THE EDUCATION OF A MODERN INTERNATIONAL MANAGER

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Abstract. This article is based upon a speech delivered by Mr. Jacques G. Maisonrouge, Senior Vice President, IBM Corporation, and Chairman of the Board, IBM World Trade Corporation, at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of International Business, Washington, DC, on 28 October 1982 when he became the first recipient of the International Business Leader of the Year award and was elected an Honorary Member of the Fellows of the Academy of International Business.

I am delighted to be here and deeply honored to have been chosen the first recipient of your international business leader of the year award. This makes my job both simpler and more difficult. Simpler because I did not have to do any research in order to talk about my distinguished predecessors. More difficult because I must set a good example for those who follow me. Although I accept your award with gratitude, I am fully aware that it should be shared with the thousands of men and women around the world who have helped me do my job every day for over 34 years.

I don't know what criteria were used this time. But I should like to suggest that any individual under consideration in the future ought to have demonstrated either in his career or writings that while remaining attached to his national roots—even patriotic—he has managed to rid himself of the prejudices acquired during his early school years. Such an individual must be close to a Renaissance man . . . or woman. The Renaissance man knew, for instance, that the most knowledgeable people he could meet, work with, and be stimulated by were often located in distant countries. Whatever your criteria this year, I am deeply honored to have been judged worthy of recognition by acknowledged connoisseurs of international business, and I cannot be too humble about it because I trust your judgment.

The novelist, Gore Vidal, once said that it is not enough to succeed; your friends must also fail. It is cleverly phrased—a true bon mot that speaks volumes about human psychology. But I do not agree, because success is not a zero-sum game in which there must be a loser for every winner.

This sentiment may sound odd coming from someone who has spent his adult life in the business world where the law of the jungle is supposed to prevail. But those of us who actually inhabit that world know that the modern business enterprise is too complex and too far-flung to be anything but a vast, cooperative effort with many interdependent parts. A multitude of skills and talents must mesh to make a large enterprise work. It is therefore in the common interest that as many people as possible succeed in what they do every single day. Toward that end, we learn from each other as much as we can.

Businesses have also learned to learn from each other—for example, through associations, through industry conferences, through consultants—and they have learned from universities. It is in this spirit that I am happy to share with you some thoughts on management education for an international career.

As a French national, I studiously avoid commenting on U.S. politics, because I do not think it is appropriate for a foreigner to do so. Since we are meeting in Washington so close to Election Day, however, I cannot help but observe that we are in the high season of accusation and recrimination. Here the Democrats and
Republicans blame each other for the country's problems. And the same thing goes on in the UK, France, West Germany, Italy, or Japan—wherever there is democracy. Nor are politicians the only ones pointing fingers at each other. Labor and management, the rich and the poor, East and West, the less developed countries and the developed countries, trading bloc and trading bloc—each cites the other as the main culprit for world problems.

When they do not succeed, managers are apt to find reasons for failure outside themselves. People even go so far as to blame foreigners for whatever bad happens to their country. It's a little like the French blaming bad weather on a depression in the UK or an anticyclone in the Azores. Where are the heads of state who will admit they did not manage their national economy well; where are the businessmen who will recognize the strategy they chose 5 years ago did not work; where are the university presidents who will concede that they did not recruit the right faculty?

Throughout my career, I have met people with the same ambition, the same drive, even the same formal education—be they MBAs, graduate engineers, whatever—who did not achieve the same results at all. Those who are not successful—and I define success here as either rising on the hierarchical ladder or attaining professional distinction—share certain traits. First, they exhibit a lack of sensitivity in their relations with others. They become so mesmerized by the processes of management or the demands of their discipline that they lose sight of the human element. They forget that people are the sine qua non of working, planning, and decision-making—in short, the ultimate resource of their operations. Given these facts, it follows that the manager's quintessential responsibility is to help his people realize their own highest potential. He doesn't do this by intimidating them, or taking them for granted, or making them feel like "hired hands." He does it by inspiring them, recognizing their unique contributions to the general effort, and making them feel like valued members of a team. Certainly, a major reason for Japan's famous "economic miracle" has been its recognition that its chief resource—almost its only resource—is its people.

The second trait shared by the unsuccessful is a habit acquired first in school. Having chosen to study only the subjects they liked, they continue that self-indulgence in business. What they like to do, they do well and neglect the rest. But to be successful in management, you must try to do well whatever needs doing. Third, those who are unsuccessful are usually those who "retire" after graduation. They confuse their degree with an education. They don't seem to understand that a diploma is simply a modest announcement that they have been armed with the tools with which to pursue a lifelong program of self-education. Instead, they believe that they have learned everything they will ever need to know.

Last, the people who are unsuccessful never discard their youthful prejudices. To this day, they mistrust foreigners, members of the opposite sex, people who come from different regions of the country—anyone, in short, who differs from them. In the process, they miss the opportunity and benefits of learning from those who have another perspective.

I must confess that, when I was younger—and, of course, knew a great deal more than I do today—there was no doubt in my mind that Englishmen lacked a sense of humor, Germans were cold and aloof, Americans were uncultured, Latin Americans were hot-tempered, and so on. Frenchmen, on the other hand, struck me as remarkably gifted in every direction—witty, warm, cultured, reasonable—and unprejudiced. As I met and worked with people of diverse backgrounds on the international level, however, an amazing thing happened. I met witty Englishmen, affable Germans, cultured Americans, even-tempered Latin Americans, and a