

A reprint from

CALIFORNIA MANAGEMENT REVIEW
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Individualism in Management

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Independence for a manager lies in his control of his own career. Is such individualism possible in today's business climate? How can he become "his own man"?

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✻ THE TRADITIONAL AMERICAN DREAM is dead for most of us. The traditional American dream has always centered on independence and individualism. A man could open his own business, buy a small business, get his own farm, move West, etc. These opportunities no longer exist for most of us, especially for the professional manager. We are employees and **will always be employees**. Furthermore, an increasing percentage of us will always be employees of large organizations.

Being an employee, especially an employee of a large organization, necessarily leads to the loss of a great deal of independence. Instead of making his own decisions, an employee (whether he is a manager or a worker) responds to the decisions of other people. Instead of acting independently to control his own life and career, an employee gives up this control and becomes dependent upon his superiors and his organization. This loss of control is especially noticeable for decisions related to his own career. Instead of acting for his own interests, an employee is expected to work for the good of his organization and leave the decisions about his career to other people.

A Basic Human Need

The desire for independence. Although the chances for independence have been greatly reduced, belief in it is perhaps as strong as ever. It is certainly as strong as ever in our public pronouncements. We are constantly talking about freedom and are constantly worried about conformity, loss of our freedom to the government, etc. We believe in independence; we believe in individualism; they are a part, an inescapable part, of the basic American ideology. We believe that we should be free to make our own decisions, that we should control our own lives and our own destinies, that our fate should be in our own hands rather than in someone else's.

Furthermore, the desire for independence seems to be a basic component of human nature. We want independence, not only because it is part of the American tradition, but because we have a basic human need for it, because the desire for independence is as much a part of our nature as the desire for food and drink.

The conflict between desire for independence and organizational demands. As Professor C. Ar-

gyris and many others have observed, some conflict between the individual's needs and desires and the demands of his organization is inevitable, regardless of the level the individual occupies in the organization: "There are some basic incongruencies between the growth trends of a healthy personality and the requirements of a formal organization."¹ These conflicts and incongruencies can be reduced, but some conflict is **inevitable**.

Some of the more important conflicts are between the organization's need for control and predictability and the individual's desire for freedom and independence; between the organization's need for standardization and the individual's desire for variety and enjoyable work; between the organization's demand for loyalty (even unquestioning loyalty) and the individual's belief that his primary loyalties should be to himself, his ideals, his career, and his family.

Ends—Not Means

The consequences of these conflicts. These conflicts have been noted by many students of management,² but most of their work has focused on the effects these conflicts have on the organization. They have observed that these conflicts cause individuals to become dissatisfied, apathetic, aggressive, anxious, hostile, etc., but they have usually been more concerned with the effects of these psy-



chological states on the organization (e.g., their effect on productivity, turnover, absenteeism, etc.) than their importance for individuals. That is, most psychologically trained students of management agree that these conflicts exist and create psychological and social problems, but they are generally more interested in the organization's effectiveness, productivity, and profitability than they are in the satisfaction and self-fulfillment of its members. Satisfaction and self-fulfillment are regarded as means for achieving greater organizational effectiveness rather than as ends in themselves. This tendency to regard people as means to other ends rather than ends in themselves has caused repeated charges that social scientists in industry have "sold out" to the organizations and become "the servants of power."³

I see little value in discussing these charges and the replies to them, but I would like to state that I regard individualism as a worthwhile goal, in and of itself, without regard for its effect upon organizations, and that I feel that it is as legitimate to help individuals reach their own goals as it is to help organizations increase their productivity or decrease their turnover.

Since I regard people as ends rather than means and value individualism for its own sake, I contend that individuals should act for their own interests rather than for the "good of the organization." Although this statement may appear to have an anti-social bias, I feel it is appropriate **at this time** because today we live in a society dominated by large organizations, a society in which individualism is very threatened. I agree, then, with William H. Whyte that:

Precisely because it is an age of organization, it is the other side of the coin that needs emphasis. We do need to know how to cooperate with The Organization, but, more than ever, so do we need to know how to resist it. Out of context this would be an irresponsible statement. Time and place are critical, and history has taught us that a philosophical individualism can venerate conflict too much and cooperation too little. But what is the context today? The tide has swung far enough the other way, I submit, that we need not worry that a counter emphasis will stimulate people to an excess of individualism.⁴

Problem is acute for middle managers. Although the conflict between individuals and organizations is a general one, occurring between each individual and every organization to which he belongs, I will

direct attention to conflicts between the needs and aspirations of middle managers and the organizations which employ them.

Reasons for Dependence

I am focusing upon middle managers because these conflicts are more important for them than for other managers. Top managers have greater control over their organizations and are more able to act independently than middle managers. The problem is more acute for middle managers than it is for workers for several reasons:

- There is much less awareness of these conflicts among managers than there is among workers. Workers generally recognize the conflicts between their interests and the organization's, but many managers and writers about management assume (or act as if they assume) that the interests of managers and their organizations are identical—a fiction top management is very eager to preserve. Obviously, until these conflicts of interest are recognized, no effective action can be taken.

- Workers have unions (or can acquire them) to represent their interests against the interests of the corporation, but managers have no such organizations. Since they must bargain with the organization as individuals and the organization is so much more powerful than they are, they have very limited power to influence it.

- The idea of company loyalty is much stronger for managers than it is for workers, further increasing the powerlessness and dependency of individual managers.

- Managers are generally more concerned about their jobs and careers than workers. Their jobs and careers greatly influence their beliefs about themselves and their personal satisfaction, while workers are more likely to regard their jobs as simply a source of income. The psychological and social effects of powerlessness, etc., are therefore greater.

- The organization interferes much more with the family and home life of managers than it does with workers. Managers spend much more time away from home, have to relocate their families if the organization transfers them, are often required to involve their wives in business socializing, and may even have their careers affected by their superiors' opinions of their wives or home life.

- Many managers are "locked into" their organizations by deferred compensation and pension plans. These plans greatly increase the organization's control over their lives since they can't afford to quit and may even be afraid to act independently in any way.

- Many professional managers do not possess the skills (or the capital) to start their own business. Their skills and backgrounds are suitable only for work in large organizations.

Because of these factors, most middle managers are quite powerless and dependent upon their organizations. They are well paid and well treated, but they know that they have lost control over their own lives and become dependent upon their organizations. And, because a basic part of their nature is a desire for independence and the self-respect and inner security that only independence can provide, this knowledge is painful. They may attempt to avoid thinking about their dependency and powerlessness by concentrating upon their homes, cars, and other material evidence of the organization's generosity, they may dull their senses with too many cocktails, but they can never really escape the knowledge that the organization controls them, nor can they escape the anxiety and resentment this knowledge causes. Managers, who are often regarded as "exploiters," are today one of the most exploited groups in our society. They have money, prestige, and comfort, but they have paid dearly for them—with their independence and self-respect.

Our aspiring executives (while the most fussed-over segment of our society) are the most manipulated and exploited steady jobholders in the land. A new kind of gruff paternalism has developed in our large enterprises, an exploitation of leaders rather than laborers.⁶

In the movement from authority to manipulation, power shifts from the visible to the invisible, from the known to the anonymous, and with rising material standards, exploitation becomes less material and more psychological.⁷

Three Popular Solutions

Inadequacies of popular solutions. The decline of individualism is certainly not a new topic. People from all walks of life have commented upon it. Most of them have been very concerned and have made suggestions which they hoped would reverse the trend. Unfortunately, their proposals have had little effect in the past and have little chance for success in the future because they are based on unrealistic assumptions about man's ability to change himself and his society and an inadequate understanding of the forces which operate within our society and the people who control it. The solutions they propose can be divided into three broad types:

- 1 / Changing leadership practices.
- 2 / Breaking our society into smaller economic, social, or political units.
- 3 / Exhorting people to be more individualistic.

Changing leadership practices. Many social scientists have proposed changes in leadership practices: reducing authoritarianism, increasing subordinates' participation in decisions, making use of committees, being more concerned with subordinates' desires and ambitions, using higher levels of communication, etc. Although these changes have increased organizational effectiveness and have made organizational life more pleasant for many people, they have not increased the opportunities for independence and individualism. In fact, many critics have argued that they have had the opposite effect, that they have actually increased the organization's control over its members.⁸

Although some of these critics have claimed that social scientists **intended** to help management increase its control of subordinates through manipulation, the key issue is not their intentions, but their results. Unfortunately, there is little doubt that their techniques have been used to manipulate people; intentionally or not, they have helped the people on top to increase their control over the people beneath them (including middle and lower-level managers). Although most proponents of "soft" leadership techniques sincerely intended to help individuals as well as organizations, their work has had this unintended effect because they made one crucial error: they assumed that the people in power had the same goals and values as they did; they did not recognize one obvious fact—that most people in power **like** power. They like having it and exerting it; they enjoy controlling other people. One of their reasons for wanting their jobs is the power these jobs offer. Therefore, regardless of the intentions of the proponents of modern leadership techniques, the men in power have used these techniques to increase their power by manipulating their subordinates.

The people at the top of most organizations are simply not going to give away their power. They are not going to give their subordinates their independence. Therefore, the **only** way subordinates can get their independence is to increase their own power, to exert their power **against** the power of their superiors and organizations.

Breaking society into smaller units. Proposals to break our society into smaller units have been advanced by people from a wide variety of political and ideological positions. The proposals range from the utopian schemes advanced by men such as

Erich Fromm⁹ for small autonomous communities, through the various schemes for decentralizing industry, to the attempts of the political conservatives to reduce "big government" and increase the power of local and state governments.

Although we have a great deal of sympathy for their objectives, it is rather obvious that these proposals are unrealistic. We can't go back; we can't revert to a simpler or more primitive form of social, political, or economic organization. Organizations grow larger because they have a growth dynamic of their own, because the people who run them desire growth, and because the public—despite its fears and protestations—wants the benefits of bigness. They may fear "big business," but they want the things it produces; they may regard "big government" as a threat to liberty, but they want social security, federal aid to education, interstate highways, etc. The trend will therefore continue: governments, businesses, unions, universities, etc., will continue to grow; our society will be more dominated by giant organizations than it is today; and an ever-increasing proportion of us will work for large organizations.

If individualism is to survive under these conditions, it will have to be a different form of individualism than we have had in the past. In the past individualism flourished outside of large organizations (or at the top of them). Today and tomorrow, because so many of us will be working in large organizations, we will need a different kind of individualism, an individualism **within** large organizations.

Exhortations for greater individualism. A plea for greater individualism within large organizations is hardly original. In fact, such pleas are quite common, even trite, e.g., charges of "conformity," complaints about the stultifying effects of large organizations, and calls for the "uncommon man."¹⁰

Most of these exhortations fall into the "commencement address" category—pious pronouncements which are admired, but soon forgotten. However, a few of them have had a greater impact. Of these, Whyte's *The Organization Man* is clearly the best known and most influential. The charges he made in it over ten years ago are still being hotly debated. One of his more famous recommendations was that individuals "should fight the organization." He also noted that fighting was difficult because modern organizations are so benevolent (i.e., use modern manipulative techniques).

I am going to argue that he should fight the organization. But not self-destructively. He may tell the boss to go to hell, but he is going to have another boss, and, unlike the heroes of popular fiction, he cannot find surcease by leaving the arena to be a husbandman. If he chafes at the pressures of his particular organization, either he must succumb, resist them, try to change them, or move to yet another organization.

Every decision he faces on the problem of the individual versus authority is something of a dilemma. It is not a case of whether he should fight against black tyranny or blaze a new trail against patent stupidity. That would be easy—intellectually, at least. The real issue is far more subtle. For it is not the evils of organization life that puzzle him, *but its very beneficence.*¹¹

But how? Whyte recommends fighting the organization, but he doesn't say **how** to fight, or **where** to fight, or **when** to fight. It is very noble, very inspiring, to urge men to greater independence, to urge that they fight their organizations, but—given the enormous power differences between them and the organization and the organization's use of subtle techniques for manipulation—urging people to fight their organizations is pointless unless one also tells them how to fight **successfully**. The goal is greater independence, not self-destruction. But, unless they know how to fight, and where to fight, and when to fight, fighting can only lead to self-destruction.

Unfortunately, on this point Whyte offers no guidance. He merely notes—rather lamely—that it is an “excruciatingly difficult” problem.

For the more power the organization has over him, the more he needs to recognize the area where he must assert himself against it. And this, because we have made organization life so equable, has become excruciatingly difficult.¹²

Career Decisions

Where to fight the organization. The task, then, is not to beat our breasts and call for a return to the American tradition of individualism, but to present a comprehensive program for **successfully exerting independence in large organizations**. Such a program must specify the areas in which an individual can most legitimately and effectively exert his independence and provide methods for increasing his ability to resist the organization.

Although there are other areas in which he can and should exert his independence, we believe that the area in which independence is most legitimate and necessary is his own career development—his



compensation, promotions, duties, responsibilities, transfers, etc. This area is the most legitimate one because the conflicts between his interests and the organization's are greatest here and because decisions about his career have such a great impact upon his life, happiness, and family. Independence can most effectively be exerted here because there are ways to counter the power of his organization which can greatly increase his satisfaction, independence, and self-respect.

However, even though there are clear conflicts between his interests and the organization's, and decisions about his career are more important for him than for the organization, attempts to advance his own interests are usually regarded as illegitimate (or even antisocial). He is not supposed to think about his career; he is expected to be loyal to the organization, work for its interests, and leave the decisions about his career to his superiors.

The organization communicates to the manager that he is not expected to take responsibility for his own ca-

reer at the same time that it is trying to teach him to be able to take responsibility for important decisions!¹³

This ethic is communicated to him in many ways—in derogatory comments about “company politicians,” in satirical works such as “How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying,” in constant reminders of the need for “company loyalty,” and in a variety of much more subtle ways.

If, despite these pressures, a man still wanted to learn how to advance his career, he would find that the publishers and educators have generally ignored the topic. They, too, have assumed that men should work for the good of their organizations and ignore their own interests. They have focused on ways for men to help their organizations and have ignored ways for them to help themselves. A man seeking advice on how to advance his career would find that there are hundreds of books and articles which tell him how to improve his work, but almost none which tell him how to get rewarded for it. He is bombarded with advice on how to manipulate his subordinates (and doing so is regarded as legitimate), but can't get advice on how to manipulate his superiors (and his superiors have much more effect upon his career than his subordinates do). He can take courses on almost every aspect of his job—leadership, communication, cost accounting, decision making, etc.—but no school offers courses in company politics, techniques for negotiating raises or promotions, or any other aspect of executive career planning. He is simply not supposed to think about these things. Doing so is regarded as illegitimate, unethical, or antisocial.

I challenge this ethic. I regard it as another clever psychological trick for manipulating individuals for the benefit of organizations and feel that it is a perversion of the American tradition to regard a man's attempts to control his own career as unethical. It is not regarded as unethical for him to control his own capital or to strive for the maximum return on it. Why, then, is it unethical for him to try to control his career and strive for the maximum return on his time and earning ability? His time and earning capacity are his primary capital; they are worth far more than any other asset he has. Why should he be more restricted in the way he invests his life than in the way he invests his money? I believe that lives are more important than money, and people more important than organizations. I therefore feel that it is legitimate, proper, and ethical for

a man to try to control his own career, increase his independence of his organization, and work for his own interests.

Need for Information

How to fight the organization successfully. Even if a man agreed with my position about **where** he should fight the organization, he would still face the problem of **how** to fight it successfully, how to control his own career.

An important related problem is the lack of good information and advice on executive career problems. This issue merits discussion because a man who decides to resist the vast power of his own and other organizations and ignore the pressures against trying to control his own career needs good information and advice, but can't get it today. Without this information and advice his chances for **successfully** exerting his independence are very limited; therefore, if individualism is to survive, adequate sources of information and advice must be developed.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that there is a serious lack of information related to executive career problems. Counseling and clinical psychologists, who are usually the major source of information about individual problems, have devoted nearly all of their attention to children and people who are abnormal or deficient in some way—physically handicapped, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, etc. Far more work has been done with children and abnormal adults than with normal, intelligent, reasonably successful adults.¹⁴ We know much more about the career problems of blind people or amputees or ex-mental patients than we do about the career problems of executives.

Executives and executive careers have been studied many times by industrial social scientists, but, as we noted earlier, nearly all of their work has focused on ways to increase organizational effectiveness rather than on the career problems and ambitions of the executives themselves.

Many of the people who have studied executives have intended to work solely or primarily for the benefit of organizations and have been indifferent to the executives themselves. Although I don't care for their emphasis, I have no real quarrel with them; helping organizations and our industrial and social system to work better is certainly a reason-

able and legitimate goal. My quarrel is with the social scientists and other serious students of management who have refused to make a choice between working for individuals or organizations, or who have acted as if no choice were necessary because they saw no fundamental and irreconcilable conflicts between them. Unfortunately, many people fall into this category.

There seems to be a certain amount of confusion as to whether prescriptions for power-equalization (i.e., modern leadership techniques) are written from the point of view of organizational efficiency or that of mental health. . . . There are those who claim that what is good for the individual will, in the long run, be good for the organization and vice versa. Regardless, it is useful to keep one's criteria explicit.¹⁵

Choose the Individual

Since very few serious students of management have decided to work for individuals without regard for the effect their work has upon organizations, adequate sources of information and advice can only be developed if some of the people who are currently trying to work for **both** individuals and organizations realize that doing so is impossible and decide to work for individuals.

Unfortunately, many of these people are unwilling to face the brutally obvious—but apparently unpleasant—fact that some conflict between individuals and organizations is inevitable, that what is good for the organization is not necessarily good for the individual. It is, of course, foolish to claim that there are no areas of common interest, but it is equally foolish to claim or assume that there are no conflicts or that all conflicts can be resolved if proper leadership is exercised. Yet again and again I have encountered such claims and assumptions! W. Bennis, a very respected social scientist, provides a particularly good example of this type of wishful thinking:

It is my contention that effective leadership depends primarily on mediating between the individual and the organization in such a way that both can obtain maximum satisfaction.¹⁶

Such a statement (and there are hundreds of similar statements throughout the literature) reveals an inability or unwillingness to face the fact that some conflicts between individuals and organizations are inevitable and irreconcilable, regardless of the lead-

ership approach one uses. And, until those students of management face this unpleasant fact, until they discipline their thinking, they obviously cannot or will not help individuals to resist their organizations.

But disciplining their thinking is not enough. After they have done so, after they have clearly recognized that there will always be some conflict between individuals and organizations, they must choose between them. They must decide whose interest they value and work for those interests **because they cannot work for both** (at least not at the same time). This is the type of unpleasant decision that they would prefer to avoid (in fact, their desire to avoid it is probably a major cause for their not recognizing conflicts). But, unpleasant or not, this decision must be made. They cannot avoid it by wishing away conflict, nor can they claim that moral questions are irrelevant to a scientist, nor that a scientist must avoid moral decisions because his goal is to be "objective," "impartial," and "scientific." Although objectivity and impartiality are usually very desirable goals, in this case avoiding moral issues and decisions in order to be "objective" and "impartial" is, in effect, a decision to help organizations control individuals, a decision to support the existing powers. The people in power will not be impartial; they will use the results of "impartial" investigations to increase their own power and will act solely for their own interests. Therefore, the writer, social scientist, editor, publisher, or other person who avoids this unpleasant decision is as much a "servant of power" as the man who works enthusiastically for it.

In other words, social scientists, by providing, without interpretation or advocacy, techniques and concepts useful to men engaged in struggles for power, became by default accessories to the power politics of American government and industry, while insisting they were innocent of anything of the sort. The insistence on objectivity made an impartial *use* of their research findings virtually impossible.¹⁷

Accessories by Default

Making organizations and our society run more smoothly is an obviously legitimate goal, but it is not the **only** legitimate goal! Some of the men currently trying to work for both individuals and organizations would, if they realized a choice was un-

avoidable, opt for the individuals. I hope that this paper will influence at least a few of them to make this choice. Their potential contributions to individualism and independence are critically needed.



A Proposed Program

I will return to the central question: How can an executive control his own career and increase his independence of his organization? Because of the limited amount of information available, the program I propose is a rather general one. Future research is needed to fill in the details, and such research will probably generate major changes in it. However, despite the general, tentative nature of this program, I feel that it is superior to the career strategies (or lack thereof) currently being used by most managers. I also feel that it provides a reasonable general framework for future research. All of these topics have been inadequately investigated, and research on any of them can be put to almost immediate use.

Specific Advice

Until now, my remarks have been impersonal; I have commented upon certain developments and their consequences. Now I am going to make specific recommendations for the manager who wants to control his own career. In other words, I am no longer referring to people or careers in general, but making direct recommendations to a manager that can be used to increase his independence and control over his own career.

1 / Accept the fact that there are some inescapable and irreconcilable conflicts between you and your organization. There are many areas in which your interests and your organization's are nearly identical, others in which they are unrelated to each other, and others in which they are opposed. This rather obvious fact is hard for some men to accept. They prefer to believe that there are no real conflicts, that all problems and frictions are caused by poor communication, misunderstandings, etc. They do not want to believe that, even if communication were perfect and there were no misunderstandings, there would still be conflicts, problems, and friction because there are opposed interests. What is good for the organization is not always good for you or vice versa. If you do not accept this simple fact, if you assume, or act as if you assume, that there are no conflicts between your interests and your organization's, you can never become truly independent of your organization.

On the other hand, seeing conflicts where none exist, or unduly emphasizing the conflicts which do exist, can be self-destructive because your superiors will regard you as disloyal, a troublemaker, or a nuisance. You therefore need to strike a balance, recognizing common interests as well as conflicts of interests, working for the organization's interests when possible, your own when necessary; being loyal, but not blindly loyal; creating the impression that you are loyal, but also letting your superiors know that you are aware of your own interests.

2 / Accept the fact that your superiors are essentially indifferent to your career ambitions. You are a means to an end for them, not an end in yourself. They are primarily concerned with their own careers and ambitions and the survival, growth, and functioning of their units and the organization. Their jobs and their responsibilities are to look out for their units' and the organization's welfare, not

yours. They are therefore indifferent to your career ambitions (except, of course, for the effects these ambitions have upon them, their units, or the organization). They are not opposed to your ambitions; they are simply indifferent to them.¹⁸ Furthermore, since they are responsible for their units and the organizations, not your career, it would be irresponsible for them to be anything but indifferent to your career. These obvious facts are also hard for some men to accept. They want to believe that their superiors care for them, that they are not alone. Personnel men and their superiors work very hard to create and sustain this impression since it helps them acquire and control people. They communicate in a variety of ways that "the sky is the limit" or "We have great things planned for you." But thousands of you have already discovered that they don't mean it, and many more of you will discover it when you are passed over for promotion, get fired, don't get a raise, or are transferred to some unpleasant place or job "for the good of the organization."

It may be hard for you to accept the facts of conflict and indifference. It requires courage and realistic thinking. It requires accepting the frightening knowledge that you are alone, that your organization and superiors don't really care about you, that beneath the friendly, benevolent surface are inescapable conflicts, and that you are the only one who is really concerned about your career. It may be unpleasant to face these facts, but doing so is absolutely necessary if you are to be truly independent. Until you accept them, you can be manipulated, dominated, and controlled; after you accept them, you can resist. You can see through the false promises and vague hints about "the great things we have planned for your future" and avoid the dead end that comes to so many people who believe them. You can turn down the transfer to the Oshkosh office if you don't want to live in Oshkosh. You can listen without feeling guilty to the executive recruiters. You can bluntly ask your boss for a raise, based not on your needs (because he doesn't really care about your financial problems), but on your value, including your value to other firms. You can insist that your superiors spell out their future plans for you instead of making vague promises and hints. In other words, you can act freely and in good conscience for your own interests.

3 / Analyze your own goals. An intelligent career

strategy obviously requires a clear understanding of your own goals. If you don't know what you want, you obviously can't get it. If you don't understand your own goals, you can't work toward them. Unfortunately, relatively few people ever carefully analyze their own goals; they simply accept the goals that other people say they **should want** instead of determining what they **do want**. Then, if they do succeed in reaching these goals, they may find that their success is meaningless and empty because it does not provide the satisfaction they anticipated.

The American emphasis upon material success creates many such problems. We are told that we **should want to get ahead**, that we **should want a lot of money**, that we **should try for the top**. For some people these are meaningful goals, but not for everyone. Many of you would be a lot happier if you would honestly face up to the fact that you are not the most ambitious person in the world, that you really don't like a lot of pressure, that you want a lot of time for yourself, that money is not that important to you, that your family means more to you than your job, etc. I am not saying here that the traditional goals of a business career are incorrect; I am simply saying that they are not correct for everyone.

If, in fact, you are primarily concerned with material success, with reaching the top of the pyramid, I have no objection whatsoever. A major purpose of this article is to help you get there. But, if you want something else from your career, it is best that you not kid yourself. If you really want to spend a lot of time with your family, if you are attracted to your present neighborhood and advancement would require that you change it, if you don't like playing politics or business socializing, it is best that you realize it now and take a job which will satisfy the goals that you really have. Otherwise, you may waste your life seeking things that cannot satisfy you.

Analyze Your Goals

A complete analysis of your goals is probably not possible without professional assistance, but you can greatly increase your understanding of them by asking yourself a series of fairly specific questions, writing down the answers, and looking for patterns in these answers. Talking over your answers with your wife, a friend, or a minister can be very help-

ful. Ask yourself this kind of question and don't be embarrassed or discouraged if you can't give a complete or logical answer. Acquiring self-knowledge is always a slow process.

♦ If you could have any job that you wanted, what job would you take?

♦ How important is making a lot of money to you?

♦ How much income do you want?

♦ How much income does your wife want?



♦ Do you really want to do executive work (not lead an executive's life)? That is, do you want to do things by motivating, directing, and controlling other people, or would you prefer a job in which you worked on your own or advised people?

♦ In what size firm would you prefer to work?

♦ For what company would you like to work?

♦ Would you rather work in a company where most decisions are made by individuals or by committees?

♦ Would you rather have a secure job or one in which you could "sink or swim"?

♦ Would you rather work independently in an unstructured situation or have clear guidelines from above?



♦ Where do you want to work and live?

♦ What price are you willing to pay to get ahead?

♦ What price is your wife willing to pay?

♦ Are you willing to drop old friends as you go upward?

♦ How many hours a week do you want to work?

♦ Are you willing to spend a lot of time away from home on company travel?

♦ Are you willing to play politics?

Two Key Questions

These and many other specific questions should cover enough areas so that you can ultimately answer the two key questions related to over-all career goals; again, I suggest that you write out your answers.

■ There are many factors to be considered for any career choice (e.g., duties, titles, income, superiors, location, firm, travel, etc.). **Which factors are important to you, and how important is each factor?**

■ **What do you really want to do with your career?**

4 / **Analyze your assets and liabilities.** It is not enough to understand your goals; you must also understand the assets which will help you reach them and the liabilities which will hold you back. You wouldn't even try to make a company's future plans without a clear understanding of its assets and liabilities, and you obviously can't plan your own career without a similar understanding. Unfortunately, analyzing your personal assets and liabilities is much more difficult than analyzing a company's. A business generally has standardized accounting procedures for measuring its assets and liabilities, and they can be made directly comparable to each other by converting them into dollars. A person's assets and liabilities are usually very hard to measure and cannot be compared directly with each other. For example, it is nearly impossible to say how much intelligence compensates for the lack of a college degree or how much a proved record of success compensates for the fact that a man is over fifty.

Even though you can't make a completely accurate estimate of your personal assets and liabilities, you can greatly increase your understanding of them by using the same general technique that is used to analyze personal goals: ask yourself a large number of specific questions and look for patterns in the answers. Since most of us have rather biased opinions of ourselves, the help of another person (particularly a trained specialist¹⁹) can be invaluable but is not absolutely necessary.

Ask yourself this kind of question and, again, don't be embarrassed or discouraged if you can't

give a complete or logical answer. Even an incomplete or somewhat illogical answer can improve your self-understanding.

◆ How intelligent are you? (The important comparison for intelligence and all other assets and liabilities is not with the general population, but with the people with whom you are competing for jobs, promotions, and raises. You are probably not competing with average men and must therefore compare yourself with your competitors rather than with the general public.)

◆ How does your income progress compare with the progress of other people in your firm?

◆ How does it compare with other people your age in other firms?

◆ Do you have favorable contacts in your firm?

◆ Do you have favorable contacts in other firms?

◆ How do your social skills compare with your competitors'?



◆ Do you have all of the necessary credentials for the jobs you want (degrees, certificates, proper experience, the right social and religious background, etc.)?

◆ If not, can you acquire these credentials?

◆ How valuable is your experience to your firm?

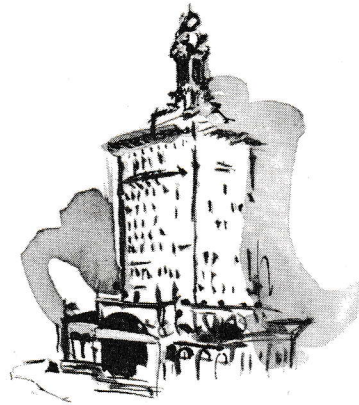
◆ How valuable is your experience to another firm?

◆ How valuable will it be in the future?

Answering these and similar questions should help you decide how realistic your ambitions are and what steps you must take to make the best use of your assets and minimize the effects of your liabilities.

5 / Analyze your opportunities. Normally, the word "opportunity" refers primarily or entirely to the chances for advancement, but here it is used to refer to your chances of reaching your goals, regardless of what these goals may be. If you want to move into top management, the word "opportunity" refers to your chances of doing so; if you want a lower-pressure job, or one with more satisfying work, more regular hours, less company travel, etc., the word "opportunity" refers to your chances of reaching these goals.

Make as cold-blooded an analysis of your real opportunities as possible. Determine as carefully, systematically, and unemotionally as you can the opportunities you **really** have to reach your goals in your own or another firm. It is usually very hard to make this analysis, because most firms are quite dis-



honest about the opportunities which they really offer; they try to create the impression of a much better situation than really exists. Fortunately, there are other sources of information than interviews with recruiters, personnel managers, and your superiors (published data, stock analysts, friends, management consultants, personal observations, etc.). Using these other sources of information in a systematic way can result in a much clearer understanding of your real opportunities than you have now. You can use the same general technique here as in the other analyses, answering many specific questions and then looking for patterns to answer the key questions. You need to know the answers to such questions as:

◆ How rapidly is your industry growing?

◆ How profitable is your industry compared to other industries?

◆ How well does your industry pay compared to other industries?

◆ What would be the effect upon your industry of a great decrease in military or governmental spending?

◆ How does the growth of your firm compare to the growth of the rest of the industry?

◆ How profitable is your company compared to the rest of the industry?

◆ How well does your company pay?

◆ How many new products has your firm introduced in the past ten years?



◆ How much agreement is there between your goals and values and official and unofficial company policy and practices?

◆ How many people have moved upward from your unit or present job to higher management?

- ◆ Is your boss promotable?
- ◆ Does your boss want to help you get ahead?
- ◆ Do your superiors want to help you get ahead?
- ◆ How many people who are important to your future do you normally contact on your job?
- ◆ How much has your income increased since you joined the firm?
- ◆ How many **real** promotions have you had?
- ◆ How high do you think you have a reasonable chance of going in your firm?

Your Opportunities

Answering these and many similar questions should help you answer the four key questions:

- Should you stay in your present job?
- Should you look for another job with your current firm?
- Should you look for a job in another firm?
- Which firms or industries should you consider?

6 / Learn the rules of company politics. For centuries political scientists have recognized the distinction between techniques for acquiring power (the art of politics) and techniques for using it wisely (the art of government) and, as even the most casual examination of any government clearly reveals, the masters of politics, not the masters of government, have most of the power. Unfortunately, this distinction is rarely made in the business world, despite the abundant evidence that many executives got their jobs for reasons other than their competence and performance.

Of course, doing your job well will probably help your career, but it will not guarantee that you will get the job that you want or that you will be properly rewarded for your work. In fact, good performance may not have much effect on your career at all because it is usually very difficult or impossible to say how good a job a manager is doing. A worker's performance can often be rated on several fairly objective criteria such as number of units produced per hour or amount of scrap, but a manager's performance can very rarely be judged as accurately or objectively.²⁰

Therefore, a manager's pay, performance ratings, advancement, and all other aspects of his career are very dependent upon his superiors' opinion of him and his work, opinions which are influenced by

many factors besides performance. In a word, a manager's career depends upon politics.

You may dislike the fact that your career depends upon politics, but you cannot escape it. Politics exist in every department and in every organization, particularly at the managerial and executive levels. The only way you can completely avoid politics is to leave executive life.

The question, then, is not **whether** you get involved in politics, but **how** you get involved and **what kind of politics** you get involved in. Here again there is no substitute for a thorough analysis, both of yourself and your situation. You have to decide what kind of political role you are willing and able to play and what effect your particular style of politics will have on your career in your current or another job. To do so you have to understand yourself and the rules of the political games in your own or any organization you are considering joining. There are really several sets of rules in each organization or department, rules for getting ahead quickly, rules for surviving quietly, etc. After you understand these rules, you have to decide whether you want to play according to them or whether you should go elsewhere to find a game more to your liking. And, once you understand the games and have selected one, you can play it more effectively. You can obviously do better if you know what the rules are, how points are really scored, how evaluations are really made, how people really get ahead, etc.

Power Politics

To understand the politics in any department or organization, you must determine two things:

- Who has the real power (especially the power to influence your career)?
- How do they make their decisions (especially decisions related to your career)?

Once you know who has the power to influence your career and how they decide to use that power, you can evaluate your own situation and take steps to improve it. You can leave, "play it cool," try to build good relationships with the right people, etc.

7 / Plan your career. Although these analyses can be time-consuming and even annoying, they make it possible for you to do something that very few men ever do—to plan your career—to decide where you