

# THE *Bluffer's*<sup>®</sup> GUIDE TO

# MANAGEMENT

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THE *Bluffer's*<sup>®</sup> GUIDE TO

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# MANAGEMENT

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# THE SECRET OF MANAGEMENT

**T**he great secret of management is that it is actually rather easy. This is a secret because if everyone knew how easy it was, everyone – all right, nearly everyone – could probably do it. Then what would be the point of having managers?

Worse, what would be the point of being a manager? To whom would the prestige and the status be accorded? What would happen to the extra money and the perks? They might go to the people who can actually do things rather than to the people who tell them to do them. The horror!

So the role of bluffing in management is not only about pretending to be more knowledgeable than you are. It is also about pretending that it is necessary to be more knowledgeable than you are.

Most of the academic discipline of ‘management science’ consists of making things that are in themselves rather simple appear complex. Indeed, the whole process begins by calling it a ‘science’. There is nothing particularly scientific about management. It is, like bluffing itself, more of an art.

Like any art, it depends on the mastery of a few basics, but those basics can be summarised in a short book... about this size, as it happens.

Management is a big subject with lots of different aspects. The word 'management' can be used as a prefix to form a broad range of threatening terms – management techniques, theories, committees, functions, tools, and so on and so on. How can you hope to understand them all? Fortunately you do not have to.

The essence of bluffing is to retain control of a situation, or at least your position in it, without sufficient data, assets, ability or power to justify that retention. That, as it happens, is also the essence of most management.

In some ways, management should need no introduction. We are all exposed to it on a daily basis, and not just at work. Daily survival in the twenty-first century depends on smooth management. Most of the glitches you face in your daily life, from letters being lost in the post to not having enough milk for your coffee, can be described as 'management failures' – and if you cannot pin a management failure on anyone else, you might have to accept it as your own. If your train is late, it is a failure in operational management by the rail company, but if you are late for your train, your own failure in time management is to blame.

The fact is that we are all managers – the managers of our own lives, whether or not we like to think of it that way – but that does not mean we can all be taught to be successful managers. Just as some leaders are born rather

than trained, there are people on whom management courses or, indeed, any formal ‘education’, are wasted. These often turn out to be the best managers because their heads aren’t cluttered with arcane theory.

Managing even a big organisation is only an application of the basic principles you have learnt in managing your own day-to-day existence. Most management really is just common sense. However, over the years the ‘common’ has grown into ‘specific’, where different areas of the organisation require different management skills. You do not have to worry about obtaining an in-depth understanding of these different disciplines; you just need to know about the concepts that are common to them all – so it really is *common* sense.

An overview of each of the different areas of management will enable you to appear extremely knowledgeable about your fellow managers’ areas of expertise (assuming that they really are genuine specialist managers, dedicated to their own areas of expertise, and not, like you, expert in the art of bluffing).

To outsmart your peers, subordinates and superiors, you can use this book to learn useful management tools which you should utilise by dropping them into conversation whenever possible. Of course, you are not expected to make use of them yourself, but armed with the management skills of delegation and staff empowerment, you will be amazed at how you will be able to guide your staff to use the tools to get results that you can then use to impress others.



How can a bluffer pass as a real manager? Remarkably easily. Very few managers think seriously about their actions, objectives and motives. Anyone devoting even a fragment of the working day to cerebral activity about being a better manager stands out as a dangerous revolutionary. People above them on the corporate ladder see this sort of reckless individualism at best as a catalyst for change (which nobody likes) and at worst as a threat to their own positions. Or they see them as a sort of David Brent from *The Office*, who was a threat only to himself.

The perfect manager seeks to rise above the herd while, at the same time, appearing to desire nothing more than to remain part of it. You need to be seen as a 'team player' if you are to effectively lead the team, but you must also separate yourself from mere followers in thought, word and deed – without anyone noticing what you are doing. As comedian George Burns said: 'Sincerity is everything. If you can fake that, you've got it made.'

This book sets out to guide you through the main danger zones where you are most likely to encounter tricky management challenges. It will equip you with the vocabulary and evasive techniques required to distinguish yourself as a manager of rare ability and experience and to minimise your risk of being found out as a bluffer. In other words, it will enable you to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your knowledge and advice – without anyone discovering that you're probably not the best person to manage a village paper round.

## A WORKING TITLE

**Y**our first decision in management is the most important: where do you want to bluff? The born bluffer will of course aim straight for the top. There is, after all, always room there. However, there is also vicious in-fighting there, between some of the most cunning and competitive people in the world. So you might prefer to look for a niche a little lower down, where you can be monarch of your own private empire.

The importance of your choice of title cannot be overstressed. Note that it is your choice. Your employers may be under the quaint impression that they choose what to call you, but this is true only if you let them. What you call yourself defines how others see you and how you see yourself. Title is in fact a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you sound important, you will be important.

Your first step is to ignore the official title when you introduce yourself. Describe yourself as you would ideally like to be seen and you will soon be seen as just that. If, therefore, your official title is 'office manager', start thinking of yourself as 'administrative director' or even

'systems director'.

Needless to say, this all becomes superfluous if you really do happen to have an impressive title. Then your tactic should be one of deliberate understatement. 'Oh, I help with the books at Universal Widgets' is fine when it can be followed by the immediate presentation of the business card which reveals you as group finance director.

It therefore follows that you must proceed with great care in choosing the title to which you aspire.

## **CHAIRMAN**

Most organisations are headed by a person with some variant on the splendidly democratic title of chairman\*. This implies an egalitarian body of whom the chairman is one among equals and just happens to be the one who chairs meetings. This is, of course, a caricature of the more common reality in which a chairman runs things about as democratically as Vlad the Impaler. Yet, for legal reasons there is usually a body, such as a board of directors, which the chairman chairs and with whom he or she nominally shares power. Since most members of these bodies are, in practice, appointed to their lucrative sinecures with the chairman's approval, the result is rarely Classical Athens in terms of open debate.

\* In the public sector, which is run by left-leaning employees even when the right is in power, and increasingly in the private sector too, expressions like 'chairperson', 'chair' or 'chairwoman' are used, according to fashion.

Confusingly, in US companies there is often a president below the chairman – despite there being no chairman above the president of the United States. Even more confusingly, British organisations often have an honorary president nominally above the chairman but with no real power in the hierarchy, in much the same manner as the Queen is supposed to outrank a prime minister but cannot interfere in government business.

The title ‘vice president’ is handed out generally to make people feel better about themselves without meaning very much. Again, there is an obvious parallel here with the federal government of the USA, except that most organisations can have as many vice presidents as they want. Whether even one is necessary is another matter.

The title ‘chairman’ is obviously very desirable to the bluffer. Alas, there is only one proper chairman per organisation. However, the chairman of a subsidiary board, committee or sub-committee might emphasise the word ‘chairman’ and neglect to mention the bit that comes afterwards.

## **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Whatever the chairman’s delusions of grandeur, the chief executive is the person who actually runs things. The chairman may not be a full-time employee of the organisation, indeed he or she may be no more than a front for the chief executive. Alternatively, the real megalomaniac will combine the offices of chairman and chief executive.

Chief executives used to have humbler titles, usually managing director in the UK or general manager in the USA. These days, most cannot resist the combination of the powerful 'chief' with the dynamic 'executive' in the same title. More impressive still is the variant born in the USA, chief executive officer – often abbreviated to the even more dramatic abbreviation, CEO.

As a general rule, you really have arrived when you no longer even have a title and are described instead by a set of letters. Real power increases in direct proportion to the decrease in the number of letters by which you are referred. Deputy and assistant directors have longer titles – and therefore more letters – than their superiors, so that an assistant director of finance and administration might be ADFA, and the director DFA. It seems an unwritten rule that no one has fewer than three letters in a private organisation, presumably in order to avoid offending the CEO. Two letters, like PM or HM, implies national prominence. Napoleon just used N. M, of course, gives out licences to kill. Many CEOs would secretly love to do the same.

## **C-LEVEL**

The goal of ambitious people in a hierarchy used to be 'board level' or 'director level' (*see* below). Now, more and more, it is 'C-level' for members of the 'C-suite'. Not to be outdone by CEOs, finance directors have become chief financial officers or CFOs, operating directors have become chief operating officers or COOs, and so on. Now it seems there is no limit to the potential C-level positions

in an organisation. We now have titles like chief technical officer, chief investment officer, chief legal officer, chief creative officer, chief risk officer, chief learning officer, chief brand officer, chief knowledge officer and even – surely a contradiction in terms in any hierarchy – chief visionary officer. Followers of *Star Trek* will feel vindicated by the fact that the posts of chief science officer and chief communications officer really do exist in many organisations.



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The advantage of C-level from the bluffer's perspective is that it implies the highest possible rank in the organisation but is not tied to any particular level in the hierarchy. You do not have to be at board level or even manager level to have a C-level title; if you narrow your specialisation enough so that you are indeed the senior person performing that particular function in the whole organisation, then you can claim to be chief of that function in the organisation. So the tea boy in the cashier's office becomes the organisation's chief financial services beverage supply officer and the janitor in reception the chief front office cleansing officer.