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THE SECRET OF MANAGEMENT

The 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 poses as 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, 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 enough 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 21st century depends on smooth management. Most of the glitches you face in your daily life, from compromising emails sent to the wrong person 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 and impenetrable jargon.

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, of course, that they really are genuine specialist managers, dedicated to their own areas of expertise, and not, like you, expert only in the art of bluffing).

To outsmart your peers, subordinates and superiors, you can use this book to learn useful management tools and mantras 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 how to be 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.

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 couldn't actually manage a village paper round.