says: in each piece of material "the universe stands represented and speaks as a whole, saying to the worker, 'make me better'."

Using imagination

If you are a workman, and feel that you are not a craftsman, turn your imagination loose.

Perhaps craftsmen have something of the poet in them, combining technology and mysticism. Certainly, a workman cannot accomplish anything great unless his imagination has furnished him with a goal.

What we imagine may be out of reach at the moment, but may be drawn within range, captured and fixed. Michael Angelo said that he already saw in the unhewn block a statue which to duller eyes

remained invisible until his chisel had removed the flakes of marble which concealed it.

It was imagination that enabled man to extend his thumb by inventing the vise, to strengthen his fist and lengthen his arm by inventing the hammer. A new word "imagineering" describes the process: you let your imagination soar and then engineer it down to earth.

All of us are much more creative than we suspect. If you find yourself getting irritable in your groove, here is the way out. Get going on something that you recognize as being creative, even if it is just a little thing.

The housewife who decorates her windows with taste, or paints landscapes or still life to brighten her walls, or sets her table in a variety of imaginative ways, is expressing herself creatively. A man with the highest honours earned in the world's greatest universities may be serene in a small corner, teaching mathematics in a high school, solving economic problems in a business, or breeding plants purposefully in a hot-house. Why is he satisfied? Because what he is doing gives him a sense of creative craftsmanship.

Expert in the job

It must be repeated that first of all the craftsman is expert in his job. He does not fumble. He may or may not have scored 100 per cent of marks in a written examination, but he does apply his knowledge in a practical way. He puts the stamp of his spirit upon his work so that it becomes uniquely his.

When a business man grasps a problem with the rapidity of intuition and solves it, he is a craftsman. To the writing craftsman, words of a strange rightness come easily; to the craftsman in metal, the exactly correct twist of the wrist; to the craftsman in painting, a beautiful and permanent shape is given his fine inspiration.

There is a craftsmanlike quality to even the simplest action, such as driving a nail into a board. There is a best way of doing that, and the man who has done it that way may rest confident that he has been guided by the sum total of all knowledge; that the best workmanship in the universe has asserted itself in that act.

But the craftsman is not easily satisfied with his work. He asks: what can I do to better it or to extend it? His vision is on the horizon rather than at his feet, though he knows that just as a journey of a thousand miles must start with a single step, so perfection in his art starts with very small advances. He tries every day to know more than he did yesterday.

It is essential to our nature as human beings that there should be no "end." The craftsman is not averse to invention. By combining curiosity with experience and knowledge with experiment he attains the only solid satisfaction given to human beings—the happiness of endless attaining.

But he must realize that to reach this stage he needs to know deeply. If he works in wood he does not know merely the surface of his plank but the heart of the tree. If he is an artist in colour he knows what goes into the making of every shade, the pigment and the dryer and the poppy oil as well as the way it shows on his canvas. If he is a business man he knows what causes the surges and depressions on the chart of his profit cycle. The value of intimacy with one's material is greater than can be set down in black and white.

Using one's head

The craftsman must not be thought of as one who works with his hands merely. Let us consider one who does work with his hands, and we find that his craftsmanship comes from his head.

He uses induction, which is the ability to discover rules, to reason out what makes things happen. He visualizes, seeing how a piece of material would look when moved to another place or if something were done to it. He has a memory for details, noting imperfections as well as perfections. He has muscular imagery, the ability to picture to himself the appearance of his hands as they manipulate material and tools. He has perceptual speed and flexibility, detecting quickly what is necessary and attending to it without being distracted by other things. All of these, the operative factors that direct his manual skill, are products of his brain.

Craftsmanship is sincere. The craftsman believes in doing with all his might what his hand finds to do. His prayer might be like that of the scientist in Sinclair Lewis' *Arrowsmith*: "Give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished."

Judgment, therefore, becomes a part of craftsmanship. A man must know what he is trying to do and the best way to accomplish it. He must have the courage to judge for himself between two ways of doing a job: which is the better? He will not make a fuss about the lesser technicalities nor the mannerisms affected by others, but look toward the desired end.

Choosing a craft

So that they may choose wisely, young people should learn earnestly about the work that is done by people in their community. If they become interested in learning about a wide variety of jobs they will be

better able to choose the one that will give them greatest satisfaction.

This is one of the benefits of such a plan as the Boy Scout proficiency badge programme. In studying for badges attesting that he has knowledge of what is done by the airman, blacksmith, carpenter, electrician, auto mechanic, farmer, mason, metal worker, printer, and a dozen others, the lad gets a taste of many sorts of work.

The Guidance Centre, Ontario College of Education, University of Toronto, publishes monographs on many occupations, telling in concise detail about the qualifications and skills needed, the nature of the work, opportunities for advancement, wages, working conditions, and how to get started. Similar outlines, prepared by the Department of Labour, are available from The Queen's Printer, Ottawa.

Being in the right job is a valuable help toward satisfying one's ambition to amount to something. A person who finds his place, and applies himself to seek excellence in it, becomes a craftsman. Of that, no one can rob him. His aspirations may outrun his immediate powers, and he may suffer occasional spasms of frustration, but his sense of craftsmanship gives his life meaning.

In these days many a man has to draw his own chart for learning. Young people are being diverted from training, apprenticeship, and higher technological studies by inflated wages attracting them into blind-alley occupations.

As a consequence they become unhappy, after a few years, when they find themselves with no adequate employment for their best talents. Fortunately for them, universities and schools and the adult education associations have stepped in with opportunities for study toward repairing the damage done by premature school-leaving. There are evening or correspondence courses available in every subject imaginable.

Apprenticeship

This situation is now new. The different systems of apprenticeship proposed by eighteenth-century industrialists show how difficult it was to cope with the demands for a new type of workman created by the new machines of their time, and we today have not yet found our balance in the midst of a new technical revolution.

"Apprenticeship" is generally accepted as meaning a period of training, involving shop and related subject instruction.

It is suggested by Professor Glen U. Cleeton, of Carnegie Institute of Technology, that we might with advantage move toward an internship programme of

education in substitution for what now passes as apprenticeship. The trade learner would be instructed initially to the point where he was partly skilled. He would then be given a chance to use this skill in work assignments, returning to the training centre at frequent periods for direct training on other units of his trade. He would thus increase proficiency through alternate periods of education and work. As his final pre-journeyman assignment, for a period of a year or more, he would be required to apply complete trade skills under the supervision of a master craftsman.

Professor Cleeton points out (*Making Work Human*, Antioch Press, 1949) that "the plan has a dangerous aspect for some of the craft unions in that it would probably produce craftsmen superior in competence to more than half of the persons now working as members of the craft."

In a radio address last year, G. C. Bernard, Manager of the Ontario Division of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, praised the institutional type of training now taking hold with such remarkable effect in the industrialized countries of Europe.

Mr. Bernard pictured an apprentice acquiring, within perhaps two years, the skill and knowledge required to fit him to take his place beside his fellow craftsmen.

Broad education

Beyond technical training there needs to be given our young people a broad general education. As Urthred says in H. G. Wells' science-fiction story *Men Like Gods*: "There is no way but knowledge out of the cages of life."

The man who is well and broadly informed is always ahead of the man who is just doing a job, and he is less at the mercy of fate.

The importance of this broad knowledge is too often lost sight of in the pace at which a man pursues his job. Important off-the-job interests are pushed aside with the old excuse "lack of time." Yet when we study the success stories of craftsmen we find that, somehow, they found the time to enrich their minds and their lives.

To pursue education on a broad front and beyond the necessities of a job can well make the difference between being a worker and a craftsman, between mediocrity and genius.

Society, no matter how hard it tries, cannot raise ignoramuses or lazy people to the attainment level of craftsmen. The craftsman has a self-attesting note of authority, a standing that should be looked for and recognized by employers. It is part of the employer's responsibility and part of the supervisor's job to

stimulate every worker to make the best use of his abilities and to provide recognition of the worker's attainments.

Keep trying

Even when our attempts to reach a high peak of craftsmanship seem to fail, we should not despair, but look inside ourselves to seek what further faculty we have for development. Darwin held the opinion as the result of a lifetime of critical observation that men differ less in capacity than in zeal and determination to utilize the powers they have.

The craftsman's mature judgment is founded upon the total of his disappointments and burned fingers and fears as well as his successes.

Craftsmanship requires genuine ability. Don't think that by murmuring some spell over a couple of white mice they will become prancing white horses. You have to work at your craft to make your dreams come true.

Though he may dream, the craftsman is not a dreamer merely. We recall the advice given a brilliant but erratic man: get your knees under a desk where you can do a good job; or put on overalls and work at a bench; and then go home and work out your inventions and ideas in the evenings and over week-ends.

A man who is at heart a writer or artist or inventor need not wait for freedom from the necessity to work. Counting eight hours a working day he spends only 2,000 hours of the year's 8,760 hours earning his living. If the urge to be a craftsman in science, writing, mechanics, architecture, or anything else is strong enough he will find a way to make time for study, practice and achievement.

Should every man be entitled to a certain amount of joy in the work he is doing? This is not an honest question, because there are two conditions wrapped up in it. A man should be able to count on happiness in his job if it is one he has chosen and to which he is giving his best in intellect and dexterity.

C. E. Montague puts it this way: when we are doing our work well "the whole adventure of mankind upon the earth gains in our sight a new momentousness and beauty. Living becomes a grander affair than we had ever thought."

The craftsman achieves that happy state by putting something of himself into whatever he is doing, great or humble. His skill and ideals affect not only the material thing he works with but those who put the finished product to use. His work is a significant part of what Bertrand Russell calls "the stream of life flowing on from the first germ to the remote unknown future."