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FRIDAY, 10th JANUARY, 1975

ACROW CHAIRMAN SPEAKS OUT ON MODERN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

AT THE ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY MEETING, HELD IN STATIONERS' HALL ON 11 DECEMBER 1974



W. A. de Vigier

The Anglo-Swiss Society held its Christmas meeting on Wednesday, 11th December, at the Stationers' Hall, in Ludgate Hill. About 200 members and guests attended, amongst them the Swiss Ambassador and many prominent personalities, attracted by the beautiful hall, but above all by the eminence of the speaker, Mr. W. A. De Vigier, Chairman and Managing Director of ACROW (Engineers) Ltd. He is a prominent member of the Swiss community in this country and founder of his well-known group of companies.

The Hall of the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Newspaper Makers is famous for a splendid carved oak screen of the Grinling Gibbons period and a plain oak panelling by Stephen Colledge (d. 1681). This fortunately escaped damage in the last war.

In the absence of the Anglo-Swiss Society's President, The Earl of Selkirk, the Rev. Lord Sandford was in the chair. He introduced the speaker who addressed the meeting as follows:

"Your Excellency, my Lords, ladies and gentlemen.

Introduction

"When I was asked by his Excellency, the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. Weitnauer, to speak to you this evening about experiences in modern management, I immediately wondered whether or not I was qualified to speak on the subject.

"I don't think it will surprise those of you who know me to find that I am rather a traditional manager.

"Many companies in the last 20 years have begun to use management techniques which have been developed from such diverse academic disciplines as economics, mathematics, statistics, and the behavioural sciences. However, 20 years ago, I was old enough to have forgotten what the inside of a schoolroom looked like and had the responsibility of managing a company in the post-war era emerging, with mass high-speed communications, in the dawning of a truly global world.

Team

"Very early in life as the Captain of a soccer team in Switzerland I learnt the importance of choosing the right players to have a winning team. This same principle applied to business has been of major importance in the Acrow Group, for, ladies and gentlemen, I believe the human element to be the prime factor in our success.

Leadership

"I consider firm and fair leadership to be vitally important in business particularly today when industry is subject to the merciless scrutiny of customers, of shareholders, government agencies and of course one's own employees. It goes without saying that the man at the top must always work hard himself and by his example show how much he cares for and identifies himself with the success of the enterprise.

Middle Management

"I am sure that anyone here this evening interested in soccer wishes his

team to be in the First Division League. To remain there needs top and middle management without which a team soon loses its homogeneity, is inefficient and inconsistent. Above all, in a competitive economy, the quality and performance of the middle men determines the success of a business — indeed, they determine its survival. For the quality and performance of its managers is the only effective advantage an enterprise can have in a competitive economy.

Approach to Management

"Being a Swiss living here in Britain and doing business in most nations of the world, I have always relied on the traditional approach to management.

"I have often been accused of being old-fashioned in my management methods and only a few years ago I almost believed it. But at that time I heard a story attributed to the then Chairman of the company which today for many people symbolizes our modern business age — I.B.M.

"Thomas Watson, Junior, was asked during an interview how he controlled his vast organisation. His answer, surprisingly enough, was not "through the use of our computers" but "rather by the motivation and control of the best available people". He is purported to have said that "together with my management I set goals that are realistic and I then expect these goals to be met."

Incentives

"This is precisely what we do in the Acrow Group of Companies throughout the world where we hold competitions yearly, quarterly, monthly, rewarding successful salesmen and production teams. By such incentives, we have become the leaders in many fields of our very diversified activities and operations.

Selling

"If I may digress a little from my main theme, I feel I must emphasise what I consider to be the fundamental of successful business *selling* without which

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no management is *in* business.

"In my experience, I have found, that even though many firms — through capable technicians — have invented and developed magnificent products whilst others have built beautiful factories with the most up-to-date machine tools they have had no success because they ignored the fact that *selling* is the fundamental of successful business.

"Our alert sales force covering world markets is the listening ear feeding back to the technicians and production teams information and trends as to customer requirements and needs.

Markets and Customers

"Markets are not created by God, nature or economic sources but by business men. The customer is the foundation of a business and keeps it in existence. To be successful we must know his requirements if we are to satisfy his needs.

British Workers

"We are constantly hearing that the British worker is at fault in some way for the poor performance of British industry in the world league. I totally reject this. We have in England some of the finest workers and some of the most skilled people in the world. What we lack is the aggressive selling of our German, Japanese and American competitors.

Modern Techniques

"Ladies and gentlemen, to return to my theme, some basic developments have occurred in recent years which make possible significant improvements in the practice of management. Traditionally, decisions have been made on the basis of memory judgement and intuition.

"Modern management methods such as operations research, management science and other analytical methods of management have important roles to play as tools to enable the manager of a diversified organisation to plan his business, identify its problems and find solutions to those problems. What is important is that one should never forget that they are tools *for* people and *not in place* of people.

"Modern management must have an awareness and understanding of its responsibility to staff as never before. In

order to function properly our computer rooms must be kept dirt and dust free — is it any less essential that our kitchens and workers' canteens be dirt and dust free!

Profits

"The ultimate test of management is business performance. It can only justify its existence and its authority by economic results. If, ladies and gentlemen, I may refer to the word "profits" I would emphasise that profits is not a "cause" but the result — the result of the performance of the business in marketing, innovation and — very important — productivity. It is at the same time the test of management performance.

"I am sure you will all agree with me that profits are necessary to remain in business, for profits provide the fuel which is the life-blood of our present way of life. Profits are required to provide taxes for the benefit of the community. Profits are required to keep one's people fully employed by providing them with modern equipment so that they can remain competitive in world markets.

"Profits are required to increase productivity for we all know, ladies and gentlemen, that it is not by printing paper that we increase wealth but by productivity.

"I started in business in a railway arch in Bow with two employees in 1936 — during a depression when money *just* could not be borrowed. Today, we employ over 10,000 people. How could this have been achieved without profits to reinvest?

Human Relations

"On the subject of modern management techniques, you will by now have gathered that I consider human relations to be of supreme importance — allied to an adequate focus on work. We must recognise above all else that we are dealing with human beings at all levels of our companies and not with robots.

"There is no substitute for responsibility and consideration for one's staff and the constant appreciation that we are all suffering today because for too long throughout the world management forgot that the man with the broom on the shop floor has the same human

characteristics as his colleagues around the board table.

"Whatever size the job is, the worker must be made to feel that his efforts are important to the company. Every worker needs to feel — as I myself need to feel — to be part of a creative team. However, I would like to add that you cannot have good human relations without discipline or discipline without good human relations. No legislation should be necessary to achieve this.

Conclusion

"To conclude, I would like to quote the epitaph of Andrew Carnegie:

*"Here lies a man
Who knew how to enlist
In his service
Better men than himself."*

"Managing a business always comes back to the human element, no matter how sound the business economics, how careful the analysis, how good the tools."

* * * *

After the interesting talk, Mr. De Vigier answered questions put to him by the audience. The Chairman thanked the speaker for addressing the Society, and this brought the first part of the evening to a close. An excellent buffet supper followed.

FRANK MARTIN Death of Distinguished Swiss Composer

With Frank Martin's death on 21st November, the Swiss world of music has lost one of its most prominent composers. From a very early age, he composed songs, chamber music, later concertos and oratorios. His own individualistic style became noticeable in his early fifties. Amongst his best-known works are the Shakespeare opera "The Storm", "Le Vin Herbé", "Golgatha", "Mystère de la nativité", his oratorios and his "Jedermann Monologues", and one of his last and most impressive works, his "Requiem".

Frank Martin was born in Geneva on 15th September, 1890, the son of a pastor. He studied with Joseph Lauber and, after the First World War, he continued his studies in Zurich, Rome and Paris. From 1928 he taught at the Jacques-Dalcroze Institute and taught chamber music at the Geneva Conservatoire. In 1933, he founded the "Technicum moderne de musique" which he directed for six years. From 1942-1946 he was President of the Swiss "Tonkünstlerverein". For seven years in the 'fifties, he was in charge of a composers' class at the Music Academy in Cologne. In 1946 he retired to Naarden near Amsterdam, though he went on composing with inspiration and energy. He died at Naarden after an operation for a cerebral haemorrhage.

M.M.