Chapter X

More Details on Self-Management

THE EXECUTIVE AS STUDENT. Well planned though his life may be, the executive must remember, as has already been suggested, that, although one plan may endure for a lifetime, it should be discarded wholly or in part if a better one can be found. By this counsel we should not be understood to advocate inconsistency. Rather, our aim is to suggest willingness to improve steadily, to set new goals, and to use new methods where old ones are found unsatisfactory in the light of new experience and new knowledge. The executive must never accept any continuing program or procedure as entirely settled. He must always be striving for better ways of performance for himself and for his agency. In addition to his functions as planner and as administrator, he must be a student. In other words, he must know the theoretical and factual aspects of his job and utilize every possible means for increasing his knowledge.

(*a*) *First-hand Information Essential.* Much of the executive's knowledge must come at first hand. By personal inspection and contacts he may keep continually in touch with the work of his organization and with conditions in his community. A hospital superintendent should make complete and repeated rounds of his institution. The secretary of a family society must visit his district offices or outposts frequently. The executive of a community chest or council should visit his member organizations often and talk to their executives and officers. Thus he may know what they are doing and why they are doing it and may see the relationship of their specialized activities to the total program of community service.

(*b*) *Reading.* Even such direct means of acquiring information are not sufficient. The executive must be a student of all the phases of his particular work and of all the elements of his general field of service from the standpoints of professional service and administration. He must learn to extract the meat from pamphlets, period-

icals, proceedings, and books on these and related subjects. He must not confine his reading to his own areas of professional responsibility. In addition, he should read significant material on national and world affairs and on his cultural interests.

Time for such reading may be taken in the evening or during his other spare time (if he has any). It seems valid, however, for the executive to take office time (if he can find it)—say one afternoon a week—to read current professional magazines and periodicals, marking them for his own use and for that of his staff and board, tearing out pages he wishes to keep, and indicating selections from books, to be copied by his secretary. If the working day does not afford time for such reading, he may create an opportunity for it by staying at the office half an hour or an hour after quitting time in the afternoons when other engagements do not prevent, or by using Saturday mornings for this purpose if the general office operates, as many do, on a five-day week. That may be hard on one's leisure, yet one of the uses of leisure should be self-improvement.

No matter how the time for reading is wrenched from the executive's full life, at the first opportunity he should dictate memoranda of this reading and send them to the persons concerned with such material.

Every executive should have in his office the necessary reference works in his field of activity. These range from the dictionary and *Who's Who in America* (valuable when information regarding local dignitaries or out-of-town speakers is necessary for publicity or other reasons) to standard volumes on office management and the techniques of social work. We think the present book would come in handy in most social agency offices. For that matter, we have been pleased to see its 1931 version, *Social Work Administration,* on the shelves of numerous agencies. Valuable material for an executive's library will be found in the well-tested bibliography at the end of this book. Members of the professional and executive staff also should be encouraged to read on much the same basis as the executive. Pertinent books, magazines, and reports should be routed to staff members, and they should be asked for suggestions as to how this material may be applied to the work of the agency. Sometimes they may be requested to review important books or articles at staff meetings. A reading shelf should be maintained by a competent staff member for the use of the staff and of volunteers.

(*c*) *Learning by Observation and Conversation.* The executive must also seek counsel from many other sources. He can learn much

by observing organizations that are doing the same kind of work in his own or other cities. In addition, he can learn by analogy from organizations outside his field. He may from time to time attend institutes or refresher courses to make sure that his ideas are up to date and in order to attain new professional horizons. He should attend important conferences on social work. The conference should not be used merely as an orgy of attendance at meetings and of exchanging ideas in hotel lobbies. More important, it should be considered an opportunity for face-to-face discussion with specialists in the various phases of social work. The executive may either rely on catching these specialists at the conference or write to them in advance and make specific engagements with them. He will find it beneficial, when he visits other cities, to call on the leaders in social work and get their advice on his problems. This the more or less flattered leader will be glad to give. In his own town, the resourceful executive will have a few seasoned advisers, both lay and professional, to whom he can go confidentially with the problems which disturb him.

RECORDS FOR THE EXECUTIVE. Throughout all this studying, consulting, and conferring and all the concomitant planning and scheduling, the executive may wish to keep a record of individual and organizational performance in convenient form for his personal use.

(*a*) *Daily Log.* He may, for example, find it helpful to write—for some time, perhaps for a few weeks or months—a daily log. In this he writes down everything he does and the length of time it takes. This log may be combined with his daily schedule form—the schedule on one side and the log on the other. By analyzing the log he can find out how much time he devotes to various activities. Then he can determine whether he is giving too much or too little to any project, or whether some of the relatively unimportant chores which are taking a great deal of time may not be delegated to some other member of the staff.

Such an analysis of time will be helpful to almost every executive or social worker. The log helps to show where a waste of time and effort can be eliminated. It also serves as a basis for preparing plans and schedules for the future, since the estimated time for carrying on activities may be determined from its record of their past performance. A further advantage of the daily log is that the user may prepare from it a daily report or diary of activities. From it in turn may be compiled his weekly and monthly reports. Log-keeping

is almost as useful for the social executive as it is for the captain of a ship.

(b) Avoid Unnecessary Records. In addition to the log, which may be kept with greater or less devotion, the executive may need other records—but not too many, or too elaborate ones!

The complex records of finance, statistics, and personnel which some executives carry in inside and outside coat pockets (and feminine handbags) remind one of the old-fashioned housewife who put everything in the attic because she thought she might want it some day.

Even the records which the executive keeps in his desk could probably be reduced to much smaller proportions than the bulk which is frequently in alleged use. Financial and statistical reports ordinarily need not be kept at hand beyond the time when the next reports are received. Out-of-date reports and elaborate lists are usually better in the central file, available for everyone, than in the executive's desk. Then, when infrequently the executive is asked for data which may not be conveniently at hand, he can say that he will secure it—and do so, promptly.

(c) Idea Book. One record, however, which is not usually kept in the desk, may well be maintained there. This is the idea book, suggested by the late W. H. Leffingwell, the great pioneer in office efficiency. He used ticklers to note ideas. When he got to his office each day he dictated each idea to his secretary. She typed it on a separate sheet of paper and inserted it in a loose-leaf binder. These memoranda were classified according to types of ideas. When he had time, "Leff" went through his idea book and wrote down additional thoughts that occurred to him. Then, when the time came to put an idea into practice he found himself fully armed through reference to his idea book. He once told us that this idea book had been worth tens of thousands of dollars to him. A similar idea book might be worth tens of thousands of dollars to the social agency which employs an executive who will use it.

(d) Always Hold Something in Reserve. The use of the idea book suggests an important bit of executive technique described to us a good many years ago by the late James F. Jackson, then superintendent of the then Associated Charities of Cleveland, Ohio. He said, "The smart executive always has a bag of tricks available from which he can extract new tricks when the old ones are worn out." This was "the General's" homely way of saying that an executive should always have in mind the element of fatigue in the interest

of board, committee, and staff members. He should not weary them by insisting always upon the same elements of program. Preferably he should give some variation to his proposals. He would plan to present old material in new guise, and new ideas and new activities when the old ones seemed for the time being to have run their course. The executive who uses an idea book need never be without ideas, especially if he is alert and studious and continually collects material from every available source.

If he does not use such a book, his ticklers of ideas should at least be filed away under appropriate subject guides. This book you are reading, for example, was originally outlined completely in a tickler file. It took two foot-long boxes to hold the ticklers and infinite precaution by a harassed family to protect them.

The use of the idea book and the tickler file will help the executive to keep one or two moves ahead of the group and to exercise real leadership at all times. Records thus used are creative.

HANDLING DICTATION. In order to make creative activity possible, a number of tricks of executive technique have been worked out. Some of these refer to the usually heavy task of dictating letters.

(*a*) *Dictate as You Read.* Instead of reading his morning's mail through and then reading it over again and dictating, as many do, the fast-working executive will dictate his reply to each letter that can be handled immediately without further thought or research just as he finishes reading it.

Some letters, of course, cannot be handled in this dashing manner. If the letter requires a "cooling-off" period because it irritates the dictator, or if the executive needs to let his subconscious mind operate a bit before he can formulate the right reply, he may pencil notes as he reads, for future guidance. Then he can put the problem letter at the bottom of the day's mail. By the time he comes to the letter again, he will probably be ready to answer it fully and adequately, with the help of the penciled thought pegs. The subconscious mind has an agreeable way of working on such letters and providing answers by the time second attention is given to them. Then, too, some letters require the assembling of data or special information not immediately available, and answers to such letters must be deferred.

In comment on the above, Howard S. Braucher, President of the National Recreation Association, writes as follows:—

At one time I was very much impressed with the idea of dictating as one reads communications and reports for the first time, but as I have watched

a good many of our own workers I have seen a great deal of the time of able secretaries wasted because problems had not been thought through and because material from the files necessary to the dictation had not been brought out.

(*b*) *Letters Written in Wrath.* It goes without saying that except under the most extraordinary conditions the executive should never send a letter written when he was angry. He may dictate an irate reply to relieve his feelings, but it is wise for him to hold such a letter until the next day, read it again, and destroy it. Then he will write another letter which will adjust the difficulty and build good will instead of antagonism for the organization and the writer.

(*c*) *Additional Material via Secretary.* If the letter requires material which the executive has not immediately available, he may dictate a memorandum which requests the needed information from his secretary. It is to be presumed that the executive uses a dictating machine; direct dictation to a stenographer is now out of date for anyone with much dictation to do. (We wrote this sentence first in 1930 and regret to note that the admonition is still appropriate.) The secretary can then attach the material to the letter which is to be answered.

(*d*) *Clean It Up from Day to Day.* We once knew a prominent executive, overworked and untrained in executive performance, who was chronically weeks behind in his dictation. His special technique in dictating was to turn the whole pile of unanswered letters upside down and then dictate from what had been the bottom of the pile. In that way he at least answered the letters which were oldest and presumably most needed attention. Still it should have been just as easy for him to clean up his dictation day by day. He now has passed to his Great Reward. We hope it is not diminished by his earthly malady of epistolary congestion.

(*e*) *Keep Time Clear for Dictation.* The importance of keeping up with dictation means that it is expedient for the executive who has a heavy load of dictation to have definite hours for conference with his staff members. If any must see him daily, they should leave him free to attend to the mail and other matters during the first hour or so in the morning, when callers are less likely to appear than later. It may be desirable for the agency to secure a post-office box and have mail addressed to it. Then a staff member can stop at the post office on the way to work, get the mail, and have it ready for his arrival. If possible, conferences should be held in the afternoon. By planning his day in this way and handling his dictation as

the mail comes to him, the executive can turn out an enormous amount of correspondence, yet free himself for constructive activities and for getting out of the office to call on people he should see.

A well-conceived plan of handling dictation such as has been described will almost work itself. Even though the executive is tired and out of sorts, work that is handled in this orderly manner will demand and get attention. Moreover, prompt handling of correspondence is a courtesy owed to one's correspondents. Further, it is an item in good public relations, for which the executive has a major responsibility.

FORM LETTERS. Some of the members of the executive seminar which discussed the first draft of this revision said that they thought form letters or form paragraphs might be used by the dictation-harassed executive. We, too, were once fascinated by that business-tested idea, but it did not prove very helpful in social work. We have occasionally used stock paragraphs that embodied our best answer to a stock complaint or question. Still, we always embedded the paragraph in a personalized letter. Each letter should be written as specifically as possible for the recipient. It should represent the social work technique of individualization or case work.

The correspondent should be warned by the alleged experience of the gentleman who, during the transportation turmoil of the Second World War, found a bedbug in his Pullman berth. (We must say we never did.) He wrote a letter of complaint to the Pullman Company and receive promptly a beautiful letter of apology. It said that such a tragedy had never occurred before and would, he might be sure, never happen again. Measures had been taken. Unfortunately (runs the story) enclosed with the assuring apology, was the complainant's original letter. Across the bottom was penciled, "Write this —— the bedbug letter." Beware of form letters!

WRITTEN ORDERS AND AGREEMENTS. In accordance with the attention already given to dictation and to the keeping of records, one of the most important rules of executive performance is that all orders, all agreements, all instructions, and all matters to be remembered and preserved should as far as possible be put in writing.

(*a*) *Diary.* Some executives dictate, from their daily logs or some other brief form of notes on the day's events, a diary of the significant events of the day. From this diary the executive compiles his reports. From it, also, he can when necessary verify his recollection of past events. He may keep this diary in a loose-leaf book in his desk until he has compiled his weekly or monthly report and then

send the diary to the central file. (Many executives write narrative reports of activities at the end of each month.) The diary may be of great advantage, too, in making a case study of the development of a social agency or in writing its history.

Carbon copies of the diary can be used in various ways. One copy can be clipped apart according to subjects. The various items then are filed under the respective topics. A community chest director might file pertinent sections of his diary under the names of the member organizations with which face-to-face or telephone contracts are recorded in the diary. With this material he could check up on any questions which might arise later as to what actually occurred in those contacts. Moreover, if the president of the organization is interested in knowing what is happening, the executive can keep him informed by mailing him a copy of the diary each day. This procedure saves much conference and gives the president information on everything that happens.

(*b*) *Memoranda of All Agreements.* After keeping a diary of this sort for some years, an executive whom we knew expressed doubt as to whether the practice was worth all the trouble and time involved both for him and for his secretary. In place of the diary, he decided to dictate memoranda about important contacts, mail the original to the person concerned for verification, and file a copy of the memorandum under the proper subject. Carrying out this new procedure made the detailed diary unnecessary for him. Anyone who succeeded him in the organization could find in the file a record of all important contacts. Thus, if a board member telephoned about some important matter, the executive not only told him what action was possible but also confirmed this statement in writing and put a copy of the memorandum into the file folder on the subject. The board member thus knew to what the executive had agreed. If there was a misunderstanding, it was at once apparent and could be cleared up. The corrected understanding would be confirmed in writing.

The value of written confirmations of personal and telephone agreements has often been observed. On the other hand, the evil effects which come from half-understood agreements and indefinite promises (and sometimes from agreements apparently willfully misunderstood) have been seen innumerable times. No reasonable doubt exists that this practice of written memoranda is a fundamental part of effective executive control.

(c) Written Instructions. The injunction "put it in writing" ap-

plies to relations with staff members as well as to those with people outside the organization. Copies of internal agreements, sent to the personnel concerned, can be the basis for effective co-operation, with great economy of time and effort. Instead of calling a staff member to the office when he is busy talking to someone else, or telephoning him and finding his line busy, the executive may dictate a memorandum which his secretary promptly transmits. The executive holds a carbon copy of it in his desk in the folder which refers to that person. The assistant knows that the executive has a copy of the memorandum and that he will check up on performance. Since the instructions are written, no question can arise as to what they were.

Memoranda of this kind are valuable. They confirm and make definite the means of carrying on internal operation. For instance, they make specific and beyond controversy agreements regarding rates of pay, promises of promotion, vacations, and the like.

Internal agreements may be typed on plain sheets of 8½ by 11 inch paper, with carbon copies on the same kind of paper; or they may be typed on special forms made up in pads, with the original of one color and the carbon copy of another. (Although the latter device is elegant in appearance, it seems to have no advantage over plain paper.) Paper from an inexpensive scratch pad may be used, with a piece of carbon paper inserted between two sheets. Three by five inches is a good size for such a pad, because instructions typed in duplicate on this paper may readily be put into both the recipient's and the executive's tickler files.

Internal memoranda may also be used for requesting information, and the assistant can handle his reply in the same manner. If the person who is to do a certain task is sick or away from the office, the one who takes up his work can carry on where he left off by referring to the memoranda.

Memoranda on matters to be discussed in individual and group conferences will stimulate advance thought and collection, as well as make the conferences briefer and more resultful than if the conferees are "caught cold."

The extra time and labor necessary for the dictation and transcription of internal memoranda are far less important than the value of definite and specific agreements, instructions, and understandings. Written memoranda are permanent and susceptible of correction and will serve as a basis for supervision and as a fundamental factor in the delegation of responsibility. They should not, however, take the place of the personal conference which may be

necessary for understanding and constructive discussion. It is obvious that the practice of using written memoranda should not be carried to a silly extreme. Used in judicious moderation, the device can be highly useful.

(*d*) *Records of Visits and Conferences.* Written memoranda may be further used by the executive for recording special contacts made outside or inside his office. For example, the superintendent of a hospital may, on making the rounds of his institution, note certain matters which should come to the attention of his department heads. Rather than trust to his memory, he may dictate his suggestions and have them delivered to his subordinates for discussion at mutual convenience. In the same way, the executive can record his impressions of important callers or of conversations which may affect the policy of the organization, for his guidance in future relationships with them or with the organizations they represent. Then, too, the executive may get information regarding the interests and hobbies of his board members or of large contributors. These ideas should be dictated and recorded either in the files or on the master cards of those concerned. This procedure corresponds to the practice of case-working social agencies which make case records of their contacts with their clients.

All these uses of memoranda for the executive merely emphasize the well-known historical fact that civilization made its greatest advances after the art of writing was developed for the communication and preservation of ideas. Those social agencies which have a background of written agreements, written understandings, and written instructions tend to make the most effective progress.

SELF-DISCIPLINE. Some books on personal efficiency emphasize the importance of self-discipline. A mild amount of it seems desirable for almost any social administrator who wishes to accomplish his purposes as completely as possible. For instance, he may say that he will not leave the office on Saturday afternoon (or take Saturday morning off if his agency is on a five-day week) unless he has completed the dictation work which has accumulated during the week. If he will treat himself thus sternly, he will get his work done more promptly than would otherwise be the case. Further, he will thus (we hope) enjoy his recreation over the week end more than he would if a great amount of unfinished work were hanging over him. He can relax instead of remaining in a state of tension, conscious or subconscious. More than this, with a clean start on the following week, he probably will finish that week's work on schedule instead

of being delayed by unfinished business. On the other hand, some major tasks cannot be completed in a day or a week but must be held over, for completion as nearly as possible on schedule.

There is a great deal of truth in what Howard S. Braucher, quoted earlier, has to say on discipline:

> Of course recently we have gone through the depression period and also the war period when workers have been scarce and the loads greater than are ordinarily borne. It is perhaps because of the recent experience that I am not inclined to think it is a good idea for an executive to discipline himself by not beginning his week end until his desk has been cleared.
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> I myself have strongly urged a five-day week in our own organization, from the point of view of efficiency. I was even rash enough to state that I believed more work could be done in five days than in five and one-half days. The experiment was authorized in our organization on this basis. I cannot say that I feel my prediction as to volume of work has been realized, but I still believe profoundly in the value of the five-day week. I very much hope that in our own organization it will be kept. We do have what we call a "skeleton force" to handle correspondence, consultation, and emergencies on Saturday mornings. That means that each worker has to be in on Saturday on the average of about once in six weeks.

This whole discussion of discipline is based on the presumption that the executive takes his work seriously and has certain goals which he thinks are even more important in their attainment than are certain pleasures. Such a philosophy may not, of course, coincide with that of many people who hold that work exists for the sake of giving a financial basis for pleasure and that labor should be confined within certain definite hours (and those as few as possible).

Yet, the creed of discipline is sound practice for those who feel that the labor they perform in social work is worth while, that their schedules should give them time for play as well as for work, but that sometimes accomplishment has to be achieved at the cost of what otherwise would be leisure. The following principle is valid: Defer *recreation* (although not at too great a cost with respect to the pleasure of the family and others dependent upon you and your joy in them) until you have finished as far as practicable and reasonable the *creation* you have set yourself. To do so will help in your achievement of the goals which you have set.

QUESTIONS

1. What does some social work executive whom you have observed do to secure first-hand information about the progress of the work for which he is responsible?

2. What professional reading does he do?

3. What does he do about passing on to his associates information secured in this way?

4. What use does he make of conferences, institutes, and visits to other social agencies?

5. What records does he keep for his personal use?

6. Does he keep an idea book or file, or anything that corresponds to them?

7. How does he handle his dictation?

8. How is he able to arrange time for his dictation?

9. What is his policy on written orders and agreements?

10. Does he keep a diary or log? If so, what is its nature and what use is made of it?

11. To what extent does he record significant conferences and visits?

12. How do you think his procedure in these various respects might be improved?

13. What do you do about self-discipline?

14. How do you think you might improve?