



## **ARE YOU A MANAGER?**

Suppose I were to give you a choice of a single word to best describe your conduct as an agribusiness manager. What word would you choose? What type of a manager are you? Is there a single word (or short phrase) which adequately depicts your most obvious managerial quality?

Of course, it would be most unfair for me to ask you these questions. Obviously, no single word or phrase exists which would accurately describe any manager's qualities. Managerial quality and conduct do not fall nicely into predetermined categories. In an attempt to identify those factors contributing most to business success, many academicians have attempted to place managers in one or more definitive categories. To my knowledge, none of these attempts have proved worthy of their effort. The fact remains, managers are too diverse, too heterogeneous, and too complex to permit accurate type-casting of their qualities and conduct.

During the past two years, I have had the pleasure of meeting a relatively large number of agribusiness managers from throughout the Northwest. Some I have come to know quite well, while others I might recognize by name only. Some managers were eminently successful in their business and others would clearly have been better off engaged in other endeavors. As noted above, it becomes totally impossible for anyone to describe all those managerial qualities which contribute toward successful management. Those qualities contributing

to poor management are only slightly easier to identify. They are easier, however, because for every five new businesses begun in this country, four will eventually fail due to poor management. Therefore, poor management is more often observable than is good.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, I would like to share with you my personal categorization of poor management qualities and conduct. I do not propose that my attempt to classify managerial types will be any more successful than those attempts by my professional colleagues. Nor do I propose that my list is all-inclusive. You will undoubtedly be able to add to my list. However, I do hope that my discussion causes you to think about your own qualities and conduct as an agribusiness manager. In so doing, perhaps you will be able to reach your own conclusions concerning which factors contribute to good management and which do not.

## **The Silent Type**

This doesn't refer so much to the manager who exhibits a quiet or reserved personality. The silent type is the manager who is quiet for a reason -- he wants to know which way the wind is blowing before committing himself. He either waits to get on the bandwagon, or waits until others have committed themselves before joining in, thereby giving the impression that he has been more analytical in his analysis prior to reaching his decision to support the others.

The silent type will always vote in the majority. By so doing, he will always be assured of having several people with which to share the blame if things do not go as expected. By remaining silent during periods of debate, he reduces the chances of antagonizing anyone. At a meeting, he will sit at the back of the room or safely snuggled amongst a group of his best friends. He enters the discussion only when forced to do so. While on the job, this manager keeps mostly to himself and takes no action, no matter how minor, without first obtaining the opinions (and support) of others. Chances are, he will be the last to adopt new methods and technology, always waiting in silence for others to first declare themselves.

Are you the silent type?

### **The Keep-It-Simple Type**

The keep-it-simple manager is determined to reduce complex matters to over-simplified terms. He sees no need for a careful examination of the relevant facts surrounding a problem because, to him, everything is “so obvious.” To this man, life is a series of simple decisions. The long-run implications of his decisions are never considered because they only tend to complicate matters. Unless all discussions are kept at a “practical level,” he refuses to listen. Unless a solution has “immediate application,” he does not wish to consider it.

At a meeting, this man’s comments will always begin with the words “What you are really trying to say is . . .” In his overzealous attempt to simplify things, this manager misinterprets half that is said. Under no condition would this manager agree to a lengthy or detailed investigation of a problem. To him, such efforts are never justified. Since all his problems are simple

ones, the solutions are, in his opinion, easy to find.

Are you a keep-it-simple manager?

### **The Historically-Minded Type**

The historically-minded manager is one who is always referring back to the way things used to be. He suffers from a chronic case of nostalgia. Things were always better in the “old days.” When permitted to do so, he can talk for hours about his past successes when good times were had by all. Memories, memories -- all we have left is memories! Having survived the Depression years, many historically-minded managers speak of this as if it were their greatest accomplishment in life. For many, it was a noteworthy accomplishment, but it was also probably their last.

All managerial decisions are based on the “way it was done last year.” When any aspect of their operation is questioned, their response is always the same, “But we’ve always done it this way.” To suggest new ways of doing business is to confront the historically-minded manager with problems that he is not equipped to handle. At a meeting, this manager never questions established procedures and objects only to those things which would require an adjustment in the status-quo. Chances are that this type of manager has been with a particular agribusiness firm for several years. His life and that of the firm are almost one and the same. He is determined to protect that with which he has a personal attachment, regardless of the cost to the firm. Because of his persistence to look backward rather than forward in time, he conducts himself as if his eyes were affixed to the back of his head rather than the front.

Are you a historically-minded manager?

### **The One-Track Type**

The one-track manager is a man who has a fixation on some one idea that he rallies around for answers to any questions that come up. You can always depend on him to see things only in the framework of his one interest or “pet” idea. For example, how many times have you met an agribusiness manager who attributes all his problems to money? He is convinced that all his problems would be solved if the firm had enough money to build the warehouse, to buy the new equipment, to retire equity certificates, or whatever. This man’s pet concept is finance, and all business problems are viewed in relation to this area. I’m sure you’ve met other one-track managers who believe that all their problems are caused by either price, competition, credit, labor costs or market conditions.

Rarely is a business problem the result of a single deficiency. More often, they occur because of a combination of factors which may include financial deficits, competition, deteriorating market conditions and others. The one-track manager who sees all problems from a single viewpoint, will find it extremely difficult to enact a proper solution. He is like a physician attempting to cure a disease by treating only one of many symptoms.

Are you a one-track manager?

### **The Lion-Hearted Type**

The lion-hearted manager is identified by his roar. That is, he speaks loudly, relentlessly, and with a great deal of emotion. He is the manager who is always talking, but whose talking never really adds up to much of any value. Frankly, as the manager, he considers himself to be the expert on all topics. He’ll be glad to talk about anything, but especially so if it’s off the subject. When you visit this manager in his office, you should be

prepared to spend at least two hours. The ensuing topic of discussion may range from the weather to the recurrence of Aunt Martha’s arthritis. Your only salvation is to hope that he runs out of gas before your next appointment is scheduled.

Chances are that the lion-hearted manager will have a pleasant personality. In fact, his pleasant personality and his endless talking have an almost mesmerizing effect on employees and staff. In his wandering from one subject to another, the lion-hearted manager rarely has time to make decisions or deal with specific operational problems.

Are you a lion-hearted manager?

### **The Perfectionist Type**

The perfectionist manager refuses to make a decision until all the facts have been exhaustively examined. The trouble here is that the perfectionist is *never* satisfied that *all* relevant facts have been explored. As a result, the explorations continue endlessly and decisions are never made.

The perfectionist is also over-inquisitive. That is, he must have an answer or an explanation for everything, no matter how minor. If the roof is found to be leaking, this manager will spend excessive amounts of time trying to discover why it is leaking when, in fact, that time should have been spent getting it fixed.

The perfectionist is never satisfied. No answer, regardless of how comprehensive it may be, is acceptable. He is always searching for a more perfect way of doing business. Unfortunately, this man never recognizes that management is not an exact science, that it includes numerous unmeasurable factors. After continual dissatisfaction, the perfectionist becomes more and more discouraged with his

inability to cope with the non-scientific, human element in his firm.

Are you a perfectionist manager?

### **Horn-Of-The-Dilemma Type**

For everything that happens, the horn-of-the-dilemma manager feels there is just a right or a wrong answer; a yes or a no. Management to him is either black or white, with no gray areas in between. He is never alert to all the sensitive shadings and variations that may fall between two extremes. His decisions, when they are made, are strictly of the go or no-go nature. Because of his narrow viewpoint, he often fails to study or even consider more than two alternative solutions to a problem, even though many more than this may be evident. Furthermore, the two alternatives he does consider are usually at the opposite and extreme ends of the scale of possible actions.

For example, let's assume the horn-of-the-dilemma manager is faced with the question of expanding his firm's services or product line. To him there are only two answers: either you make no changes or you make the maximum addition to service or products. The addition of selected services and/or products would never be accepted because to this manager it would represent a half-way measure.

Are you a horn-of-the-dilemma manager?

### **The Railroad Type**

The railroad manager has two major concerns which dominate his ability and conduct: time and efficiency. Things must begin on time, and once begun, the only thing that counts is efficiency. Obviously, people do not enjoy working for this manager. While a railroad may operate on a strict time schedule, people normally do not.

The manager's conduct, however, is as dependable and as predictable as a good Swiss watch. He will arrive at work on the exact minute every day and proceeds through his duties with the precision of a master technician. All seems to go well until something unexpected interrupts his schedule-then the trouble begins. Panic strikes the organization as the manager loses control over a situation which no longer meets his expectations of time and efficiency. He does not have the ability to regroup his resources in an attempt to try a second time.

The practice of democracy to this manager is a waste of time. At a meeting, he likes to see lots of motions pass and isn't concerned about having them understood by the people voting.

Every attempt is made to substitute machines for people. After all, machines are more dependable and efficient than people. Those people which remain in the business are expected to perform like machines; no delays, full capacity production, and consistent out-put. The human element, to this manager, has no place in a real business enterprise.

Are you a railroad manager?

### **The Soapbox Type**

The soapbox manager keeps things moving, but pretty much around himself. He isn't concerned about moving his business in any particular direction, just so long as he is in the lead. He makes every attempt to dominate every aspect of the business, least someone suspect that he is no longer the boss. He doesn't ask for respect, he demands it. When he is speaking, he expects complete acceptance by his audience. If someone asks him a question or challenges his statements, he considers it to

be a personal attack on his ability and position.

At a meeting, the soapbox manager is most conspicuous. He dominates all the discussion. So long as he has the floor, he feels it is a good meeting. He cannot think of overall industry viewpoints, but only of what will be good for his particular business. No matter what the opposition is, he refuses to back down on his opinion. Even if his opinion is proven to be ill-founded, he is prepared to filibuster the proceedings in an attempt to substantiate his superiority.

Are you a soapbox manager?

### **Summary**

It is difficult to type-cast agribusiness managers. Their managerial qualities and conduct varies too greatly to permit neat classification. Nevertheless, certain management patterns do appear, particularly those contributing to business failures. This paper attempts to identify and discuss a series of detrimental managerial characteristics. Hopefully, your recognition of these factors will help you to avoid them and, thereby, improve your talents as a manager.

### **MANAGEMENT MANUAL AVAILABLE**

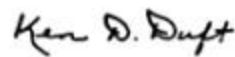
In 1958, a new management planning and control technique was developed. The technique was titled P.E.R.T. (Program Evaluation and Review Technique). It was designed to provide: 1) management information on actual and impending problems associated with the completion of a work project, 2) a continuous status report on the progress of an on-going work project, and 3) a description of the most (and least) critical activities existing within a work project.

By the mid-1960's P.E.R.T. planning and control systems were being adopted by many of our nation's businesses (particularly the larger industrial concerns). Some industries looked to PERT as the "cure-all" for all their management planning and control problems. A few industries chose to cautiously observe others' use of PERT, while other industries chose to ignore PERT entirely. The agribusiness industry fell into this latter category. Extremely few agricultural businesses adopted PERT and a majority of agribusiness managers knew nothing of its existence.

PERT has now existed over 40 years; and while it may never prove to be the panacea many had hoped, it would, in my opinion, behoove agribusiness managers to understand its principles and be able to use its information in decision making.

A management manual titled, "PERT Time/Cost; An Aid to Agribusiness Management" is available from Washington State University on this web site. This manual introduces agribusiness managers to PERT and illustrates both its uses and limitations. It may be downloaded by returning to the Extension page

Sincerely,



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