

TOWARD A MORE AUTHENTIC MANAGER

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In Gestalt therapy the contrast is made among three ways in which an individual may experience his world and communicate his experiences to others. These are:

"Aboutism" — a form of abstracting his contact with his environment in such a way as to keep it "once removed" from direct feeling. He talks *about* his life rather than experiencing it *here and now*.

"Shouldism" — a way in which the individual continually measures his actions, or even thoughts, against some set of standards imagined in his mind, and so tries to direct himself into conformity with what he should do or think.

"Isism" — a way of living in which the emphasis is on the individual becoming as aware as possible of his own unique feelings and acting accordingly. In the "istic" mode spontaneity, naturalness and freedom are most highly valued, in contrast to deliberation, good manners and self control.

These Gestalt concepts are as applicable in organization life as they are in most other areas of our lives. In this brief note I would like to comment especially on "Shouldism" as it affects managers.

A person's ideas about proper managerial behavior — *how I ought to act as a manager* — can be gathered from a number of sources. For example, there can be a prescribed set of rules provided formally by the organization. These rules, in some companies, may deal not only with at-work situations, but also personal conduct off the job. Usually, however, the manager's shoulds are less formal. They may come to him as a perceived series of traditions of good managership, or from his observations (frequently incomplete or even distorted) of other more senior manager-hero figures, or from some stereotyped ideas of the American executive in action, or as advocated in many of the modern management training programs. These latter include, incidentally, some of the rules of appropriate interpersonal behavior learned in sensitivity sessions.

The shoulds ingested from these sources are added to the manager's personal set of behavior rules that he has been accumulating since infancy, and the whole package combines into an elaborate system of acceptable behavior that continually tends to cut off and discourage the manager's possibility of being spontaneous and enjoying himself. At the same time his inhibited style is experienced by his subordinates and provides a model for their behavior, and so for the next generation of managers.

Probably the most radical proposal anyone dealing with organization theory could make in these times would be to advocate increasing spontaneity in the organization.

Our emphasis for a number of decades has been on increased planning, control and other forms of regulative activity that can produce predictable results. Of course, in the complexity of present day organizational requirements the need for planned action is undeniable. However, what has occurred as a result of this largely successful approach to addressing

organization needs has been the extension of the philosophy of deliberation and planning to a point where addressing all aspects of organization life, including human interaction, calls for the encouragement of moderated and predictable behavior.

One cost of constantly adhering to this norm of self control has been that many of us have cut off access to our own natural capacity for excitement and the inherent personal power that normally accompanies such excitement.

Another cost is that we have deprived ourselves of much of our capacity to enjoy ourselves and each other. Some of us have even forgotten what it used to be like to be ourselves without care or caution. We are able to appreciate the experience only vicariously. We may, for example, enjoy the antics of a film character like Zorba, or the innocent spontaneity of a child. Or perhaps on rare occasions at a party; well lubricated by alcohol,

we may allow some of our own boisterous or sentimental feelings to come through without suppression for awhile. But in the latter case there is frequently the next morning's worry and regret . . . What did I do? What did I say? Did I seem silly to others, antagonistic? etc. And, so last night's enjoyment turns sourly to this day's embarrassment and then the sober resolve of "never again."

Many, perhaps most, manager development programs, especially those that are human relations-oriented, prescribe principles for effective and positive relationships by managers with their subordinates, their superiors and their peers. For those that go to extremes, and there are probably many of them, a model of the "one best manager" is set up and the training proceeds to attempt to shape managers to conform to that model. Many times the trained managers do not relate to the principles described in the model

except to acknowledge them as theoretical information, "nice to know."

At other times, however, managers may attempt to behave in the prescribed way, or at least try it out, without having internalized or even recognized the values that are implicit in such behavior. The result of course is incongruous behavior that is usually quickly perceived and disturbingly felt by the people with whom the manager deals. The manager so trained, therefore, does not receive the promised return of improved performance or good feeling from others that he anticipated. This often gives him a sense of failure and generally turns him off and away from human relations theories.

Manipulation Obvious

The manipulative interpretations of human relations training by managers are seen repeatedly. In many of the introductory talks I have presented on organization development, managers in the audience ask questions and make statements that show clearly their idea of human relations is "to get people to do what you want them to do, but to make them think it was their idea." Fortunately (or unfortunately, if you prefer), as Lincoln said, "You can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." It is doubtful that the manipulative manager can fool many of his people for any length of time. He comes in contact with them too frequently and in too many different situations.

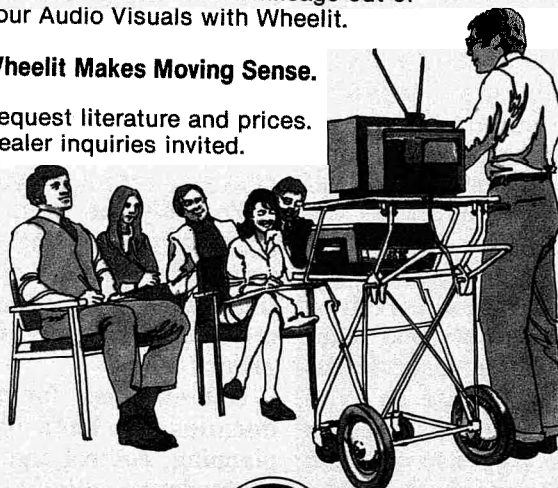
While most behavioral science theoreticians would renounce manipulation as a goal, I think there is inadequate recognition that adhering to and acting out *any* set of principles that are not integrated as a part of your own character has to be manipulative to some extent. The most subtle, and most limiting, manipulation is probably self manipulation, i.e., getting yourself to act in certain ways because you think it is the appropriate or effective thing to do rather than because it is a natural thing for you to do.

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Even when managers "change" after extensive human relations training that "demonstrates" how much better it is to treat people in a Theory Y rather than a Theory X way, and they believe this at an intellectual level, self manipulation may still be present. If it is, exercising the new style of leadership may drain considerable energy from the manager as he tries to repress his natural inclinations in favor of what he has been told is a more effective mode.

Further, even when the efforts are strongly and sincerely made, others will usually sense the manager's strain in holding himself back and will be confused or discomforted. They, in turn, may react in many ways that do not reinforce the new behavior for the manager. Under these circumstances, unless the manager receives substantial personal satisfaction from his behavior, as well as "more effectiveness," he will soon return to his old patterns, perhaps with an accompanying feeling of failure.

Consonant Techniques

What I am saying does not in any way preclude our helping managers to learn various techniques and approaches for handling specific tasks and functions, e.g., running a meeting, organizing work to be done, learning to sense what is happening among his subordinates, etc. What it does advocate, however, is that in all of these and other of his responsibilities we should learn to sense and help the manager himself to be aware of his own particular characteristics. Having done that, he can then go on to adapt the techniques so they are consonant with his own character, rather than adapt his character to fit the techniques.

The Gestalt model encourages authenticity of behavior, not merely saying what you are feeling, but *being* what you are and where you are. I believe that more emphasis needs to be given to the development of human relations approaches that attend to this reality. Successful (and likeable) managers at every level of management, and in every industry differ greatly from each other.

Successful managers, even in the same company, who succeed each other on the same job may differ tremendously in their personal styles and approaches. I believe that in management training what we need to do is to help managers to become more themselves and to exercise their own individual strengths most fully.

What a manager says does not define him. How a manager acts in given situations, at specific times, to achieve particular purposes, does not fully define him. A manager is what he is, and he is perceived by others as what he is in unplanned moments, at ease or under stress, when his guard is down.

No One Best Model

Just as most of us like a variety of people in our personal lives, people that have varied and sometimes even contradictory characteristics, so we have feelings toward the manager and are either inspired by him or oppressed by him, not merely in terms of his

exercise of his managerial role, but rather in terms of his entire character and outlook.

Instead of management training in human relations trying to emphasize a one best model, no matter how democratic and humanistic that model may be, it would be better for us, I believe, to help managers to realize their own unique personalities, to recognize their own discontents or self-identity problems, and to work these through so each would emerge with an authentic unique and internalized style of his own.


If this style is not one that functions well in a managerial role, then the manager ought to consider changing to another specialty. That would probably be healthiest not only for others, but for his own peace of mind and satisfaction as well.

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