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DEVELOPING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

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"The Killarney Conference left me somewhat up in the air. I have three questions to which I don't know the answer: First: Am I an Entrepreneur? Second: Should I be? and Third: If I should, how do I go about becoming one?" It is precisely to answer these three questions, raised by an Irish manager after the Killarney Conference, that special courses have been developed by D. C. McClelland and his associates at Harvard and run and evaluated in various parts of the world. A pilot programme of this sort has also been run by Liam Connellen, Dermot Egan, Liam Gorman and the author in Ireland, and the results of the evaluation are awaited with interest.

As is implied by the questions raised by the businessman mentioned above the courses strive to help people think about their lives and life goals as a whole and thereafter pursue the life goals that are important to them more effectively. The courses take as their starting point the notion that the more a man has carefully examined the benefits and frustrations of a course of action on which he is about to embark, and the more he then commits himself to that course of action, the more successful he is likely to be. Once the participants have examined themselves in some detail and had a thorough look at the research literature relating to successful people in the world of business and economic development, the course then goes on to bring home to the participants as dramatically as possible both their own behaviour tendencies and the type of behaviour that is, and is not, effective in a number of situations of relevance to to business - such as planning, anticipating obstacles, dealing with people and finding

solutions to the problems which crop up in business life. Thereafter the participants go on to make specific plans for their own business, make plans to monitor their activities to see whether they are on target (an important feedback process which is frequently neglected), and establish a network of friends to support them in their activities.

The Model of the High Achiever

The participants are taken thoroughly over the research literature relating to high achievers and the patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour of the latter are carefully discussed with them. It is repeatedly emphasised that this picture has emerged from research; that it is not an academic description of the ideal way a businessman should behave; it is in fact the way successful businessmen tend to think, feel and behave although - and this, too, is repeatedly emphasised; - many successful people do not think, feel or behave this way, and many people who do think, feel, and behave in this way are not financially successful: there is simply a general association between success and each of the characteristics listed.

The pattern which emerges is that high achievers tend to have the following characteristics in their thoughts. They:

Want to do new things

Make careful plans to achieve their goals

Anticipate obstacles to the achievement of their goals

Consider their own abilities and limitations more explicitly than do low achievers

Think of ways of measuring the success they are having in reaching their goals

Anticipate the delight they will experience if they succeed in their activities and the misery they will feel if they fail; by anticipating these things they are, of course, able to release much more energy into what they are doing.

Feelings They:

Take a pride in doing things well

Enjoy their work

Are very much in touch with their feelings, they channel their emotions - both positive and negative - into their jobs

Enjoy introducing innovations and better ways of doing things, instead of thinking that this is wrong or feeling afraid of change

Enjoy seeing their actions have some effect in moving a group of which they are a member towards its goal even if they do not get credit from the group for their activities

Think that a person who does a job well deserves a proportionately greater reward, in comparison with a person who does it averagely, than do most people: in other words the dimension of quality is much nearer the top of their minds.

Behaviour They:

Seek out moderately challenging tasks where the results of their activities can be clearly seen

Seek out opportunities to be of benefit to the community

Make detailed and explicit plans to achieve their goals

Utilize their experience and don't branch out into the entirely unknown

Are self confident and rely on their own ability to master situations in which others would fail

Seek the help of others to achieve their goals

When choosing work partners they choose people who know their jobs rather than friendly people

Enlist the support of others - for example their wives and friends - to help them to achieve their goals

Work hard and for long periods to achieve their goals

Seek evidence of how well they are doing, of the degree to which they are on course for their goal

Refuse to work at tasks which do not interest them and do not help them to reach their goal

Refuse to work hard at a routine task for a financial incentive

Seek to work with others in such a way that both benefit; that is they seek to establish win/win relationships with others rather than relationships in which if one wins the other loses

They seek out tasks that they can control, where they can rely on their own skill and judgement.

In order to thoroughly familiarise the participants with this information about high achievers the course participants examine the stories which more and less successful people make up about relatively ambiguous pictures depicting human situations (the theory being that people attribute to others the pre-occupations that they have themselves), they examine the stories which they themselves tell (which also serves to aid their understanding of themselves, as will be discussed below) and they examine the way of life and business histories of more and less successful businessmen in order to detect the presence or absence of each and every one of the characteristics listed above. The crowning event of the Irish course occurred when the owner of the hotel in which the course was being held was asked to give a ten minute account of the development of his own business. He displayed every single characteristic. It was no longer possible to maintain that the results were fabricated, ideal only, or that they did not apply in Ireland!

In the course of going over the research literature dealing with the characteristics of the high achiever references are made to research into the origins of the behaviour. This is important because one of the important messages which the course seeks to convey is that successful people are - to reverse the familiar statement - made and not born.

Steps to Encourage the Participants to Think about Themselves

Interspersed with the fore-going exercises are exercises designed to help the participants think about themselves - the sort of person they are and the sort of person they would like to be. This is done partly by encouraging the participants to take part in some of the experimental situations from which the research was derived, partly through discussion with the other course participants, partly in sessions in which they privately consider their own life goals and what has

hitherto given them most satisfaction and caused them the most intense feelings of frustration, and partly by encouraging them to think, in considerable detail, about the future of their own business - an activity in which surprisingly few appeared to have engaged in previously.

Although no-one on the Irish course did so it has been found in other courses that at this stage some people reject the model of the high achiever and announce that they do not wish to be like that. In debate with others some of the people who criticise the sort of person who conforms to the model turn out to be criticising some stereo type of the successful businessman who does not in fact conform to the model at all - for example the hard, striving, neurotic, ambitious person who is seeking personal power and does not hesitate to trample on others in order to get it. Others, of course, persist in not wishing to be the sort of person that is actually described - a decision which is respected by the course organisers and its implications explored individually with the participant.

Business Planning

Throughout the course participants work gradually toward a specific plan for their own business - one which is realistic, challenging, and which enables the businessman to clearly monitor whether he is or is not reaching his goals. By the end of the course the aim is to have had the participants think about where they hope to get to, the obstacles they will encounter, how they will be dealt with, and the steps which they themselves should take in the next three months, six months etc. if they are to reach their goals.

Many of the steps they need to take turn out to involve acquiring new skills themselves, (and in particular new skills of dealing with, and managing, personnel) reorganising their labour force, and obtaining training for their employees. It is to the development of new social and managerial skills that the remainder of the course time is devoted. Owing to shortage of time, however, much of it was left out in the Irish course. As has already been mentioned the object of these exercises is to bring home to the participants as dramatically as possible, and in a fashion that they are least likely to forget, both their own normal behaviour and the behaviour that is most likely to be effective in these situations.

Cooperation and Competition

One of the characteristics of the high achiever is that he tries to set up relationships with other people in which both gain; he is, for example, prepared to see someone else's business grow and progress out of a joint activity provided he gains as well. This, of course, is in conflict with his tendency to compete with others. The balance he achieves between these motives is crucial in the growth of business. All too often the competitive motive over-rides the cooperative one - witness the conclusions of the Surveys of Irish Industry. The need to develop sensitivity to these possibilities is brought home to the participants by means of two business games both of which present the participants with an option of coordinating their activities so that they both gain a steady, relatively small, number of points or amount of money, or treating the situation as a pure competition, in which case both lose points or money although one may gain a relative advantage.

Estimating and Budgeting

This section, omitted from the Irish course, is designed to encourage the participants to estimate and budget very carefully, allowing for all necessary obstacles and making due allowance for their own personal skills and experience when arriving at a costing. Again it brings home to many businessmen just how poor they are at performing this function and also its critical role in business success. It also provides opportunity to practice improved behaviour patterns.

Developing Feelings of Efficacy and Self Confidence

This section is designed to encourage the participants to realise that by delaying evaluation they can arrive at solutions to problems which at first seemed insuperable. The sessions consist of brain storming sessions in which the participants suggest wild ideas to solve each others problems - characteristically one of the wild ideas turns out to be extremely useful.

Dealing with People: Delegation of Responsibility

One of the problems which confronts many small businesses occurs when the business has grown to such an extent that the businessman needs to take on a manager or foreman to help him with his work. However, another research finding is that more successful businessmen and farmers change their behaviour each time they take on an extra man and each time leave more of the work they have previously been doing to someone else in order that they can devote more of their own time to long term planning and overall organisation. An attempt was made to bring this situation home to the businessmen by means of a case study, but there is little doubt that more affective means of conveying this problem and its solution to course participants needs to be developed.

A considerable amount of research has been done on preferred leadership style and its relationship to the task to be accomplished and the social relationship which exists between manager and employee. Had the course been longer this material would have been discussed with the participants and illustrated by case studies.

Dealing with People: Helping Subordinates

Omitted from the Irish course, an attempt is made here, again through game situations, to remind the participants, dramatically, of what it feels like to be a learner and how differently the same situation is perceived by subordinate and superior. One game situation for dealing with this relationship consists of blindfolding some of the participants before asking them to do some difficult task (such as eat a dinner consisting of rib steak with potatoes done in their jackets, or build towers out of irregularly shaped blocks with their left hands).

Dealing with People: Motivating Subordinates

Again omitted from the first part of the Irish course this section is designed to encourage the participants to think about the social pressures toward different types of behaviour on the part of subordinates: People behave as they do partly because of their own tendencies and partly because of pressures from the environment in which live and work. In particular people - and particularly the high achievers we have been discussing - do not work for money alone: The satisfaction that different types of people seek from their jobs are discussed with the course participants as are the sorts of pressure that might cause, for example, an achievement - orientated individual to behave in a conformist and traditionalist fashion or an affiliation - orientated individual to behave in an achievement fashion. Similarly the sort of organisational-climates (and community climates) which stimulate people to behave in particular ways, such as to try to innovate, to stick

in the mud and refuse to change, to do things as they have always been done before, to be secretive and engage in malicious gossip and backbiting rather than develop that trust and openness which is so essential for cooperation and progress, are discussed with the participants in some detail and highlighted by means of case studies and study of the participants own businesses.

Commitment to Goals - Provision for follow-up

The course concludes with a clear commitment on the part of the course participants to strive to achieve their goals and by them making provision to keep in touch with each other and with the organisers of the course. It is well known that without (a) commitment to objectives, (b) establishing a network of supporting friends - a reference group - and (c) provision for monitoring activity, it is all too easy for course participants to be dragged down by the day to day pressures of their jobs and thus fail to live up to the high standards they set themselves whilst on courses.

Effectiveness of the Course

It is, of course, impossible to know how effective the course has been until evaluation data have been collected at 6 months and 2 years. However, the general consensus of the participants at the time seemed to be that the course had been of value. The effectiveness of the courses elsewhere seems to be that of any group of businessmen participants the behaviour characteristic of the most effective third of them in the two years prior to the course become characteristic of two thirds of them afterwards.

As far as personal happiness and mental health is concerned it is worth noting that very many authors have noted that unhappiness and neuroticism result from a state of conflict of one sort or another, from frustration of a need for adequacy or self-actualization, or from an inability to relate to people in a satisfactory way, and, in particular from a failure to develop a capacity to work purposefully and well with others for the good of oneself and the community. The goals of the course, in the direction of encouraging people to clarify their goals and think about what really does give them satisfaction, of helping them to think through psychological conflicts and bring more of their feelings and behaviour into consciousness should, therefore, serve to promote, not only economic development, but also the psychological well-being of the participants.

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