



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

## MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 39, No. 10

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, OCTOBER 1958

### *On Being a Follower*

**I**N EVERY SOCIETY, however Utopian, every healthy adult person is expected to do some sort of useful work. Not everyone can be, or desires to be, a leader of other working people.

The old divisions of work into manual labour and white collar occupations no longer apply. Many workers in industry are less truly manual labourers than is a doctor or a grocer.

Instead, the reports of censuses and labour force and other such statistical tables divide the working people of a country into "managerial and professional" and "others".

Out of 4,085,000 persons in the labour force of Canada at the time of the 1951 census, only a trifle more than four per cent were in the first class, leaving 95.7 per cent "others". The 1957 taxation statistics show only six per cent of Canada's individual tax payers listed as "consulting engineers, architects, lawyers, notaries, medical doctors, surgeons, accountants, dentists, other professionals, business proprietors". Ninety-four per cent of taxpayers are "others".

It is evident, as H.R.H. Prince Philip said on the occasion of his receiving the Freedom of the City of London: "the followers have a great contribution to make to their country". There must, then, be an art of followership as well as of leadership.

These are some of the factors making a good follower: dependability, loyalty, enthusiasm, enterprise, tolerance and common sense. The person who combines these features in his work attains self-respect, than which few greater goods can be given to a human being.

#### *A wide outlook*

Being a follower does not require one to be stodgy — a stick-in-the-mud. A worker who knows something of the larger purpose of industry and agriculture will be a better worker and a happier man than he who works blindly and for the day.

It is man's imagination that has made him remarkable among created things, and that imagination can carry him far beyond the reach of his working hands. He is co-heir with all mankind to the science and intellectual adventure that are gradually freeing him from drudgery and disease. He is, generation after generation, developing those qualities of mind and spirit which increasingly distinguish him from the animals.

A person seeking to broaden his life will take a long view. He will not judge his present state by a single incident or situation. Change that is worth while cannot be seen within days or weeks. Progress is made a little at a time.

Robert Louis Stevenson, a frail genius whose bodily ailments often forced him to leave the places he loved and go into lonely banishment, knew the virtue to be found in a clear-sighted view. He wrote an essay called "On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places" in which he said: "Things looked at patiently from one side after another generally end by showing a side that is beautiful."

By following this prescription the blue collar or overall worker who has the skill and desire can stretch the horizons of his craft. He will find an opportunity in his environment and follow, not the line of least resistance, but that which offers the greatest scope for his development.

He may not be able to influence many of the items that go toward the cost of production or the quantity produced by his firm, but these are directly in his hand to take pride in: the time, the quality, and the quantity of his work, the product of his time and his skill.

It was men with such thoughts who brought us to the plateau of living we enjoy today. Tired of pulling loads against maximum friction, men invented the roller and the wheel and ball bearings and engines. Today, workers in our factories are using delicate

equipment that was not even dreamed of a century ago. It grew out of the imagination, skill and labour of craftsmen who were not afraid to beat the time schedule by invention even though a great many people put up a clamour that the improvement was unfair to this or that group.

A worker can develop pride in his work whatever it may be. He knows that there is no job in the world so dull that it wouldn't present fascinating angles to some mind. He will pursue his practical art as if it were a liberal art, concerned to make the work of his hands tops in quality and appearance. He disesteems what is cheap, trashy and impermanent. He has something to work for, and that gives dignity to what he does.

### *A law of life*

Work is a law of life, but not a penance. As Emerson expressed it: "I do not wish to expiate, but to live".

Work is an economic necessity, and has been ever since the Garden of Eden, but it is also a psychological necessity. Not to be occupied, and not to exist, amount to the same thing. Sir Alfred Roberts said at the Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference: Work is an economic necessity, a social obligation, a basic human right, and a means of personal fulfilment. It is, indeed, only by the work of all hands that society survives. In the Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Pius XI distributed in 1931 he remarked: "Universal experience teaches us that no nation has ever yet risen from want and poverty to a better and loftier station without the unremitting toil of all its citizens."

The themes of fairy tales are made of work. The prince who rescues the princess; the courtier who sorts out the tangled skeins of silk or separates the coloured grains of sand; the sage who deciphers a message on a wall: all these worked for their reward. We cannot imagine a state without work, and if there were a place without work its people would be most unhappy.

Our ancestors lived in a constant state of uncertainty, whether in the next moment they would happen on a square meal or themselves be eaten. We of today are more likely to suffer from the inertia of relative security — the nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner. Some of us have absorbed the idea that the goal of life is pleasure through comfort.

The man who seeks happiness through work — and where else is he to find it? — must accept a new role. He is not a minor or an invalid in a protected corner. He must decide what his attitude toward his work will be, what his purposes are, and how strongly he desires the happiness he seeks.

These things will be found useful: to have ideals, to seek competent counsel, to apply common sense, to

admit the necessity of discipline, to be broad-minded, to believe in and practice the fair deal, to do honest work efficiently.

The negative of all these enters into the result of a survey reported by the Alexander Hamilton Institute: of 4,000 office and clerical workers discharged by 76 business firms, only ten per cent were let go for lack of skill or knowledge — the rest were dismissed for carelessness, laziness, or inability to co-operate.

### *About fitting in*

If you feel that your work does not give scope to your imagination, that you are full up with ideas seeking expression, an hour's self-appraisal may show you the way out.

Such an exercise will not, like a slip given you by a fortune-telling machine, pretend to solve your problems. Done honestly, it will give you a sound idea of what vocations you are fitted for with your present knowledge and skill, and what qualities you need to cultivate if you are to prepare for a vocation you desire.

More important, it will reveal any defects there may be in your fitness to handle your present job in such a way as to make you enjoy it.

When you do something positive, like making an inventory, you are avoiding working yourself into an emotional state over your problem: you are asking yourself what you can do about it and starting to do the wisest thing you can think of.

Some persons, of course, run away from anything so revealing as a personal inventory, just as some foolish people put off a medical examination for fear it might reveal that they have a dreaded disease.

Everyone has some characteristics, physical, mental, or social, in which he is short-suited. To accept this fact as a matter of course is to take a long step toward happiness. And the chances are that when you write up your case it won't look so gruesome as it seems when rattling around in your head in a disorganized way.

### *Look at your job*

Take a fresh look at your job, too. Let your mind roam over all facets of it, just as you do when solving a crossword puzzle.

You may be surprised by the outcome of a survey you can make without great trouble and in very little time. Consider how vital your job is in the product or service provided by your company; think of the benefit that product or service gives to the people who buy and use it; consider your firm's contribution to the economic welfare of your city, your province and your Canada.

Be sure you have the facts before starting to criticize your position. No decision is better than the information

on which it is based. Before coming to a conclusion as to whether your job is good or bad you need to see the total situation. It is more satisfactory — and less embarrassing — to talk from a crowded mind than to go out on a limb with information that is inadequate to support your argument.

Even when criticism of one's job or one's working environment seems to be justified, it is not good enough to attempt merely to tear down something that other men have built up.

Having detected something that can be improved, take your self-adjustment seriously. Uncover the reasons behind the complained-of condition. What is its cause? Perhaps it has a purpose hitherto unknown to you. Then produce positive ideas, make suggestions that will bear evidence on their face that yours is no snap judgment, but an idea arrived at after mature thought.

### *Responsible and disciplined*

Responsibility goes hand in hand with self-expression. The greater the opportunity for expression the greater becomes the obligation.

Some workers prefer not to accept responsibility, being content with simple, repetitive tasks. But the very act of living implies some measure of accountability. It is not the measure of any man's duty merely to avoid blame.

The truth is that every living creature has it laid upon him by nature to accept such responsibility as his age warrants and fits him for. When the workman accepts as much responsibility as he safely can within his job limits he is not simply showing eagerness for promotion by demonstrating his capacity to cope with his environment. He is also assuring himself of the deepest personal satisfaction. He is taking his place as a first-rate member of society.

Self-reliance, arising out of accepting responsibility, is an expression of emotional stability, willingness to face facts, faith in the validity of one's own judgment, and practice in making decisions and abiding by the consequences.

All of these are subject to discipline. No worker should expect to be allowed to disregard necessary routines or procedures. The executive, when he was on his way up, had to learn to obey so that he should know how to command.

### *Loyal and co-operative*

Responsibility and discipline make up a big part of what we call loyalty, which John Ruskin called "the noblest word in the catalogue of social virtue."

Loyalty to your firm and to your fellow-workers is essential to your present peace of mind and ultimate

happiness. This does not imply blind adherence to an institution or an organization. It does not mean that you should overlook weaknesses or malpractices. Loyalty is positive. It means that you will strive to bring about better conditions so as to improve the lot of your firm and fellow-workers.

Loyalty has to stand up to attack. There is little virtue in it if it is to be shattered at the first sign of a flaw. Loyalty is individual, prompting us to avoid doing slipshod work; it is collective, as when workers respond to the impulse not to let the side down. It is a virtue that prompts us to do without witnesses what we would do before all the world.

While taking a long look at ourselves and our jobs, let's not forget to give some thought to our workmates. When they are irritating, there is no use in our being rough and graceless. Just as surely as there is a cause for what ails your machine, so there is a cause behind all human behaviour. You take pride in overcoming the mechanical difficulties; why not enjoy adjusting the human relationships that are out of kilter?

One doesn't have to like everyone, but one does owe it to one's own sense of self-respect to be considerate and decent. To respect the dignity and worth of another man's personality is to be mature. It is a mighty principle, one that, says Dr. C. Gilbert Wrenn of the University of Minnesota, can sway the world.

To be happy on the job one needs to be interested in people and thoughtful of them. A gentleman, someone has said, is one who is considerate of the rights and happiness of those to whom he is not obligated to be considerate. You can show this trait by speaking of the worth-whileness of a fellow worker's job; by showing enjoyment in his having been elected to a committee; by mentioning something he does well but which you cannot do.

Respect for other departments is part of this picture. They form part of the industrial body of which you are part. The better you know their tasks and problems the better you will appreciate your own department and your role in it. Knowledge is the basis of teamwork.

### *Something about worry*

There is no use in saying to the worrying type "don't worry", or in giving him some tidbit to overcome his present feeling of depression. A pill to tranquillize anxiety feelings accomplishes nothing permanent.

The solution of the worry problem can be easily stated: if you can fix it, why worry? if you can't fix it, what's the use worrying? This was put into striking words by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor at the Union Theological Seminary, New York: "The serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to

change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The needed serenity, courage and wisdom cannot rest on will power alone, but must have a basis of facts. Into which class does your problem fall? Should it be accepted or solved? Look at your self-appraisal to see what strong points in your makeup you can marshal to offset the weak ones that are encouraging your anxiety.

Having arrayed the good and the bad in the situation, talk it over with someone. Don't try to brush off anxieties, don't shirk facing them, don't spend useless worry over them: talk them through to a solution.

Bertrand Russell suggests that we consider seriously and deliberately what is the very worst that could possibly happen. Then, having looked this possible misfortune in the face, “give yourself sound reasons for thinking that after all it would be no such very terrible disaster.” At the worst, we can be no more badly off than *Oliver Twist*, wholly at a loss to think of any way of overcoming his difficulties. He, writes Dickens, “changed his little bundle over to the other shoulder, and trudged on.”

Perhaps your anxiety is caused by your feeling that you are a failure in your job or in your life. Failure is a difference you feel between what you expect and what you get, or the difference between what you assume you have to do and what you actually accomplish.

No man is a failure jobwise if he is doing a necessary job efficiently. If the job is not the right one for him — if it is one in which his undoubted skills are not fully used — then his adjustment consists in activity properly directed toward getting the right job. He must make sure his compass is true, and then apply energy to the rudder to bring him into proper course.

### *Happy on the job*

Self-respect is a key factor in a worker's happiness on the job. A sense of dissatisfaction with your attainment so far, combined with a desire to improve, can exist side by side with self-respect. You have no need to be ashamed of what you have done so far, since you are continuing to improve. You can be aware of things you do poorly and yet respect yourself for the things you do well.

There is a morbid sort of thinking which prompts a man to be afraid to do his best for fear his best will not be good enough. Everyone has deficiencies in himself and in his environment, but he also has assets of which he should be proud. All is well so long as a man does the best he can from day to day, true to his ideals and active toward achieving them.

Self-esteem does not arise from the accomplishment of any task that is easy. If a workman has secured a reasonable degree of satisfaction in four fields he has the right to self-respect and the respect of others; a sense of belonging through doing a worthy job well; a sense of participation through working on and off the job with his fellow men; a sense of achievement through reaching his goals one by one; and a sense of taking a hand in decisions that directly affect his destiny.

The man who is happy on his job is not working by halves but with a will. He is not absorbed with the mechanics so as to be blind to the possibilities.

Day-dreaming has its place in life, but only if it leads to something. The other sort is futile and damaging. You will recall that Don Quixote, the knight in Cervantes' novel, said to his niece when she was trying to persuade him to do something useful: “Were not my understanding wholly involved in thoughts relating to the exercise of knight-errantry, there is nothing which I durst not engage to perform.”

A day-dream that makes you so dissatisfied with yourself that you go to work energetically to correct what is wrong is very different from the day-dream which is just an escape from unpleasant realities. The danger is in dreaming without action . . . the sort engaged in by Aesop's fly, which sat upon the axle-tree of the chariot wheel and boasted: “What a dust do I raise.”

### *Looking forward*

It is good for any worker, whatever his job or rank, to expand his horizons and quicken his thinking. There are exercises designed to do just this.

Dr. Alex F. Osborn, author of *Applied Imagination* and several other widely read books on topics ranging from marketing to creative thinking, is fertile in suggesting exercises. Here are some of his ideas that require only an alert mind, a seeking spirit, a sheet of paper and a pencil. Jot down all the ways your simple screwdriver has been improved to make it a more effective tool, and suggest three further improvements. Name at least three “inventions wanted” which you believe would be most useful to the world. How could you make a dining room table more useful? If you were asked to give the sermon at your church next week, what subject would you select? What features in your home might be improved if they were curved instead of straight?

These exercises are only idea-starters. Transfer them to your own workshop and interests. You will find that life becomes more attractive when you are continually searching for something than if you wait indolently for an idea to come to you. You will then be sensitive to the moments of opportunity that now brush you with their wings and pass by.