

FUSSY ADMINISTRATION.<sup>1</sup>

President McKinley handed Colonel Roan a message to carry to Garcia. There were no strings tied to that commission. He had chosen a man of intelligence, resource and ability to do a job and he was willing to let him do it in his own way. This very fact proved that the President was a great executive. He knew how to centralize responsibility and how to hand out a message to a messenger, an art which many men in administrative positions have not yet acquired.

Probably the most fussy and inefficient form of administration ever invented is the committee system. Committee administration does not exist in approved business organizations, but it appears to be the preferred system in society, public and academic administration.

Questions of business policy, plans for manufacturing development, technical or educational problems all require discussion, consideration and analysis. The experience and knowledge of a number of men working in cooperation is required to determine these matters of general policy. Such questions are properly and efficiently handled by a representative committee selected with a view to reaching a correct and lasting solution. With the solving of these problems and the fixing of a policy for the future administration of the organization their duty should end. It is when this big, unwieldy committee engages in the consideration of nursery problems or attempts to function as an administrative body, that it becomes ridiculous. It has repeatedly been demonstrated that the administrative efficiency of a committee varies inversely as the square of the number of men on the committee. It is well known that business administration is much more efficient and prompt than public, society or academic administration, and the reason, is to be found, to a large extent, in the complete freedom of business administration from a triangular or pentagonal committee attempting to make a job for itself out of the duties of a reliable man. Suppose we take a specific case: An office boy in a well managed business may ask for an increase in salary because he has reasoned out that he is rendering service which will justify it. He goes to the chief clerk who is his immediate superior and is therefore the logical person to control such matters and through such control is enabled to exercise a discipline which puts a premium on efficiency. The chief clerk knows the value of the boy's services, considers all of his arguments and makes a decision one way or the other. If the request is granted, the paymaster is instructed as to the agreement and when it is effective. Total time consumed, about five minutes. Suppose this same boy is working for a committee-mad organization and makes an application for more salary. He is usually advised to "write a letter" covering all points to be considered. The letter is brought up at the next meeting of the board of directors. In order to "save time," after being duly moved, seconded and discussed, the matter is referred to a committee of three or five, to be appointed by the chair, to consider and report at the next meeting on the question of salary for office boy. The committee on office boy's salary is made up of busy men and they find it difficult to get together; it will be a miracle if they do not come in at the next board meeting and report "progress."

<sup>1</sup>Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry.

In the meantime the boy has become discouraged and has reduced his services to a value comparable with his salary or has obtained a new job at a better salary on account of the knowledge and experience gained while employed by the committee-ridden organization. Running a training school for employees who leave as soon as they have learned enough to be valuable is a discouraging operation at best; such a system of filtration, in which the values all go to the filtrate, will, in an incredibly short time, leave a residual organization which will blunder along with a maximum of inefficiency.

Speed is an important factor in efficient administration. How is the work of a committee going to be expedited? The chairman may call a meeting but the only result is an echo. Men are busy, too busy to be spending their time fussing over insignificant details. We have seen ten ten-thousand-dollar-a-year men sit for hours discussing, considering, and acting upon a quantity of insignificant administrative matter which could have been disposed of by one two-thousand-dollar-a-year man in one hour. Such a man, familiar with all questions of policy peculiar to this organization, would have acted with even better judgment than the committee because of a more intimate, direct, first-hand knowledge of the facts. The results would have been snappy administration and a living example of practical efficiency to the subordinates — a lesson which could not be drawn from the operations of the hundred-thousand-dollar committee. The committee men themselves often see the ridiculous waste and yet become resigned victims of a system of “fussy” administration which literally oozes with delays, procrastination, irresponsible and inefficient methods.

Most societies and institutions have at least a carload of committee reports which have been made at great expense of time and labor but which have not been read or adopted. Some offices have records — records everywhere — but no obtainable information. In other places the whole organization is busy with the administrative “double pass,” where instructions are handed from one subordinate to another and everybody is busy with the system of passing orders along but no one has time to do a job.

Professional men, engineers, chemists and educators might do well to recognize administration as a profession by itself and not a side show to some specialized occupation. As a matter of fact, administrative power is the rarest of all talents and is therefore the best paid profession. We entrust our legal, technical and educational problems to men trained and experienced in their respective specialties. The proper administration of policies so established is equal in importance to, and often more difficult to accomplish than the formulation of the policies themselves. One might properly suggest therefore that the question of efficient administration is important enough to justify careful analysis.

In successful business organizations we find centralized responsibility and power in the hands of a man whose business is administration. Policies are prescribed and commissions are assigned for the purpose of having them executed, and the person who undertakes the work is held responsible for the results. Men of ability and judgment are not converted into errand boys and assigned to duty between the board of directors and the job. Technical questions and questions of policy may be considered and decided by committees but these committees are not “woodenized” by don'ts and limitations. Every man in such an organization

believes that the easiest way to dispose of work is to do it. He knows that his boss is waiting for results, not excuses. When he is told to do something he does not rack his brain for reasons and arguments as to why it should not be done, but puts some intelligence and energy into the matter of doing it. Things are accomplished in an hour, which, if undertaken at all in an organization saddled with committee administration or a fussy manager, would take six months.

Since the introduction of laboratory methods of instruction into our educational systems, men trained for numerous activities have been taught to study conditions, observe facts and interpret results. Administrators who apply this training to problems arising in the development of men and women in their organization will have less cause to complain of inefficiency. They will have more people who can carry a message. The elimination of fussy systems of administration will go a long way toward successfully dealing with the human element in efficient management.

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#### THE COLD STORAGE INDUSTRY.

The cold-storage industry, as might be anticipated, has not escaped criticism. In some quarters it has been regarded as a menace to public health on the ground that refrigeration enables dealers to hold food-products for so long a time that they become unfit for consumption. Goods preserved by cold storage have been declared to be inferior to fresh food in quality, wholesomeness and palatability and to produce various disorders. Furthermore, it has been contended that cold storage enables speculators to withdraw food-products from the market and to force up prices to an artificial level, to the great injury of the consumer, thus becoming an instrument of monopoly.

In its relation to the health of the people and less directly in its effects on the cost of living, the cold-storage problem is of immediate interest to the medical man. At the outset it must be admitted that no serious complaints can be brought against the cold-storage warehousemen in general on the ground of unsanitary or unscientific methods of conducting their establishments. Any abuses in this respect are exceptional; and the satisfactory condition of the plants is attested by the results of governmental inspection. The other questions raised have very recently been made the subject of an inquiry by a commission appointed for this purpose by the Governor of Massachusetts. The report of its five members commands notice as the latest pronouncement on this debated topic. The commission recognizes that cold storage has become a fundamental necessity in the distribution of the food-supply of the nation, and sees its principal economic function in the fact that it enables the surplus of certain products in the season of natural plenty to be carried over to meet the demand in the season of natural scarcity. The charge that cold storage in general is detrimental to public health is refuted by an impartial examination of this subject in its hygienic aspects.

In the words of the report: "While abuses have arisen, through the holding of food-products in cold storage for unduly long periods and through the handling of foods by improper methods before and after as well as during refrigeration, the benefits that have come from the salvage of food through cold storage far outweigh any evils that have developed in this field. Cold storage has brought about an expansion and diversification of the food-supply of the population, making certain kinds of food more abundant and more accessible. It thus makes for the conservation of the vital resources of the people. The gain from this source is universal and permanent; the injuries are occasional and temporary, and can be eliminated by proper regulation."—*Journal A. M. A.*