

Administrative Leadership

AN IDEAL CABINET MEMBER would be one combining great abilities as a popular leader with great administrative abilities. Great ability as a popular leader is not often found. By definition, great ability is exceptional. Great administrative ability similarly is exceptional. The man who combines exceptional abilities in both fields is a most extraordinary person.

Such a combination of qualities is not a logical one. Leadership of the public goes with marked individuality. Something of the same kind of personal leadership contributes to success in administrative management and may be used in some cases as a substitute for administrative ability; but it is not the same thing. It can, for example, serve as a substitute in a business based on a novel idea when the idea gives it a special advantage over its competitors and makes less necessary an efficiency arrived at purely through management. It can serve as a temporary substitute at the beginning of an undertaking when special zeal may be able to take the place of organized management. It can sometimes serve as a substitute in a small organization. But administrative efficiency can be developed and sustained in a large organization only by systematic methods. Marked individuality in the head of an organization can contribute to administration if that man appreciates the necessity for intricate teamwork. Usually, however, the contribution he makes is not to the process of administration but to the dynamics of it. If it were otherwise, it would probably damage administration rather than help it.

The completely public nature of government poses a special problem in the balance needed in executive personnel between capacity for popular leadership and capacity for organized management. Ordinarily the best way of securing a proper balance is by seeking for complementary qualities in executives on first and second levels of

the administrative hierarchy and by developing in them a vivid appreciation of the importance of both kinds of ability and of the distinctive contribution each can make.

Managing Complexity

Paradoxically, citizens who profess to be alarmed at the size of government often clamor loudly for the extension of government into new areas where their particular interests would thereby gain an advantage. Members of Congress who oppose on principle an enlargement of the sphere of government control nevertheless share with their constituents dissatisfaction regarding specific situations and, in consequence, vote for measures requiring the government to undertake new or additional functions.

Whether it comes from the cumulative logic of events or from some extraordinary single incident such as the attack at Pearl Harbor, this is the current course of history for all who run to read. One does not have to believe in extending the range of government per se in order to have a reason for being concerned about how extended government can be made to function effectively.

It is plain that there is no clear and basic principle marking the limits within which government must confine its actions. Government has to do what it has to do. One basic sentiment of our people is strongly opposed to the extension of governmental activity, but we have even stronger sentiments that move us to call for such extensions whenever they promise better solutions to public problems than private action. Our national structure reflects a reluctance to accept positive government. This reluctance is embodied, for example, in our system of checks and balances, which by making agreement hard to get makes it difficult to get vigorous governmental action. It is a fair and fundamental question whether our basic structure is well adapted to the functions our government must presently perform. True conservatism quite properly begs that question by attempting, short of thoroughgoing structural change, to find ways by which government may better carry the load it has assumed and the greater load it seems likely to assume.

There is encouragement, then, in the thought that existing complexity may not be at all so unmanageable as it may appear to those

newly aware of it or to those who see it only from a great distance. Patently, the prewar situation was tolerable for the overwhelming majority of our people. Even our mild reactionaries do not deny that democracy could still live if only the government would stop where it was on December 6, 1941. It is fear of the further growth of government beyond the limits it has reached today that is really serious. But this was as true twenty years ago as it is now. While we all may be inclined to feel that there are bounds beyond which we hope government will not go, and while the study of satisfactory ways of "other than governmental" handling of our emerging problems is much to be desired, surely it is the part of wisdom to explore ways by which government may satisfactorily carry its prewar load and, say, ten per cent more.

It is, after all, mainly a job in organization and management, a big one, yet not nearly so large as the war job—and we are proving that we can manage that. Better understanding of governmental administration would, moreover, be an important aid to better conduct of the war.

All of us have known persons who, though functioning well in small affairs, cannot orient themselves effectively in a larger frame of reference. The number of people who can deal readily with bigness is severely limited. This fact is not, however, one that should cause deep concern, since fewer people are equipped to deal with big measures than with little ones. Most people in big organizations function much like people doing similar work in smaller organizations. It is by no means fully realized, but it is a fact that there are persons who can handle six digits as readily as most mortals can handle two. Moreover, there are persons who can deal effectively with big issues even though they get bogged down with the little things of life. It is generally believed that men should go up the administrative ladder step by step but the belief is not altogether well founded. There are men who would be poor as ordinary section heads in a bureau who would be able and effective as Secretary of the Department.

It is not necessary for the head of a small business to be a book-keeper in order to understand his balance sheet and to be able to call for figures that will tell him what he needs to know. Neither is it necessary for the heads of great governmental organizations to be

masters of the various functions performed by their staffs in order to be masters of their own executive functions.

Even in a relatively small enterprise the elements of bigger organization are present. The president of a company does not write its advertisements. Final copy is invariably a composite of production, sales, and management points of view, molded and modified by advertising technicians. It may not be completely satisfactory to any department, but it is an organization product. So it is in government—except for one further complication. The process of getting an organization product calls for a reconciliation not only of the viewpoints of those responsible for the several different functions of the agency, but likewise of a host of public-impact considerations.

The nature of the job of organization may be illustrated by the game called "twenty questions." Beginning on the fringe of creation it is possible, by organization processes, swiftly to identify the sink in a particular kitchen. All creation; the planet Earth; the Western Hemisphere, the United States of America, the state of Nebraska, the city of Lincoln, the house at 4343 Bureau Street, the kitchen, the sink.

Here is an illustration from life. Some years ago a man in the Department of Agriculture reported with a chuckle finding on his desk eight identical letters from a citizen who had addressed them to the President, the Secretary of Agriculture, the head of the AAA, the head of the Southern Division of the AAA, two Senators, one Congressman, and the man on whose desk the letters accumulated. All of the letters had promptly reached the desk of the man who was handling the particular matter involved. All of the replies, when they went out, had adequately taken account of the vantage points and the functions of each of the officials originally addressed. In drafting them, therefore, the man had to allow appropriately for the separate special considerations regarded as important in each of the other seven offices, and on their part, members of the staffs of the other seven offices became similarly educated to a composite, representative point of view on the particular matter.

Qualifications of Top Executives

This kind of process goes on continually. Direction of the process is a function of a department's top-level executives. It is *not* an un-

manageable function. But it does require the special utilization of persons who have a somewhat unusual assortment of qualities—and the development of more such persons. The qualities include, perhaps first, an ability something like that required for higher mathematics. Trigonometry is no less practical and precise than arithmetic. It comprehends arithmetic, but is a way of relating and simplifying the handling of relationships between various arithmetical calculations. What is needed is the ability to handle relationships in their larger and broader terms—the quality of philosophy. This means a capacity to see public policy in tens of thousands of different actions and to relate these actions to each other in terms of public and governmental interest. Efficient “operators” we have in great numbers. They *are* capable of serving well on the higher levels of governmental management only if they have this quality of philosophy.

The kind of philosophy is of course important. A philosophy of absolutes and cold logic, a philosophy technical and rigid, would be ruinous. A sound political philosophy must comprehend people's spirits and emotions as well as their reasoned opinions, it must embody the logic of events and sentiments, and not merely the logic of statistics.

The second quality needed by the top executive is “governmental sense,” the ingrained disposition to put the public interest first and thus to recognize the great, essential, and pervasive difference that distinguishes public administration from the management of private enterprise.

Related to governmental sense is a third quality of public-relations or political sense. This involves, on the one hand, an appreciation of the necessity for government officials and governmental action to be exposed to the citizens and the public affected by them and, on the other, an ability to anticipate probable popular reaction and make allowance for it. It also includes the capacity to act swiftly in introducing minor administrative adjustments when such action will relieve public irritation and the ability to sense major political shifts in the early stages of their development and gradually to modify the program of the agency accordingly. No matter how elevated they may be, however, administrators can never have the fullness of wisdom. Fortunately, they need not have it. Events and national senti-

ments will make the bigger and the ultimate decisions. Executives and administrative experts, working together, simply give form to specific programs and mechanisms within the framework of larger national movements. The capacity to sense the coming of these movements is political sense at its highest level.

Ability to be governmental enough to discern the national interest and to insist on programs and procedures so sound that they will be as unyielding rock on which the waves of special interest may break their force in vain, ability to be political enough to seek those concessions which are the needed refinements of the process of making governmental action equitable and smooth, ability to be political enough to read and respond to the messages of public currents, and ability to use administrators who can organize and relate agencies so that they produce organized, integrated action—this is the combination of abilities required for the relatively few top people in the great agencies of government.

A Secretary's Job Top-Side View

To organize for or to stimulate and support organized efforts for getting integrated action that will be acceptable to the public is the job of administration on its highest level.

How to organize at this top level depends of course upon the nature of an agency's program and upon attendant conditions. If its function is a new one and especially complicated, as was the case with that of the War Production Board in 1942, the initial problem will be how to free the responsible head for essential consideration of general policy. Later on, as agency policies become settled, the top job becomes mainly a matter of adjusting policies and of overseeing the processes by which they are expressed. If general policy is understood to include these adjustments, then the top job is completely a policy job. While it involves administration in the sense of getting policy into performance, it is administration in very broad terms. It means organizing to do the whole job by making general determinations that affect the entire program.

Among the things that are essential for good administration on or near the Cabinet level are several elements that in my judgment are of special importance. They may be listed and described briefly

here as they apply in the administration of a huge and complex department. In later chapters I shall discuss some of them in greater detail.

First in importance comes a steady insistence on "operating on one's proper level." Any Cabinet member who attempts regularly to make specific and detailed decisions is a poor administrator. Inevitably he does great damage to his organization and fails effectively to implement his own policies. He simply cannot perform his own real function and do it well if he allows himself to become involved in specifics. As the bridge to the governmental level the secretarial level is the top departmental level. No secretary should ever operate below that level. No one on the governmental level should attempt to operate on the departmental level. No bureau chief should attempt to operate on the division level. The drag of inadequacy is always downward. The need in administration is always for the reverse: for a secretary to project his thinking to the governmental level, for a bureau chief to try to see the problems of the department, for the division chief to comprehend the work of the entire bureau.

The next essential is continuous and determined effort to establish within the department working relationships that will guarantee an organized product, one, that is to say, which embodies the contribution or points of view of all appropriate parts of the agency. This means habitual horizontal clearance and co-ordination as contrasted with the rigid flow of material in straight hierarchal channels. The impulse some persons feel to be facetious about co-ordination is mistaken. There is no way of dividing functions so that they are really self-contained. The more complex matters are, the more co-ordination there must be.

The third essential, somewhat related to the second, is to unify the structure so as to facilitate decision and action. This involves a special appreciation of the importance of building into the structure of the agency a central cone of authority reaching from the head of the department to every individual engaged in carrying on work for which the department is responsible. This authority, turning on the right to hire and fire, is essential to the responsibility of a secretary. His power will be limited in any case by the necessity to delegate, the necessity to minimize controversy, and the necessity of getting or-

ganizational and public acceptance. To delegate authority regularly and definitely to non-Federal officials or to persons responsible to other organizations—as too many agency heads seem willing to do—is to renounce responsibility and to abandon the effort to get teamwork and unity.

The fourth element complements the second and third and amplifies the delegation implicit in the first requirement. It is an informed capacity for decentralization. This follows the third point rather than precedes it for a very definite reason: there can be no sound decentralization until there has first been centralization. One cannot well dispense what one does not actually have. Good management of every complex and far-flung business requires decentralization, but it must be a centralization organically unified and stemming from a core of basic authority.

The fifth most essential qualification for top administration in a Department is the ability to provide that which otherwise tends to be pushed out by the process of getting an organized product—dynamics. If an agency is to succeed significantly, it must organize against the tendency of all organizations to petrify. No amount of effort on the part of other officials can compensate for the failure of the Secretary of the Department properly to concern himself on this score.

A sixth element has to do with democratic spirit and techniques. It can be expressed in many ways: enlistment of all the energies and abilities of the persons in an organization; getting their full and zealous participation rather than simply their compliance; understanding the importance of individual placement, arranging for and encouraging the flow of ideas and suggestions from the bottom up and not merely from the top down, demonstrating an interest in everything in good and imaginative personnel administration; providing for intra-departmental education in total program objectives and content, and stimulation of personnel to develop better spirit and improved techniques in dealing with the public. Each is important for effective administration.

We shall examine some of these elements in more detail in succeeding chapters. Before elaborating on them, however, I should like to try to shake a few prejudices about "governmental inefficiency," "red

tape," and "bureaucracy." For it can, I think, be readily demonstrated that as a nation we need and profit by the very thing so often criticized. government by bureaucrats, government by government-minded officials; government by bureaucrats subject to and accustomed to political control.