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## 4: Making Strength Productive

The effective executive makes strength productive. He knows that one cannot build on weakness. To achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths—the strengths of associates, the strengths of the superior, and one's own strengths. These strengths are the true opportunities. To make strength productive is the unique purpose of organization. It cannot, of course, overcome the weaknesses with which each of us is abundantly endowed. But it can make them irrelevant. Its task is to use the strength of each man as a building block for joint performance.

### STAFFING FROM STRENGTH

The area in which the executive first encounters the challenge of strength is in staffing. The effective executive fills positions and promotes on the basis of what a man can do. He does not make staffing decisions to minimize weaknesses but to maximize strength.

■ President Lincoln when told that General Grant, his new commander-in-chief, was fond of the bottle said: "If I knew

his brand, I'd send a barrel or so to some other generals." After a childhood on the Kentucky and Illinois frontier, Lincoln assuredly knew all about the bottle and its dangers. But of all the Union generals, Grant alone had proven consistently capable of planning and leading winning campaigns. Grant's appointment was the turning point of the Civil War. It was an effective appointment because Lincoln chose his general for his tested ability to win battles and not for his sobriety, that is, for the absence of a weakness.

Lincoln learned this the hard way however. Before he chose Grant, he had appointed in succession three or four Generals whose main qualifications were their lack of major weaknesses. As a result, the North, despite its tremendous superiority in men and matériel, had not made any headway for three long years from 1861 to 1864. In sharp contrast, Lee, in command of the Confederate forces, had staffed from strength. Every one of Lee's generals, from Stonewall Jackson on, was a man of obvious and monumental weaknesses. But these failings Lee considered—rightly—to be irrelevant. Each of them had, however, one area of real strength—and it was this strength, and only this strength, that Lee utilized and made effective. As a result, the "well-rounded" men Lincoln had appointed were beaten time and again by Lee's "single-purpose tools," the men of narrow but very great strength.

Whoever tries to place a man or staff an organization to avoid weakness will end up at best with mediocrity. The idea that there are "well-rounded" people, people who have only strengths and no weaknesses (whether the term used is the "whole man," the "mature personality," the "well-adjusted personality," or the "generalist") is a prescription for mediocrity if not for incompetence. Strong people always have strong weaknesses too. Where there are peaks, there are valleys. And no one is strong in many areas. Measured against the universe of human knowledge, experience, and abilities, even the greatest genius would have to be rated a total failure. There is

no such thing as a "good man." Good for what? is the question.

The executive who is concerned with what a man cannot do rather than with what he can do, and who therefore tries to avoid weakness rather than make strength effective is a weak man himself. He probably sees strength in others as a threat to himself. But no executive has ever suffered because his subordinates were strong and effective. There is no prouder boast, but also no better prescription, for executive effectiveness than the words Andrew Carnegie, the father of the U.S. steel industry, chose for his own tombstone: "Here lies a man who knew how to bring into his service men better than he was himself." But of course every one of these men was "better" because Carnegie looked for his strength and put it to work. Each of these steel executives was a "better man" in one specific area and for one specific job. Carnegie, however, was the effective executive among them.

■ Another story about General Robert E. Lee illustrates the meaning of making strength productive. One of his generals, the story goes, had disregarded orders and had thereby completely upset Lee's plans—and not for the first time either. Lee, who normally controlled his temper, blew up in a towering rage. When he had simmered down, one of his aides asked respectfully, "Why don't you relieve him of his command?" Lee, it is said, turned around in complete amazement, looked at the aide, and said, "What an absurd question—he performs."

Effective executives know that their subordinates are paid to perform and not to please their superiors. They know that it does not matter how many tantrums a prima donna throws as long as she brings in the customers. The opera manager is paid after all for putting up with the prima donna's tantrums if that is her way to achieve excellence in performance. It does not matter whether a first-rate teacher or a brilliant scholar is pleasant to the dean or amiable in the faculty meeting. The dean is paid for enabling the first-rate teacher or the first-rate

scholar to do his work effectively—and if this involves unpleasantness in the administrative routine, it is still cheap at the price.

Effective executives never ask "How does he get along with me?" Their question is "What does he contribute?" Their question is never "What can a man not do?" Their question is always "What can he do uncommonly well?" In staffing they look for excellence in one major area, and not for performance that gets by all around.

To look for one area of strength and to attempt to put it to work is dictated by the nature of man. In fact, all the talk of "the whole man" or the "mature personality" hides a profound contempt for man's most specific gift: his ability to put all his resources behind one activity, one field of endeavor, one area of accomplishment. It is, in other words, contempt for excellence. Human excellence can only be achieved in one area, or at the most in very few.

People with many interests do exist—and this is usually what we mean when we talk of a "universal genius." People with outstanding accomplishments in many areas are unknown. Even Leonardo performed only in the area of design despite his manifold interests; if Goethe's poetry had been lost and all that were known of his work were his dabbings in optics and philosophy, he would not even rate a footnote in the most learned encyclopedia. What is true for the giants holds doubly for the rest of us. Unless, therefore, an executive looks for strength and works at making strength productive, he will only get the impact of what a man cannot do, of his lacks, his weaknesses, his impediments to performance and effectiveness. To staff from what there is not and to focus on weakness is wasteful—a misuse, if not abuse, of the human resource.

To focus on strength is to make demands for performance. The man who does not first ask, "What can a man do?" is bound to accept far less than the associate can really contribute. He excuses the associate's nonperformance in advance,

He is destructive but not critical, let alone realistic. The really "demanding boss"—and one way or another all makers of men are demanding bosses—always starts out with what a man should be able to do well—and then demands that he really do it.

To try to build against weakness frustrates the purpose of organization. Organization is the specific instrument to make human strengths redound to performance while human weakness is neutralized and largely rendered harmless. The very strong neither need nor desire organization. They are much better off working on their own. The rest of us, however, the great majority, do not have so much strength that by itself it would become effective despite our limitations. "One cannot hire a hand—the whole man always comes with it," says a proverb of the human relations people. Similarly, one cannot by oneself be only strong; the weaknesses are always with us.

But we can so structure an organization that the weaknesses become a personal blemish outside of, or at least beside, the work and accomplishment. We can so structure as to make the strength relevant. A good tax accountant in private practice might be greatly hampered by his inability to get along with people. But in an organization such a man can be set up in an office of his own and shielded from direct contact with other people. In an organization one can make his strength effective and his weakness irrelevant. The small businessman who is good at finance but poor at production or marketing is likely to get into trouble. In a somewhat larger business one can easily make productive a man who has true strength in finance alone.

Effective executives are not blind to weakness. The executive who understands that it is his job to enable John Jones to do his tax accounting has no illusions about Jones's ability to get along with people. He would never appoint Jones a manager.

But there are others who get along with people. First-rate tax accountants are a good deal rarer. Therefore, what this man—and many others like him—can do is pertinent in an organiza-

tion. What he cannot do is a limitation and nothing else.

All this is obvious, one might say. Why then, is it not done all the time? Why are executives rare who make strength productive—especially the strength of their associates? Why did even a Lincoln staff from weakness three times before he picked strength?

The main reason is that the immediate task of the executive is not to place a man; it is to fill a job. The tendency is therefore to start out with the job as being a part of the order of nature. Then one looks for a man to fill the job. It is only too easy to be misled this way into looking for the "least misfit"—the one man who leaves least to be desired. And this is invariably the mediocrity.

The widely advertised "cure" for this is to structure jobs to fit the personalities available. But this cure is worse than the disease—except perhaps in a very small and simple organization. Jobs have to be objective; that is, determined by task rather than by personality.

One reason for this is that every change in the definition, structure, and position of a job within an organization sets off a chain reaction of changes throughout the entire institution. Jobs in an organization are interdependent and interlocked. One cannot change everybody's work and responsibility just because one has to replace a single man in a single job. To structure a job to a person is almost certain to result in the end in greater discrepancy between the demands of the job and the available talent. It results in a dozen people being uprooted and pushed around in order to accommodate one.

■ This is by no means true only of bureaucratic organizations such as a government agency or a large business corporation. Somebody has to teach the introductory course in biochemistry in the university. It had better be a good man. Such a man will be a specialist. Yet the course has to be general and has to include the foundation materials of the discipline, regardless of the interests and inclinations of the teacher.

What is to be taught is determined by what the students need—that is, by an objective requirement—which the individual instructor has to accept. When the orchestra conductor has to fill the job of first cellist, he will not even consider a poor cellist who is a first-rate oboe player, even though the oboist might be a greater musician than any of the available cellists. The conductor will not rewrite the score to accommodate a man. The opera manager who knows that he is being paid for putting up with the tantrums of the prima donna still expects her to sing "Tosca" when the playbill announces *Tosca*.

But there is a subtler reason for insistence on impersonal, objective jobs. It is the only way to provide the organization with the human diversity it needs. It is the only way to tolerate—indeed to encourage—differences in temperament and personality in an organization. To tolerate diversity, relationships must be task-focused rather than personality-focused. Achievement must be measured against objective criteria of contribution and performance. This is possible, however, only if jobs are defined and structured impersonally. Otherwise the accent will be on "Who is right?" rather than on "What is right?" In no time, personnel decisions will be made on "Do I like this fellow?" or "Will he be acceptable?" rather than by asking "Is he the man most likely to do an outstanding job?"

Structuring jobs to fit personality is almost certain to lead to favoritism and conformity. And no organization can afford either. It needs equity and impersonal fairness in its personnel decisions. Or else it will either lose its good people or destroy their incentive. And it needs diversity. Or else it will lack the ability to change and the ability for dissent which (as Chapter 7 will discuss) the right decision demands.

■ One implication is that the men who build first-class executive teams are not usually close to their immediate colleagues and subordinates. Picking people for what they can do rather than on personal likes or dislikes, they seek per-

formance, not conformance. To insure this outcome, they keep a distance between themselves and their close colleagues.

Lincoln, it has often been remarked, only became an effective chief executive after he had changed from close personal relations—for example, with Stanton, his Secretary of War—to aloofness and distance. Franklin D. Roosevelt had no "friend" in the Cabinet—not even Henry Morgenthau, his Secretary of the Treasury, and a close friend on all non-governmental matters. General Marshall and Alfred P. Sloan were similarly remote. These were all warm men, in need of close human relationships, endowed with the gift of making and keeping friends. They knew however that their friendships had to be "off the job." They knew that whether they liked a man or approved of him was irrelevant, if not a distraction. And by staying aloof they were able to build teams of great diversity but also of strength.

Of course there are always exceptions where the job should be fitted to the man. Even Sloan, despite his insistence on impersonal structure, consciously designed the early engineering organization of General Motors around a man, Charles F. Kettering, the great inventor. Roosevelt broke every rule in the book to enable the dying Harry Hopkins to make his unique contribution. But these exceptions should be rare. And they should only be made for a man who has proven exceptional capacity to do the unusual with excellence.

How then do effective executives staff for strength without stumbling into the opposite trap of building jobs to suit personality?

By and large they follow four rules:

1. They do not start out with the assumption that jobs are created by nature or by God. They know that they have been designed by highly fallible men. And they are therefore forever on guard against the "impossible" job, the job that simply is not for normal human beings.

Such jobs are common. They usually look exceedingly logical on paper. But they cannot be filled. One man of proven performance capacity after the other is tried—and none does well. Six months or a year later, the job has defeated them.

Almost always such a job was first created to accommodate an unusual man and tailored to his idiosyncrasies. It usually calls for a mixture of temperaments that is rarely found in one person. Individuals can acquire very divergent kinds of knowledge and highly disparate skills. But they cannot change their temperaments. A job that calls for disparate temperaments becomes an "undoable" job, a man-killer.

The rule is simple: Any job that has defeated two or three men in succession, even though each had performed well in his previous assignments, must be assumed unfit for human beings. It must be redesigned.

■ Every text on marketing concludes, for instance, that sales management belongs together with advertising and promotion and under the same marketing executive. The experience of large, national manufacturers of branded and mass-marketed consumer goods has been, however, that this overall marketing job is impossible. Such a business needs both high effectiveness in field selling—that is, in moving goods—and high effectiveness in advertising and promotion—that is, in moving people. These appeal to different personalities which rarely can be found in one man.

The presidency of a large university in the United States is also such an impossible job. At least our experience has been that only a small minority of the appointments to this position work out—even though the men chosen have almost always a long history of substantial achievement in earlier assignments.

Another example is probably the international vice-president of today's large multinational business. As soon as production and sales outside the parent company's territory become significant—as soon as they exceed one fifth of the total or so—putting everything that is "not parent company"

in one organizational component creates an impossible, a man-killing, job. The work either has to be reorganized by worldwide product groups (as Philips in Holland has done, for instance) or according to common social and economic characteristics of major markets. For instance, it might be split into three jobs: one managing the business in the industrialized countries (the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan); one the business in the developing countries (most of Latin America, Australia, India, the near East); one the business in the remaining underdeveloped ones. Several major chemical companies are going this route.

The ambassador of a major power today is in a similar predicament. His embassy has become so huge, unwieldy, and diffuse in its activities that a man who can administer it has no time for, and almost certainly no interest in, his first job: getting to know the country of his assignment, its government, its policies, its people, and to get known and trusted by them. And despite Mr. McNamara's lion-taming act at the Pentagon, I am not yet convinced that the job of Secretary of Defense of the United States is really possible (though I admit I cannot conceive of an alternative).

The effective executive therefore first makes sure that the job is well-designed. And if experience tells him otherwise, he does not hunt for genius to do the impossible. He redesigns the job. He knows that the test of organization is not genius. It is its capacity to make common people achieve uncommon performance.

2. The second rule for staffing from strength is to make each job demanding and big. It should have challenge to bring out whatever strength a man may have. It should have scope so that any strength that is relevant to the task can produce significant results.

This, however, is not the policy of most large organizations. They tend to make the job small—which would make sense only if people were designed and machined for specific performance

at a given moment. Yet not only do we have to fill jobs with people as they come. The demands of any job above the simplest are also bound to change, and often abruptly. The "perfect fit" then rapidly becomes the misfit. Only if the job is big and demanding to begin with, will it enable a man to rise to the new demands of a changed situation.

This rule applies to the job of the beginning knowledge worker in particular. Whatever his strength it should have a chance to find full play. In his first job the standards are set by which a knowledge worker will guide himself the rest of his career and by which he will measure himself and his contribution. Till he enters the first adult job, the knowledge worker never has had a chance to perform. All one can do in school is to show promise. Performance is possible only in real work, whether in a research lab, in a teaching job, in a business or in a government agency. Both for the beginner in knowledge work and for the rest of the organization, his colleagues and his superiors, the most important thing to find out is what he really can do.

It is equally important for him to find out as early as possible whether he is indeed in the right place, or even in the right kind of work. There are fairly reliable tests for the aptitudes and skills needed in manual work. One can test in advance whether a man is likely to do well as a carpenter or as a machinist. There is no such test appropriate to knowledge work. What is needed in knowledge work is not this or that particular skill, but a configuration, and this will be revealed only by the test of performance.

A carpenter's or a machinist's job is defined by the craft and varies little from one shop to another. But for the ability of a knowledge worker to contribute in an organization, the values and the goals of the organization are at least as important as his own professional knowledge and skills. A young man who has the right strength for one organization may be a total misfit in another, which from the outside looks just the same. The first

The young knowledge worker whose job is too small to challenge and test his abilities either leaves or declines rapidly into premature middle-age, soured, cynical, unproductive. Executives everywhere complain that many young men with fire in their bellies turn so soon into burned-out sticks. They have only themselves to blame: They quenched the fire by making the young man's job too small.

3. Effective executives know that they have to start with what a man can do rather than with what a job requires. This, however, means that they do their thinking about people long before the decision on filling a job has to be made, and independently of it.

This is the reason for the wide adoption of appraisal procedures today, in which people, especially those in knowledge work, are regularly judged. The purpose is to arrive at an appraisal of a man *before* one has to decide whether he is the right person to fill a bigger position.

However, while almost every large organization has an appraisal procedure, few of them actually use it. Again and again the same executives who say that of course they appraise every one of their subordinates at least once a year, report that, to the best of their knowledge, they themselves have never been appraised by their own superiors. Again and again the appraisal forms remain in the files, and nobody looks at them when a personnel decision has to be made. Everybody dismisses them as so much useless paper. Above all, almost without exception, the "appraisal interview" in which the superior is to sit down with the subordinate and discuss the findings never takes place. Yet the appraisal interview is the crux of the whole system. One clue to what is wrong was contained in an advertisement of a new book on management which talked of the appraisal interview as "the most distasteful job" of the superior.

Appraisals, as they are now being used in the great majority

job should, therefore, enable him to test both himself and the organization.

■ This not only holds for different kinds of organization, such as government agencies, universities, or businesses. It is equally true between organizations of the same kind. I have yet to see two large businesses which have the same values and stress the same contributions. That a man who was happy and productive as a member of the faculty of one university may find himself lost, unhappy, and frustrated when he moves to another one every academic administrator has learned. And no matter how much the Civil Service Commission tries to make all government departments observe the same rules and use the same yardsticks, government agencies, once they have been in existence for a few years, have a distinct personality. Each requires a different behavior from its staff members, especially from those in the professional grades, to be effective and to make a contribution.

It is easy to move while young—at least in the Western countries where mobility is accepted. Once one has been in an organization for ten years or more, however, it becomes increasingly difficult, especially for those who have not been too effective. The young knowledge worker should, therefore, ask himself early: "Am I in the right work and in the right place for my strengths to tell?"

But he cannot ask this question, let alone answer it, if the beginning job is too small, too easy, and designed to offset his lack of experience rather than to bring out what he can do.

Every survey of young knowledge workers—physicians in the Army Medical Corps, chemists in the research lab, accountants or engineers in the plant, nurses in the hospital—produces the same results. The ones who are enthusiastic and who, in turn, have results to show for their work, are the ones whose abilities are being challenged and used. Those that are deeply frustrated all say, in one way or another: "My abilities are not being put to use."

that their system forces the Japanese to play down weaknesses. Precisely because they cannot move people, Japanese executives always look for the man in the group who can do the job. They always look for strength.

I do not recommend the Japanese system. It is far from ideal. A very small number of people who have proven their capacity to perform do, in effect, everything of any importance whatever. The rest are carried by the organization. But if we in the West expect to get the benefit of the much greater mobility that both individual and organization enjoy in our tradition, we had better adopt the Japanese custom of looking for strength and using strength.

For a superior to focus on weakness, as our appraisals require him to do, destroys the integrity of his relationship with his subordinates. The many executives who in effect sabotage the appraisals their policy manuals impose on them follow sound instinct. It is also perfectly understandable that they consider an appraisal interview that focuses on a search for faults, defects, and weaknesses distasteful. To discuss a man's defects when he comes in as a patient seeking help is the responsibility of the healer. But, as has been known since Hippocrates, this presupposes a professional and privileged relationship between healer and patient which is incompatible with the authority relationship between superior and subordinate. It is a relationship that makes continued working together almost impossible. That so few executives use the official appraisal is thus hardly surprising. It is the wrong tool, in the wrong situation, for the wrong purpose.

Appraisals—and the philosophy behind them—are also far too much concerned with "potential." But experienced people have learned that one cannot appraise potential for any length of time ahead or for anything very different from what a man is already doing. "Potential" is simply another word for "promise." And even if the promise is there, it may well go unfulfilled, while people who have not shown such promise

of organizations, were designed originally by the clinical and abnormal psychologists for their own purposes. The clinician is a therapist trained to heal the sick. He is legitimately concerned with what is wrong, rather than with what is right with the patient. He assumes as a matter of course that nobody comes to him unless he is in trouble. The clinical psychologist or the abnormal psychologist, therefore, very properly looks upon appraisals as a process of diagnosing the weaknesses of a man.

■ I became aware of this in my first exposure to Japanese management. Running a seminar on executive development, I found to my surprise that none of the Japanese participants—all top men in large organizations—used appraisals. When I asked why not, one of them said: "Your appraisals are concerned only with bringing out a man's faults and weaknesses. Since we can neither fire a man nor deny him advancement and promotion, this is of no interest to us. On the contrary, the less we know about his weaknesses, the better. What we do need to know are the strengths of a man and what he can do. Your appraisals are not even interested in this." Western psychologists—especially those that design appraisals—might well disagree. But this is how every executive, whether Japanese, American, or German, sees the traditional appraisals.

Altogether the West might well ponder the lessons of the Japanese achievement. As everyone has heard, there is "lifetime employment" in Japan. Once a man is on the payroll, he will advance in his category—as a worker, a white-collar employee, or a professional and executive employee—according to his age and length of service, with his salary doubling about once every fifteen years. He cannot leave, neither can he be fired. Only at the top and after age forty-five is there differentiation, with a very small group selected by ability and merit into the senior executive positions. How can such a system be squared with the tremendous capacity for results and achievement Japan has shown? The answer is



(if only because they may not have had the opportunity) actually produce the performance.

All one can measure is performance. And all one should measure is performance. This is another reason for making jobs big and challenging. It is also a reason for thinking through the contribution a man should make to the results and the performance of his organization. For one can measure the performance of a man only against specific performance expectations.

Still one needs some form of appraisal procedure—or else one makes the personnel evaluation at the wrong time, that is when a job has to be filled. Effective executives, therefore, usually work out their own radically different form. It starts out with a statement of the major contributions expected from a man in his past and present positions and a record of his performance against these goals. Then it asks four questions:

- (a) "What has he [or she] done well?"
- (b) "What, therefore, is he likely to be able to do well?"
- (c) "What does he have to learn or to acquire to be able to get the full benefit from his strength?"
- (d) "If I had a son or daughter, would I be willing to have him or her work under this person?"
  - (i) "If yes, why?"
  - (ii) "If no, why?"

This appraisal actually takes a much more critical look at a man than the usual procedure does. But it focuses on strengths. It begins with what a man can do. Weaknesses are seen as limitations to the full use of his strengths and to his own achievement, effectiveness, and accomplishment.

The last question (ii) is the only one which is not primarily concerned with strengths. Subordinates, especially bright, young, and ambitious ones, tend to mold themselves after a forceful boss. There is, therefore, nothing more corrupting

and more destructive in an organization than a forceful but basically corrupt executive. Such a man might well operate effectively on his own; even within an organization, he might be tolerable if denied all power over others. But in a position of power within an organization, he destroys. Here, therefore, is the one area in which weakness in itself is of importance and relevance.

By themselves, character and integrity do not accomplish anything. But their absence faults everything else. Here, therefore, is the one area where weakness is a disqualification by itself rather than a limitation on performance capacity and strength.

4. The effective executive knows that to get strength one has to put up with weaknesses.

■ There have been few great commanders in history who were not self-centered, conceited, and full of admiration for what they saw in the mirror. (The reverse does not, of course, hold: There have been plenty of generals who were convinced of their own greatness, but who have not gone down in history as great commanders.) Similarly, the politician who does not with every fiber in his body want to be President or Prime Minister is not likely to be remembered as a statesman. He will at best be a useful—perhaps a highly useful—journeyman. To be more requires a man who is conceited enough to believe that the world—or at least the nation—really needs him and depends on his getting into power. (Again the reverse does not hold true.) If the need is for the ability to command in a perilous situation, one has to accept a Disraeli or a Franklin D. Roosevelt and not worry too much about their lack of humility. There are indeed no great men to their valets. But the laugh is on the valet. He sees, inevitably, all the traits that are not relevant, all the traits that have nothing to do with the specific task for which a man has been called on the stage of history.

The effective executive will therefore ask: "Does this man have strength in *one* major area? And is this strength relevant to the task? If he achieves excellence in this one area, will it make a significant difference?" And if the answer is "yes," he will go ahead and appoint the man.

Effective executives rarely suffer from the delusion that two mediocrities achieve as much as one good man. They have learned that, as a rule, two mediocrities achieve even less than one mediocrity—they just get in each other's way. They accept that abilities must be specific to produce performance. They never talk of a "good man" but always about a man who is "good" for some one task. But in this one task, they search for strength and staff for excellence.

This also implies that they focus on opportunity in their staffing—not on problems.

They are above all intolerant of the argument: "I can't spare this man; I'd be in trouble without him." They have learned that there are only three explanations for an "indispensable man": He is actually incompetent and can only survive if carefully shielded from demands; his strength is misused to bolster a weak superior who cannot stand on his own two feet; or his strength is misused to delay tackling a serious problem if not to conceal its existence.

In every one of these situations, the "indispensable man" should be moved anyhow—and soon. Otherwise one only destroys whatever strengths he may have.

■ The chief executive who was mentioned in Chapter 3 for his unconventional methods of making effective the managerial development policies of a large retail chain also decided to move automatically anyone whose boss described him as indispensable. "This either means," he said, "that I have a weak superior or a weak subordinate—or both. Whichever of these, the sooner we find out, the better."

Altogether it must be an unbreakable rule to promote the man who by the test of performance is best qualified for the

job to be filled. All arguments to the contrary—"He is indispensable" . . . "He won't be acceptable to the people there" . . . "He is too young" . . . or "We never put a man in there without field experience"—should be given short shrift. Not only does the job deserve the best man. The man of proven performance has earned the opportunity. Staffing the opportunities instead of the problems not only creates the most effective organization, it also creates enthusiasm and dedication.

Conversely, it is the duty of the executive to remove ruthlessly anyone—and especially any manager—who consistently fails to perform with high distinction. To let such a man stay on corrupts the others. It is grossly unfair to the whole organization. It is grossly unfair to his subordinates who are deprived by their superior's inadequacy of opportunities for achievement and recognition. Above all, it is senseless cruelty to the man himself. He knows that he is inadequate whether he admits it to himself or not. Indeed, I have never seen anyone in a job for which he was inadequate who was not slowly being destroyed by the pressure and the strains, and who did not secretly pray for deliverance. That neither the Japanese "lifetime employment" nor the various civil service systems of the West consider proven incompetence ground for removal is a serious weakness—and an unnecessary one.

■ General Marshall during World War II insisted that a general officer be immediately relieved if found less than outstanding. To keep him in command, he reasoned, was incompatible with the responsibility the army and the nation owed the men under an officer's command. Marshall flatly refused to listen to the argument: "But we have no replacement." "All that matters," he pointed out, "is that you know that this man is not equal to the task. Where his replacement comes from is the next question."

But Marshall also insisted that to relieve a man from command was less a judgment on the man than on the



commander who had appointed him. "The only thing we know is that this spot was the wrong one for the man," he argued. "This does not mean that he is not the ideal man for some other job. Appointing him was my mistake, now it's up to me to find what he can do."

Altogether General Marshall offers a good example how one makes strength productive. When he first reached a position of influence in the mid-thirties, there was no general officer in the U.S. Army still young enough for active duty. (Marshall himself only beat the deadline by four months. His sixtieth birthday when he would have been too old to take office as Chief of Staff, was on December 31, 1939. He was appointed on September 1 of the same year.) The future generals of World War II were still junior officers with few hopes for promotion when Marshall began to select and train them. Eisenhower was one of the older ones and even he, in the mid-thirties, was only a major. Yet by 1942, Marshall had developed the largest and clearly the ablest group of general officers in American history. There were almost no failures in it and not many second-raters.

This—one of the greatest educational feats in military history—was done by a man who lacked all the normal trappings of "leadership," such as the personal magnetism or the towering self-confidence of a Montgomery, a de Gaulle or a MacArthur. What Marshall had were principles. "What can this man do?" was his constant question. And if a man could do something, his lacks became secondary.

■ Marshall, for instance, again and again came to George Patton's rescue and made sure that this ambitious, vain, but powerful wartime commander would not be penalized for the absence of the qualities that make a good staff officer and a successful career soldier in peacetime. Yet Marshall himself personally loathed the dashing *beau sabreur* of Patton's type.

Marshall was only concerned with weaknesses when they limited the full development of a man's strength. These he tried to overcome through work and career opportunities.

■ The young Major Eisenhower, for instance, was quite deliberately put by Marshall into war-planning in the mid-thirties to help him acquire the systematic strategic understanding which he apparently lacked. Eisenhower did not himself become a strategist as a result. But he acquired respect for strategy and an understanding of its importance and thereby removed a serious limitation on his great strength as a team-builder and tactical planner.

Marshall always appointed the best qualified man no matter how badly he was needed where he was. "We owe this move to the job . . . we owe it to the man and we owe it to the troops," was his reply when someone—usually someone high up—pleaded with him not to pull out an "indispensable" man.

■ He made but one exception: When President Roosevelt pleaded that Marshall was indispensable to him, Marshall stayed in Washington, yielded supreme command in Europe to Eisenhower, and thus gave up his life's dream.

Finally Marshall knew—and everyone can learn it from him—that every people-decision is a gamble. By basing it on what a man can do, it becomes at least a rational gamble.

A superior has responsibility for the work of others. He also has power over the careers of others. Making strengths productive is therefore much more than an essential of effectiveness. It is a moral imperative, a responsibility of authority and position. To focus on weakness is not only foolish; it is irresponsible. A superior owes it to his organization to make the strength of every one of his subordinates as productive as it can be. But even more does he owe it to the human beings

over whom he exercises authority to help them get the most out of whatever strength they may have. Organization must serve the individual to achieve through his strengths and regardless of his limitations and weaknesses.

This is becoming increasingly important, indeed critical. Only a short generation ago the number of knowledge jobs and the range of knowledge employments were small. To be a civil servant in the German or in the Scandinavian governments, one had to have a law degree. A mathematician need not apply. Conversely, a young man wanting to make a living by putting his knowledge to work had only three or four choices of fields and employment. Today there is a bewildering variety of knowledge work and an equally bewildering variety of employment choices for men of knowledge. Around 1900, the only knowledge fields for all practical purposes were still the traditional professions—the law, medicine, teaching, and preaching. There are now literally hundreds of different disciplines. Moreover, practically every knowledge area is being put to productive use in and by organization, especially, of course, by business and government.

On the one hand, therefore, one can today try to find the knowledge area and the kind of work to which one's abilities are best fitted. One need no longer, as one had to do even in the recent past, fit oneself to the available knowledge areas and employments. On the other hand, it is increasingly difficult for a young man to make his choice. He does not have enough information, either about himself or about the opportunities.

This makes it much more important for the individual that he be directed toward making his strengths productive. It also makes it important for the organization that its executives focus on strengths and work on making strengths productive in their own group and with their own subordinates.

Staffing for strength is thus essential to the executive's own effectiveness and to that of his organization but equally to individual and society in a world of knowledge work.

### How Do I MANAGE MY BOSS?

Above all, the effective executive tries to make fully productive the strengths of his own superior.

I have yet to find a manager, whether in business, in government, or in any other institution, who did not say: "I have no great trouble managing my subordinates. But how do I manage my boss?" It is actually remarkably easy—but only effective executives know that. The secret is that effective executives make the strengths of the boss productive.

■ This should be elementary prudence. Contrary to popular legend, subordinates do not, as a rule, rise to position and prominence over the prostrate bodies of incompetent bosses. If their boss is not promoted, they will tend to be bottled up behind him. And if their boss is relieved for incompetence or failure, the successor is rarely the bright, young man next in line. He usually is brought in from the outside and brings with him his own bright, young men. Conversely, there is nothing quite as conducive to success, as a successful and rapidly promoted superior.

But way beyond prudence, making the strength of the boss productive is a key to the subordinate's own effectiveness. It enables him to focus his own contribution in such a way that it finds receptivity upstairs and will be put to use. It enables him to achieve and accomplish the things he himself believes in.

One does not make the strengths of the boss productive by toadying to him. One does it by starting out with what is right and presenting it in a form which is accessible to the superior.

The effective executive accepts that the boss is human (something that intelligent young subordinates often find hard). Because the superior is human, he has his strengths; but he also has limitations. To build on his strengths, that is, to enable him to do what he can do, will make him effective—and will make the subordinate effective. To try to build on his weaknesses will be as frustrating and as stultifying as to try to build

on the weaknesses of a subordinate. The effective executive, therefore, asks: "What can my boss do really well?" "What has he done really well?" "What does he need to know to use his strength?" "What does he need to get from me to perform?" He does not worry too much over what the boss cannot do.

■ Subordinates typically want to "reform" the boss. The able senior civil servant is inclined to see himself as the tutor to the newly appointed political head of his agency. He tries to get his boss to overcome his limitations. The effective ones ask instead: "What can the new boss do?" And if the answer is: "He is good at relationships with Congress, the White House, and the public," then the civil servant works at making it possible for his minister to use these abilities. For the best administration and the best policy decisions are futile unless there is also political skill in representing them. Once the politician knows that the civil servant supports him, he will soon enough listen to him on policy and on administration.

The effective executive also knows that the boss, being human, has his own ways of being effective. He looks for these ways. They may be only manners and habits, but they are facts.

It is, I submit, fairly obvious to anyone who has ever looked that people are either "readers" or "listeners" (excepting only the very small group who get their information through talking, and by watching with a form of psychic radar the reactions of the people they talk to; both President Franklin Roosevelt and President Lyndon Johnson belong in this category, as apparently did Winston Churchill). People who are both readers and listeners—trial lawyers have to be both, as a rule—are exceptions. It is generally a waste of time to talk to a reader. He only listens after he has read. It is equally a waste of time to submit a voluminous report to a listener. He can only grasp what it is all about through the spoken word.

Some people need to have things summed up for them in one page. (President Eisenhower needed this to be able to act.)

Others need to be able to follow the thought processes of the man who makes the recommendation and therefore require a big report before anything becomes meaningful to them. Some superiors want to see sixty pages of figures on everything. Some want to be in at the early stages so that they can prepare themselves for the eventual decision. Others do not want even to hear about the matter until it is "ripe," and so on.

The adaptation needed to think through the strengths of the boss and to try to make them productive always affects the "how" rather than the "what." It concerns the order in which different areas, all of them relevant, are presented, rather than what is important or right. If the superior's strength lies in his political ability in a job in which political ability is truly relevant, then one presents to him first the political aspect of a situation. This enables him to grasp what the issue is all about and to put his strength effectively behind a new policy.

All of us are "experts" on other people and see them much more clearly than they see themselves. To make the boss effective is therefore usually fairly easy. But it requires focus on his strengths and on what he can do. It requires building on strength to make weaknesses irrelevant. Few things make an executive as effective as building on the strengths of his superior.

#### MAKING YOURSELF EFFECTIVE

Effective executives lead from strength in their own work. They make productive what they can do.

Most executives I know in government, in the hospital, in a business, know all the things they cannot do. They are only too conscious of what the boss won't let them do, of what company policy won't let them do, of what the government won't let them do. As a result, they waste their time and their strengths complaining about the things they cannot do anything about.

Effective executives are of course also concerned with limita-

tions. But it is amazing how many things they find that can be done and are worth while doing. While the others complain about their inability to do anything, the effective executives go ahead and do. As a result, the limitations that weigh so heavily on their brethren often melt away.

■ Everyone in the management of one of the major railroads knew that the government would not let the company do anything. But then a new financial vice-president came in who had not yet learned that "lesson." Instead he went to Washington, called on the Interstate Commerce Commission and asked for permission to do a few rather radical things. "Most of these things," the commissioners said, "are none of our concern to begin with. The others you have to try and test out and then we will be glad to give you the go-ahead."

The assertion that "somebody else will not let me do anything" should always be suspected as a cover-up for inertia. But even where the situation does set limitations—and everyone lives and works within rather stringent limitations—there are usually important, meaningful, pertinent things that can be done. The effective executive looks for them. If he starts out with the question: "What can I do?" he is almost certain to find that he can actually do much more than he has time and resources for.

Making strengths productive is equally important in respect to one's own abilities and work habits.

It is not very difficult to know *how* we achieve results. By the time one has reached adulthood, one has a pretty good idea as to whether one works better in the morning or at night. One usually knows whether one writes best by making a great many drafts fast, or by working meticulously on every sentence until it is right. One knows whether one speaks well in public from a prepared text, from notes, without any prop, or not at all. One knows whether one works well as a member of a committee or better alone—or whether one is alto-

gether unproductive as a committee member.

Some people work best if they have a detailed outline in front of them; that is, if they have thought through the job before they start it. Others work best with nothing more than a few rough notes. Some work best under pressure. Others work better if they have a good deal of time and can finish the job long before the deadline. Some are "readers," others "listeners." All this one knows, about oneself—just as one knows whether one is right-handed or left-handed.

These, it will be said, are superficial. This is not necessarily correct—a good many of these traits and habits mirror fundamentals of a man's personality such as his perception of the world and of himself in it. But even if superficial, these work habits are a source of effectiveness. And most of them are compatible with any kind of work. The effective executive knows this and acts accordingly.

All in all, the effective executive tries to be himself; he does not pretend to be someone else. He looks at his own performance and at his own results and tries to discern a pattern. "What are the things," he asks, "that I seem to be able to do with relative ease, while they come rather hard to other people?" One man, for instance, finds it easy to write up the final report while many others find it a frightening chore. At the same time, however, he finds it rather difficult and unrewarding to think through the report and face up to the hard decisions. He is, in other words, more effective as a staff thinker who organizes and lays out the problems than as the decision-maker who takes command responsibility.

One can know about oneself that one usually does a good job working alone on a project from start to finish. One can know that one does, as a rule, quite well in negotiations, particularly emotional ones such as negotiating a union contract. But at the same time, one also knows whether one's predictions what the union will ask for have usually been correct or not.

These are not the things most people have in mind when they talk about the strengths or weaknesses of a man. They usually mean knowledge of a discipline or talent in an art. But temperament is also a factor in accomplishment and a big one. An adult usually knows quite a bit about his own temperament. To be effective he builds on what he knows he can do and does it the way he has found out he works best.

Unlike everything else discussed in this book so far, making strength productive is as much an attitude as it is a practice. But it can be improved with practice. If one disciplines oneself to ask about one's associates—subordinates as well as superiors—"What can this man do?" rather than "What can he not do?" one soon will acquire the attitude of looking for strength and of using strength. And eventually one will learn to ask this question of oneself.

In every area of effectiveness within an organization, *one feeds the opportunities and starves the problems*. Nowhere is this more important than in respect to people. The effective executive looks upon people including himself as an opportunity. He knows that only strength produces results. Weakness only produces headaches—and the absence of weakness produces nothing.

He knows, moreover, that the standard of any human group is set by the performance of the leaders. And he, therefore, never allows leadership performance to be based on anything but true strength.

■ In sports we have long learned that the moment a new record is set every athlete all over the world acquires a new dimension of accomplishment. For years no one could run the mile in less than four minutes. Suddenly Roger Bannister broke through the old record. And soon the average sprinters in every athletic club in the world were approaching yesterday's record, while new leaders began to break through the four-minute barrier.

In human affairs, the distance between the leaders and the average is a constant. If leadership performance is high, the average will go up. The effective executive knows that it is easier to raise the performance of one leader than it is to raise the performance of a whole mass. He therefore makes sure that he puts into the leadership position, into the standard-setting, the performance-making position, the man who has the strength to do the outstanding, the pace-setting job. This always requires focus on the one strength of a man and dismissal of weaknesses as irrelevant unless they hamper the full deployment of the available strength.

The task of an executive is not to change human beings. Rather, as the Bible tells us in the parable of the Talents, the task is to multiply performance capacity of the whole by putting to use whatever strength, whatever health, whatever aspiration there is in individuals.