

NOT Who to BLAME but How to FIX IT

Don't be negative, it's usually unproductive -- except when clearing away a rubble for reconstructing.

Rather, **be positive, productive, constructive, and creative.**

WHO TO BLAME ?

This question is often a symptom of incompetence.

See St Dorotheus, "Disputes arise **because no one blames himself**" (*Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. III, pp. 140,143).

HOW TO FIX IT ?

Before "fixing" others or their institutions or situations, we must fix ourselves, never forgetting that first I must "fix" myself !

Have I conquered myself? Have I "thought-control" **to reject every evil thought** and to "discern between good and evil" (1 Kings3:9) ? Dictatorial types tend to lack this rejection of evil and they become slaves to their baser **passions for power, pelf and pleasure.**

HAVE I SKILLS ? HAVE I ABILITY ?

What follows is excerpted from *In-laws & Outlaws* by Cyril Northcote Parkinsn 1962. Earlier, he wrote *Parkinson's Law* 1957, and *The Law and the Profits* 1960, and was a forerunner of *Yes Minister* (1981+1982+1983) and *Yes Prime Minister* (1986)+1987) by David Frost & Antony Jay.

SKILL and ABILITY

By astute work you have risen to a position of trust. If no disaster occurs you will gradually gain the reputation of a Man of Ability. You will be **a man in whom others have learnt to place their confidence.**

With your own position thus established, you will begin to observe with surprise the **incompetence** of others. The apparent folly of some will make you wonder whether they can be of any use to the organization. Is there any purpose they can serve? Pondering on this problem, as well you may, you will come to ask yourself the fundamental questions about **skill and ability**. What are these qualities and how do they differ from each other?

How do mediocre executives achieve promotion ? And is disaster the invariable result?

SKILL

What is skill? **SKILL is the capacity to do something which is not particularly easy.**

ABILITY

ABILITY is the capacity to get things done, mainly through the effort and skill of others. The violinist has skill, the conductor has to have ability as well. And ability is always in fairly short supply. It does not command the famine price of genius but it always scarce and often unobtainable. Such is the nature of ability,

However, it often passes unnoticed. It seems quite normal, to most people, that a complex organization should run smoothly, its output steadily improving, its staff contented and its costs held down. But there is nothing normal about it. It is about as natural as a beautiful lawn, cut and rolled, with weeds eliminated and worms removed. No such lawn will happen by itself. It is the result of an **initial effort and continual care**, and neither weeds nor worms will go of their own accord. Somewhere in the organization's centre there will be **the man responsible**. Into his office will come a procession of people who are worried, baffled or aggrieved. Out of his office will come a procession of people whose minds have been set at rest.

They may not be happy, but they need no longer worry. They know at least what the decision is to be.

FOR EXAMPLE...

"What am I to do with young Crabtree ? He does nothing but grumble and complain." ---- "That is because he has too little to do. I shall transfer him next week to the transport department."

"Connie is always going sick. Should we get rid of her ?" ---- "Her trouble is that her boy-friend, George, is on a public-relations course. He will be back in ten days."

"What are we to do with Blackie's team while n. 7 is being over hauled ?" ---- "For one week they will do maintenance work on n. 3, after which they can have three days' holiday."

"Sam Deadwood is asking for his old job back, having heard it will be vacant." ---- "It will be vacant in October. But, Sam ? No. Tell him there are jobs going at Frittering and Muddle's chemical plant."

"We have an application from Tom Wormley, who used to work in the packing shed." ---- "No."

"Old Bedrock is having one of his fits of depression." ---- "So I hear. We'll send him to represent the Group at the Harrogate Conference."

"Phil Feverish is asking for promotion." --- "He can't have it. But tell him to be at my office tomorrow at 10.00."

"There's been a theft of \$400 from the petty cash !" --- "Close all doors and all outer gates. Tell the security chief to meet me in the Board Room in three minutes time."

"Please sir, I feel unwell." ---- "Drink this. Lie down for then minutes and then go home. Make up for lost time to-morrow."

"I beg to offer my resignation." ---- "It is not accepted. Take tomorrow off. Play golf over the weekend. See me again on Monday at 9.30."

Here is ability at work and **the final result is to be measured as much by the things that don't happen as by the things that do.** The factory is not burnt down. The workers do not go on strike. Bill does not resign and Betty does not commit suicide. For all this the Manager receives little credit, for **things that don't happen are hard to assess.** There is no proof, to begin with, that disaster had ever been imminent. But, whether appreciated or not, ability is there. Fortunate is the organization of which this can be said.

In the imaginary dialogue quoted above the essence of ability is shown in the Manager's attitude towards each problem. He decides in each case **what to do next.** He wastes not a minute on what has already been done.

INCOMPETENCE

The trademark of incompetence, by contrast, is apparent from an attitude which is exactly the opposite. It is again best **illustrated in dialogue.**

"There has been a serious accident in the foundry.

One of the men is pinned under a machine." ---- "Who was in charge ? Joe Wittcring ? It would be ! Why did we ever hire that man ?"

"The foundations have cracked in the new workshop -- one wall may collapse at any moment." ---- "Well, don't blame *me*. Lashup and Buttering were the engineers. I never thought much of them."

"We have proof of a communist cell organized among the electricians." ---- "What has the Personnel Department been playing at ? Do they expect me to do their work for them ?"

"We have lost the Oldrope Contract." ---- "I *knew* that would happen. If only that last delivery had been on time !"

"Our output has fallen again this month." ---- "Not *again* ? It's all the fault of the efficiency experts. We should never have called them in !"

The reaction of incompetence is always the same and the sequence is as follows: I am not the person responsible. **Whose fault is it ?** Why did we (or you, or they -- never I!) make this mistake in the past, cause of the present mishap ? If only we hadn't ? Why doesn't someone own up ? Why didn't someone do something ? Why did I ever accept this job ? From all this gibbering there emerges no word of guidance as to what anyone is to do *next*.

ABILITY contrasted with INEPTITUDE

Ability is relatively scarce. Nor is there any certainty that it will be used even where available. Organizations with every precaution against waste of time and money will often waste ability. One result of this is **the preferment of the incompetent**, which is to some extent inevitable... it **comes about through the rejection of every candidate against whom anything can be said...**

After more than fifty years of tightening control, with all initiative killed at the circumference and all leisure abolished at the top, some people have begun to ask whether much that is now technically possible is always and everywhere practically wise.

This may serve to emphasize the basic lesson, that **the best executives can save no others until they have saved themselves**. The man whose life is devoted to paperwork has lost the initiative. He is dealing with things that are brought to his notice, having ceased to notice anything for himself. **He has been essentially defeated by his job.**

LEADERSHIP -- Ability to discern, inspire and command

Mr Leederman has an outlook which is totally different. For him, the flood of correspondence is merely an interruption. Were it to occupy the day he would think that his time had been wasted. This outlook is reflected in his routine. His mail is opened at 8.45 and the rule of the office is that fifty letters must be dealt with by 9.15. Leederman often replies in his own hand-writing, usually at the foot of the document he has received. His answers are laconic: "Sorry -- can't be done," "O.K. I'll be there," "I quite agree," and, occasionally, "DRIVEL !"

To other letters he dictates a brief reply. That is the moment at which his dictation stops. At 10.00 he quits

his desk and leaves the office, beginning a leisurely tour of the factory or setting off on a visit to a branch establishment.

Instead of tearing round the factory so as to get back to the office, he tears through the office work in order to have time for the factory.

There are people who believe that he is a very good manager indeed. He sees everything...

The essence of Leederman's philosophy is that **the good manager re-ains the initiative**. He does not allow himself to be penned into his office by a flood of routine business. He **anticipates the questions** before they have been put on paper. He **foresees the difficulties** before they have turned themselves into memoranda. He has gone out to **meet the trouble before it has really begun**.

Towards thus gaining the initiative a useful first step is to rid oneself of a common **misconception about what matters most...** The misconception here is that everything should take priority over the man who is actually present... merely working on the assumption that a piece of paper is more important than a caller and a telephone more import that either.

APPLICATION TO PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP

Priesthood is about serving God and faithful and being under the authority of God and His representatives (usually bishops), whence his own lesser authority. He has no desire to dominate others, hence his service of God and service of God's people by teaching, liturgy and visiting.

Unisex women who claim males and females are interchangeable demand women priests. Feminists do not really understand what it is to be feminine. Nor do some prelates, priests, pedagogues and politicians who reject sexual complementarity. But VCII says complementarity, not unisex:

... particular roles Providence has appointed to each sex in the family and in society *Gravissimum Educationis* n. 8b.

and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity CCC n. 2333

Nor do unisexers understand fatherhood or spiritual fatherhood, or what the priesthood is for, namely the adoration of God and salvation of souls. It is not about power and dominion over others. Men and women who want power in the Church ignore the teaching of Christ:

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

For He [Jesus] taught them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:29

Authority for priests means teaching with **authenticity**. The authentic priest displays his authority credentials in a life of sincerity, sense, sensitivity and suitability for the situation, as did our High Priest, Jesus.

Seizing and keeping the initiative is for all Christians, especially those serving God in matrimony and priesthood, and in virtue and growing in virtue.

There are many things needing "fixing" in the Church, not by blame but by creative activity flowing from the interior life of prayer. May all Plenary Council reformers reform themselves, and their skills and abilities.

Father James Tierney