

EASY ESSAYS

Management Maxims

At the age of fifteen, I was introduced to the world of maxims.

As young trainees in religious monastic life, we were not permitted to talk during meals; the enforced silence was used instead to listen to prescribed readings from spiritual books. Every day at the noon meal, after one of the required readings was finished, the lector read a maxim of St. La Salle, the founder of the religious order to which we aspired.

Now, fifty-six years later, even though I am unable to recall a single one of his maxims, I do remember how impressed I was with each one's forthright, succinct and educational pithiness – the lesson for the day captured in a sentence or two.

In 1996, I wrote a set of maxims, which captured my views about how to understand and manage an organization such as Loaves & Fishes, a private sector charitable organization dedicated to feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless in Sacramento, California.

Each maxim is its own thought; it must read and understood as a stand-alone principle.

Addiction

We are all addicts. Some forms of addiction are more socially acceptable than others.

Generosity

In general, you will find a more unselfish spirit of generosity and giving among the poor, than among the wealthy.

Meetings

More often than not, meetings with other agencies or organizations are a substitute for work.

Mission Statement

The philosophy and mission statement of the organization must be stated in capsule form, and repeated constantly to new staff members, old staff members, volunteers, supporters, the media, and most importantly, to you. The words of philosophy and mission must be translated into the daily work of the organization.

Personnel Manuals

Personnel manuals are developed to deny staff members, not to assist and affirm their needs.

Job Interviews

To be effective in working with guests of Loaves & Fishes, staff presence must be active, not passive. The executive must know the difference. During interviews with prospective staff members, a judgment must be made whether this quality exists, or not.

The Process

The poor do not participate in the process because they know from experience it will lead to no personal benefit.

Honor System

The honor system and staff accountability can only be nurtured to the extent that traditional personnel control techniques are eliminated.

Meetings

The most effective meetings, and those which achieve the most lasting results, take place at the work site, in the hallways, and in the lunch room.

Staff Communication

Everything you reduce to writing, and everything you communicate verbally will be misunderstood by some staff members. It is always easier to unwind misunderstandings that are not the result of something written.

Memos

Each time you write a memo to your organization, you should remind yourself that you have chosen the least effective method of communication.

Learning A Career

Most careers are learned on the job through trial and error. Academic preparation for careers is the price of admission to learn the work.

Cleanliness

Be firm about the need – and be willing to pay – for cleanliness. The return to the organization on the investment is sevenfold.

Job Seeking

The easiest, and fastest way to secure the paying job you want, is to volunteer your services to the organization that has it.

Not Only One Way

Be clear about it. Just because you do it one way and not another, does not make it the best way, the right way, or the only way.

A Time To Be Magnanimous

When a staff member decides to leave the organization, you can well afford to be magnanimous.

Recognition

It is not possible to bestow enough recognition for the good work accomplished by staff members and volunteers.

Giving Orders

You should avoid giving orders or insisting that something be done. Make suggestions, give advice, state your opinion, and let it go at that. Follow up to see what happened, if anything. Start over again.

Logo

If it is possible for the organization to communicate its message to supporters by using only its logo, then its base of financial support is well grounded.

The Secretary

If you must have a secretary, then you are not in charge of the organization. The secretary is in charge because you are always, “unavailable”, “at a meeting”, or “tied up on the phone.”

Moving River

Despite what you might think, your organization is a moving river, and you must move with it by constantly changing, and adapting to new conditions.

Inclusive

Always err on the side of being inclusive.

Building Community

When staff members talk about “community” or “building community”, it means they resent autocratic authority, and prefer decisions reached by consensus, because at least they will have input. It frequently happens that when these same staff members are charged with achieving certain goals, they prefer decision-making “from the top down.” Making decisions is a blend of input, touching base, making a judgment, and being willing to correct in midstream.

Telephone Systems

Telephone systems, which require the caller to make choices, and punch buttons to attempt communication, create the poorest possible image about your organization. Such a system has no redeemable features.

Making Time

Don't kid yourself, you always make time for what interests you. When you say, I don't have the time, it only means you are not that interested.

Accountability

It isn't fair to staff members at any level to put them in a position where they are not personally accountable for their work. Being accountable provides opportunity for affirmation, new direction, insight, correction, and taking justifiable pride in what has been accomplished.

The Only Difference

The primary, and sometimes the only difference between the homeless, and the homed, is their residence.

Leaving the Organization

Some staff members are able to leave the organization only if they feel justified in doing so. Sometimes, it means they must pick a fight with you or the organization before they feel justified.

Working At Your Desk

Stand at your desk to do paper work, and answer the telephone. Sit down to meet. You will work more efficiently, and your back will not bother you as much.

Using the Honor System

Your commitment to use the honor system, and hold staff accountable, means that you must be willing to deal openly and honestly with staff members, even when it is painful.

Interruptions

Encourage staff members, especially new ones, to interrupt you when they have questions, regardless of how trivial they might seem. It saves you time, and prevents serious mistakes over the long term. It also helps you to assess the strengths of your staff members.

Your Best Ideas

Some of your best ideas, some of the most important and far reaching decisions about your organization will come as a result of answering your own telephone.

Time Or Money

Your currency is either time or money. If you have both, you can spend both; if you have only one, you can spend one.

Asking For Help

People want to contribute and support your organization, but they want to be asked first.

Personnel Manuals

The primary purpose of personnel manuals is to take the decision making authority away from the executive. The secondary purpose is to insulate the executive from the needs of staff members.

Daily Signals

In the first hour of the work day, you must try to pick up the mood of the day, and its early warning signals. It may be the only signal you ever receive.

Job Descriptions

Written job descriptions stunt the development of your organization, and create a barrier to change.

Open Door Policy

Never close your door for a private meeting. You slow the growth of your organization by preventing staff members from interrupting you for a quick YES or NO in order for them to continue building program.

Grievance Procedures

The purpose of written grievance procedures is to create time, distance, and insulation between the staff member with the complaint, and the person in the organization who can do something about it. To avoid complaints taking on a life of their own, you must deal with complaints forthrightly, face to face, and in a timely fashion. It can be painful.

Needs of Supporters

Supporters who contribute funds to the organization expect to be kept involved, and motivated through frequent communications about the work of the organization, including its trials and tribulations.

Nonsense

You can waste much time and emotional effort trying to make sense out of nonsense, instead of just accepting it as nonsense.

Job Resumes

Read every resume that comes across your desk. Look especially for signs of hands-on work experience. This will tell you more about the individual than their stated career experience, and their sometimes lofty stated goals.

Staff Recruitment

The very first place to look for staff replacement is on the current staff roster. The next place to look is on the fringes of the organization of persons known to you. Next is through word of mouth. The last place to look is in a newspaper.

Telephone Systems

Avoid centralized telephone systems. They do not promote communication, they prevent it. Everyone's time is wasted including that of the caller. Centralized systems inevitably create a passive message center system that is neither efficient nor manageable. Make sure that each program entity has its own separate number with enough lines and telephones to accomplish the work.

Doing More With Less

Program directors constantly ask for more staff and more space. It is far less expensive to provide the space. It is less expensive still, to rethink,

rework, and reorganize the program itself to accomplish more with fewer staff.

Artists

Artists need respect, and encouragement to cope with their insecurities. Artists should be pushed to create what *they* feel reflects what you wish to communicate, otherwise you will lose the benefit of their creative insight.

Time To Move On

Even when a staff member realizes it is time to move on to another career or line of work, you have to help him/her make and implement that decision.

Thinking About Leaving

When a staff member signals he/she is thinking about leaving the organization, do not under any circumstances, try to talk them out of leaving. Should you be successful in temporarily reversing their decision, you must be prepared to take the blame when something goes amiss in their program because he/she will be the first one to remind you that staying with the organization was your idea, not theirs.

Attrition Rate

Staff turnover is good for your organization. It provides you the opportunity to bring new talent and high energy to the work

Job Satisfaction

Working only for money or because you need a job provides very little personal satisfaction; it will leave you restless and insecure.

Self-Interest

Do not think otherwise: staff members will ultimately do what is best for themselves, and not what is best for the organization.

Control

You waste much time and emotional energy worrying about events you cannot control. Learn - and accept - the difference

Government Funding

If an organization accepts government money, a bureaucracy must be created to interface with government operatives. Inquiries must be answered, periodic and detailed reports must be filed, surveys taken, expenditures justified and audits conducted. Finally, you must answer the newspaper headlines about the organization's misuse of taxpayer funds.

Personnel Policies

Avoid written personnel policies, because the written policy seriously restricts your decision making for the benefit of staff members.

Personnel Policies

When staff members are sick, they should stay home and take care of themselves. When they need a vacation, they should take one. Written sick leave and vacation policies will not accomplish something as simple as that.

Job Prerequisites

Organizations, which do not recruit and interview staff applicants unless they have prerequisite academic credentials, required career

experiences, or state certifications, cut themselves off from highly qualified persons.

Staff Recruitment

If you have difficulty recruiting good staff members to your organization, it is an early warning signal. Pay attention.

Staff Recruitment

You are the primary staff recruiter for the organization and should personally interview and approve each applicant before hire. This is important for many reasons, not the least of which is the opportunity to officially communicate the philosophy and mission of the organization to every new staff person

What Could Be Done

Learning from a resume what others have actually accomplished helps you to realize what your organization could be doing.

Amassing Wealth

Working to create and amass wealth is stressful and tends to be a life hollow at the core.

Ideas

Your best ideas come from listening carefully to others in your organization. This creates the raw material for you to massage, reshape, and fashion into your own ideas.

Those Who Do The Work

Try at all costs to structure your organization so that staff members who do the work do not have to report to you through a bureaucratic layer. It is a question of priorities: there would be no organization without those who do the work.

Unique Contribution

Each person who presents himself/herself to work with your organization has a unique contribution to make. Your primary task is to recognize what that contribution might be, and then be flexible enough to create the niche or opportunity to utilize it.

Management Presence

Make your physical presence felt in every part of the organization. Be observant, ask questions as you walk from one place to another, offer opinions, and make observations as they occur to you. When your curiosity is piqued about something you have seen or heard, follow up, and find out more about it.

Follow-Up

After you ask a staff member to do something, it is best to assume that it will not be done in a timely manner, and may not even be done at all. Follow up to see if it was done, and when, and how well. Ask again.

Accountability

Staff members expect, and need to be held accountable for their work. Give them that opportunity.

Budget Cut-Backs

There is no way for an organization to scale back its budget without decreasing the size of the staff. You must plan to cut staff even as you hire.

Talking About Finances

When you talk about the organization's finances or controlling the budget, staff members will interpret your remarks to mean that staff layoffs are likely. When 75% of the cost of the organization's work is staff related, their interpretation is not far fetched.

Fund Raising Events

Fund raising events sponsored by the organization should be avoided. Too much overhead and too much time will be spent for too small a return.

Donations

Supporters who personally deliver items requested by the organization will also contribute funds.

Newsletters

The use of newsletters, instead of appeal letters, to communicate with supporters is impersonal and seldom raises enough money to pay for the costs of printing and mailing.

Volunteering

Volunteer orientation is critical. Regularly scheduled orientations work best because all telephone inquiries about volunteering can be funneled to a specific date and time. Volunteer orientation also represents that small decision-making-step between "wanting" to do something and "doing" it.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the life blood of your organization, literally. If large numbers of volunteers have a meaningful experience in the work of the organization, it is more likely that sufficient funds will be contributed to carry out the work.