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EARNING PROMOTION

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PROMOTION does not grow on the lower branches where it can be reached without effort or by merely lifting your hand for it. Promotion grows high and can only be reached by a ladder of many steps, which at times seem missing or difficult to reach.

Of course there are exceptions. Some men inherit the business of their fathers. A few others have a wonderful streak of luck. But let it be understood very distinctly that unless these fortunate men have a solid background of engineering principles behind them, their success will be a thing of the moment with no lasting character. The problem therefore facing the majority of men both young and old is how to earn or merit promotion.

The essential factor is that there must be knowledge of the work that has to be done. A superficial knowledge may let you "get by" for a short time, but men have an uncanny knack of separating the dross from the gold, and in these days of keen competition nothing will really satisfy but a complete equipment of applicable knowledge. "Applicable," because you may have all the knowledge in the world of poetry or art or some such subject, but unless you have direct knowledge that can be applied to your specific industry you will never get on. Incidentally I do not wish to decry a knowledge of the arts. They have and give a distinct cultural value furnishing a good background for the entertainment of one's leisure hours, but having very little to do with promotion in the earlier stages. In the later stages when the position of chief executive in a big corporation looms up I believe that this cultural background has distinct advantages.

Men ambitious for advancement should therefore have a foundation on which to build. For this a university training is invaluable, and explains the reason why so many men with this training have become successful in after life. Mark the expression that it is a foundation on which to build. Do not for a moment think that your student days are over when you leave the university. Quite the contrary, as you will find if you are ambitious. Even in the simplest work such as in the early years of industry you will be surrounded with objects well worth study. One good rule I have found it advisable to follow and advise, is to think where the object you are working on came from, and where it is going to and what it is going to do. A bolt being turned suggests the bar of steel from which it was made, and this in turn suggests the rolling mill and behind that the steel furnaces. Following this train of thought in the other direction will lead to a consideration of the work the bolt has to do, what the stresses on it are likely to be, what its functions are compared to the other parts of the work, and so on till you arrive at a point when you definitely know the bolt—its past, present and future history. Studies of this kind will keep your university knowledge fresh in your mind and immediately available for use.

This entails work and a utilization of energy which must have compensation somewhere outside of the actual joy of performance. This reward is usually expressed in terms of promotion. If you are a mechanic and merely know the turning of the bolt and nothing else, all the economic laws will be acting to have you continue as a mechanic and nothing more. If, however, you can demonstrate your ability, you will be found worthy of advancement and some day your ambition will be gratified in this respect.

Do not be too impatient. Promotions usually come through the transfer of some man higher up or through his resignation. Such occurrences are not altogether common and must be waited for. The important point is to be ready when the time comes, and the opportunity arises.

It is worth noting that knowledge alone is not always sufficient for advancement. There are many cases of able men who have for various reasons found it very difficult to "make the grade." These men are usually deficient in that somewhat intangible factor that enters into the problem—the factor of personality. Many people believe that personality is born into a man as a divine gift, and perhaps they are right. Experience has shown me, however, that personality can be cultivated to a large extent. At any rate deficiencies in it can be overcome by some trouble and energy on your own part. If you can "sell yourself" to people you will distinctly add to your personality.

For example, a man may be working on a specific piece of work. He learned one way to do it years ago, but the boss has his own ideas of what he wants, and expresses these ideas in no uncertain language. Now the man may have the correct knowledge but the problem is to satisfy the boss, and this the man must do. A situation like this calls for tact in the handling and the man should "sell himself" to the boss based on the temperament he runs into. I use this word "sell" advisedly because no other phrase is so expressive of the relationship. Remember that a satisfied boss goes a long way in helping you get on in the world.

If you run foul of the boss don't resign immediately. Study the situation for some day or two before you make up your mind, and see if you cannot agree with the boss's way of thinking. After all he has to take the responsibility and you must dovetail in with his plans. The more you can dovetail in and accompany this act with a gentle expression of the fact that you are able to do more advanced work, the more the boss will lean on you and look to you for help in his emergencies. When he has learned this, you may be sure that when the time comes he will give you the well deserved award.

After you are promoted, don't slack off, keep up the good work and immediately begin to prepare yourself for even further advancement. Usually you will find that the higher up you get, the more you have to do. Sometimes when you are wearied of responsibility, and you will weary once in a while, you will look at the men at their machines and perhaps envy them the fact that when the whistle blows they are through for the day. You have to carry home your work in the evening, and keep your mind actively at work often for many hours after the whistle has blown. This is a penalty you pay for leadership.

Now, finally a word of caution again to these students who are preparing to leave the university for industry. Don't think that your knowledge entitles you to executive responsibility immediately. Napoleon, I think, said that the man who could give orders must first learn to take them, and this is true of industry. As already stated, university knowledge is the foundation—your work in industry is the building, and you must start with the ground floor and add to it story by story till you get the completed edifice. No successful man has risen to the managerial position without first going through the ranks. Cultivate knowledge of your work. Cultivate knowledge of men, and lastly cultivate personality and promotion will be assured you.