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A Spectrum Book

PSYCHO- BUSINESS SKILLS

**How to Survive
and Thrive
in the Corporate Arena**

Joan M. Etzel & Michael Mason

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*How to Survive and Thrive
in the Corporate Arena*

JOAN MIKKELSEN ETZEL
MICHAEL MASON



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PSYCHO-BUSINESS SKILLS

Joan Mikkelsen Etzel has a private counseling practice in New Canaan, Connecticut, where she specializes in helping others embark on careers, change from one field to another, and move up the corporate ladder. She has conducted workshops and has taught business courses at the college level. She has been involved in the business world since 1968, most recently as a district manager for Merrill Lynch Relocation Management.

Michael Mason is a vice-president of Pound Press, Inc., who has worked as a writer, editor, and managing editor, both freelance and as an employee of several U.S. corporations, large and small.

*This book is dedicated
to a higher power.*

PREFACE

This is not a book of management techniques, nor is it a how-to-succeed book. It is a guide to psychological survival for the tens of millions of people who spend their lives working in the world of corporate business. It is for people at all levels of management, and for everyone whose work is managed by others, directly or indirectly.

Several things about this book are distinctive:

- It deals very frankly with the shortcomings, ethical and practical, of management as it is now widely practiced—but accepts them as givens that will probably be changed only gradually, in many cases by a series of individual survivals and triumphs.
- It preaches an ethic of cooperation, but always from the point of view of the ultimate self-interest of the reader.
- It puts the psychological experience of work in the context of the psychological history of the reader, and shows how these interact and how the interaction can be controlled.
- It also puts the psychological experience of work in the context of six thousand years of “managed” work, hundreds of thousands of years of human work, billions of years of life at work.
- Its authors are both widely experienced in business (including stints with several Fortune 500 corporations), and between them have extensive background—academic and applied—in psychology and the historical sciences.

Joan Etzel has been a district manager for Merrill Lynch Relocation Management; a head of the Low Heywood School in Stamford, Connecticut; a counselor for Board of Cooperative Services, Westchester County, in charge of a wide range of services for twenty-four schools and public agencies; and marketing associate at New Horizons in Stamford. She is a graduate of Connecticut College, an honors graduate of the University of Paris, and holds a masters degree in counseling from Fairfield University. She has conducted workshops for corporations and community groups and has taught college business courses. She now has a private career counseling practice in New Canaan, Connecticut, and is director of marketing for William Moore Associates in Stamford, Connecticut.

Michael Mason has worked under contract for MCA and Gulf & Western. He has also worked for the Tesla Corporation, an industrial design and installation firm, and for the Ridge Press. He has written successful children's books and short stories and was the supervising editor of the U.S./Japanese editions of *People's and Tribes* (VNU Books International) and contributing U.S. editor of three volumes of the *Tyrants and Titans* history series (Mondadori). He has, while researching various projects, spent time with leading psychologists and psychiatrists. He has worked in the offices of Georgia-Pacific, Richardson-Vicks, Xerox, the Danbury Mint, and Northern Westchester Hospital, while researching *Self-Management*. He is a vice-president and the editorial director of the Pound Press.

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INTRODUCTION

To be a truly successful career person in the 1980s you must go beyond business skills. To survive in business you need those skills—to thrive, you need a new outlook to go with them. You need to understand the discipline of self-management, and you need to understand the business world in a way that lets you practice that discipline.

Management and Self-Management

The 1982 edition of Standard & Poor's *Register of Corporations* lists roughly 38,000 major U.S. and Canadian firms. That translates to 38,000 chief executive officers (CEOs) and suggests that any one person's chance of becoming the CEO of a major corporation is not, statistically, very good. However, you are already the CEO of the most important business, from your point of view, you will ever run: yourself. There are some useful parallels to be drawn between management of a business and self-management. Perhaps the most important of these parallels stems from the fact that business management constantly deals with two spheres of activity: the world outside the company—customers, competitors, government, the environment, the public in general—and the internal world of the company itself. "Running a company" really means keeping a hand on each of these spheres. In the case of self-management, the two spheres of activity

are the internal reality of the individual and the reality of the business that employs him.

The Conventional View and the Psycho-Business View of Business Reality

We can describe the usual view of the management structure of a business; let's call it the "Conventional View." The Conventional View sees a fairly straightforward division of responsibilities within the company. The major divisions are production, marketing, and finance. Managerial responsibility is delegated downward within these three divisions through the "line" positions of top management, middle management, operating management, to the nonexempt employee level. Specialized "staff" positions branch out horizontally from the "line" management hierarchy. The Conventional View sees this entire business structure as a cooperative activity in competition with other similar business structures for a share of the market. It sees advancement within the company as a reward for contribution to the competitive success of the particular business structure.

A psycho-business view of a company sees the structure outlined above as only part of the picture. It recognizes several additional, simultaneous realities that exist within the structure of a business. The first and foremost reality is, of course, the reality of the Conventional View: Without it, there would be no business and no management structure in the first place. We could call this reality the *productive reality*.

The second psycho-business reality is the *career reality* of the business structure. The career reality has many components which we'll get to later; one very basic one we'll mention here. An essential element of the career reality is the fact that competition exists not just *between* businesses, for a share of the market, but also *within* businesses. The competition within the business structure is most notably for career advancement, but it is also for job security, for power, for status, for job satisfaction, for an easier workload.

An awareness of the paradoxical conflict between cooperation and competition within most modern businesses is the first self-management lesson you should learn. It *is* paradoxical, it is a conflict, and it is not a problem of your making.

The Individual Reality

A third psycho-business reality is your individual reality. This reality includes the psychological needs that you *hope* to meet through your work, and the psychological needs that *must* be met in order for you to keep working well. It includes the specialized talents and learned skills you bring to the task. It also includes your psychological history: the patterns of feeling, perceiving, and behaving that you have developed over your lifetime in response to your own basic temperament and forces in your environment, patterns that cause you to see and react in a particular way. Some of these are patterns are ones that you may want to become more aware of, so that you can alter or adapt them to meet the needs of your life in business more effectively.

The Psycho-business Tools this Book Offers You

This book will provide you with tools for developing greater awareness—of the others you are working with, of the structure you are working within, of yourself. It will help you to deal more effectively with pressures that affect you negatively so that you can benefit from and enjoy the rewards offered by business life. It will do this not through surface techniques of stress management, assertiveness training, human productivity, or interpersonal skills, but rather by showing you ways you can learn and practice psycho-business skills that will help you not just survive but thrive in the corporate arena.

The authors, who have worked in a variety of business settings and on several management levels, have seen that credentials of technical know-how, MBAs, and even business experience are not enough in the corporate world of the 1980s. The issues you need to get involved with today include recognizing how emotions can motivate you to react in a way that is harmful to you, personally as well as in a business sense, and learning how to overcome such emotions: Recognizing, for example, that it is fear that is causing you to become self-conscious and worried about making mistakes, and thus tentative in your performance; recognizing, for example, that it is anger that causes you to avoid your coworkers, a secretary, or a manager, and leave work early or give less than your best

effort to your job, because you unconsciously want to say, "I'll show them" or recognizing that it is anxiety that is making you unable to confront or change a situation which, if left untouched, swings into a vicious cycle.

This book is for people who experience corporate pressure to meet demanding goals and unrealistic deadlines, pressure that can cause you to lose perspective on what is actually happening, and to try to run even faster so "they" won't catch you. In such a situation your attention can become so focused on performance that little attention is given to a realistic assessment of your human limitations. If you perceive that your corporation regards you only as a means to an end and places relentless one-way pressure on you to produce, how can you maintain your mental and physical equilibrium? If your company is in an economic position of receding profits, to what extent are you feeling that you must personally save them to save yourself?

This book is for people who experience pressure from people they interact with in a work situation. These people may be above you, co-workers on a parallel level, or people who are working for you. You should question the pressure you are experiencing and ask whether it is affecting your work performance, and indeed whether it is spilling over into your personal life.

This book is also for people who experience societal pressure to reach and maintain a status and/or standard of living that says, they believe, "I am successful, I am worthy, I belong." Today, faced with spiraling inflation, high unemployment, and other grave issues centered around our business economy, both entry-level and top executive-level workers are trying desperately to keep it together. When your boss says, "Jump!" do you ask, "How high?" If so, the correlation you make between self-worth and the material rewards of your job may need to be examined.

If you can identify with any of the issues mentioned above, we believe this book will open your eyes to a new and practical approach to the psycho-business dynamics of the 1980s.

1

MOTIVATION

What motivates people to work? Let's think for a minute of the old carrot-and-stick analogy. A stubborn donkey is persuaded to move forward by a combination of a stick applied to his rear and a carrot on a pole dangled just out of reach of his jaws.

The stick applied to the donkey's rear might be called the "negative motivator." It stands for the hollow feeling of hunger in an empty stomach, or the chill on a naked back that is without shelter to protect it from a cold wind. Obviously these—the punishments for not working—are the most basic motivators for working, but they are certainly far from being the whole story.

What are the "carrots," the positive motivators that are dangled before us as the rewards for working, and especially for working well? One major "carrot" is the extra material rewards that success in work brings: the tastier meal, the bigger, fancier shelter. Another major carrot is the social rewards: first, the basic acceptance in society that comes with earning your own keep; second, the status that, in our kind of economic culture, is awarded in increasing degrees for what is regarded as increasing degrees of contribution to the general success of the economy.

There's a built-in fallacy to the carrot-and-stick analogy when it's used to describe the entire motivational picture: It is based on the assumption that the donkey prefers to stand still, and requires the carrot and the stick to get him into motion. In fact, it would be a very unusual donkey—

or other kind of animal for that matter—that absolutely preferred standing still to moving. Animals are defined by the fact that they move around, and, though we haven't yet found a way to ask them, it seems a good bet that they enjoy moving. Generally, it's harder to get a young animal to remain still than to get it into motion. The point is that, in addition to the motivators of carrot and stick, activity itself is a motivator—it's a form of self-expression. If the donkey doesn't want to move, and if he hasn't been overworked, it is probably not because he doesn't like movement but because he doesn't like or trust the person who is trying to set him into motion or the path that person has chosen for him. He is quite careful about surrendering or sharing that experience of self-expression.

The idea that activity is in itself a motivator does not hold up for all kinds of human work any more than for donkey work. (In fact, the kinds of activity that don't motivate have often been referred to as “donkey work.”) Some tasks are so limited that they are scarcely gratifying at all. When slaves were forced to carry endless stones to build ancient monuments to tyrannical power, when peasants were forced to toil to the limits of their endurance to produce a farm surplus that would support feudal lords in luxury, when mass production lines offer jobs of stupefying monotony, the work uses such a limited part of human capacity that it often satisfies very little of the human appetite for activity. White-collar work, management work, offers considerably more opportunity for “full employment” of human capacity than the tasks just mentioned, and there's a good possibility that you can find pleasure in the work you do. You may have to learn how to discover and create such pleasure for yourself (as we discuss later in this chapter), but most people in management have the opportunity of doing work that is a motivator in itself, along with the sticks and carrots.

Frequently, however, people's appetite for their work and its rewards, their motivation, is impaired in ways they don't understand, by feelings they can't define to themselves. They find themselves feeling lazy, indifferent, or hostile to working at tasks that at other times they have found pleasurable, or at least easily borne. It is these feelings that interfere with motivation and satisfaction in work that we're going to consider first in this chapter.

The barriers to motivation that we experience most often arise—like so many “psychological” problems—from feelings that we might call “misplaced,” that is, feelings that were at one time in our lives useful, or at