

For Thinking People

Getting Along in the Office

By
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Haag



Ancient Management Concepts

I am often asked if I am familiar with some recent management concept, with some hot new name. I usually have to respond, "No." There really are no new management concepts. All management consultants, myself included, are simply looking for new ways to convey concepts that have been considered for thousands of years. Following are some of my favorites.

Confucius

Confucius was a Chinese philosopher who lived from 551 BC to 479 BC. He taught the values of morality, correctness, justice and sincerity. Here are a few of his teachings that I find most useful in today's business world:

"The superior person understands what is right; the inferior person understands what will sell."

"You pardon inadvertent faults, however great; and punish purposeful crimes, however small."

"The superior leader does not use rewards, yet the people are stimulated to virtue. The superior leader does not show wrath, yet the people are more awed than by hatchets and battle-axes."



Confucius

"If the people are led by laws enforced by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishments but will have no sense of guilt. If they are led by virtue and taught rules of proper behavior, they will have the guilt and moreover will become good."

"The superior person can find no position in which he is not himself. In a high situation he does not treat his inferiors with contempt. In a low situation he does not court the favor of his superiors."

"The superior person gives thoughtful consideration to 9 things:

1. To see clearly
2. To hear distinctly
3. To have a benign countenance
4. To have a respectful demeanor
5. To speak with sincerity
6. To be careful in doing business
7. To question others when in doubt
8. To think of the difficulties that anger may involve
9. To think of righteousness when there is a potential gain"

Machiavelli

Machiavelli, an Italian political philosopher, lived between 1469 and 1527. In his treatise, "The Prince," he provided suggestions for new leaders. Some of his advice is considered quite harsh, but can be translated into firm concepts for dealing with change in modern times. I propose the following as most relevant:

"A Principedom is created either by the people or by the nobles ... when the nobles ... cannot withstand the people, they ... magnify the reputation of one of their number, and make him their Prince, [so] that under his shadow they may ... indulge their desires. ... on the other hand, when [the people] cannot make head against the nobles, [they] invest a single citizen with all their influence and make him Prince, that they may have the shelter of his authority."

"[A Prince should] ... bear himself [so] that greatness, courage, wisdom, and strength may appear in all of his actions."

"In his private dealings with his subjects [a Prince's] decision should be irrevocable, and his reputation such that no one would dream of overreaching or cajoling him."

"A Prince is despised when he is seen to be fickle, frivolous, effeminate, pusillanimous, or irresolute ..."

"A Prince has little to fear from conspiracies when his subjects are well disposed towards him; but when they are hostile and hold him in detestation he has



then reason to fear everything and everyone ..."

Management advice from more recent sages

"... as a general rule ... one cannot both do things and get the credit for them." *A. Lawrence Lowell, 1856-1943*

"...insects ... can maintain complex communities without the use of reason." *ibid.*

"... on the whole, the great ages have been unstable ages." *A. N. Whitehead, 1861-1947*

"I pondered how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out to be not what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name." *William Morris, 1834-1896*

"When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." *Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745*

"Philopoemen was a man eminent for his sagacity and experience in choosing ground, and in leading armies; to which he formed his mind by perpetual

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meditation, in times of peace as well as war. When in any occasional journey he came to a strait, difficult passage, if he was alone he considered himself, and if he was in company he asked his friends what it would be best to do if in this place they had found an enemy ... With such thoughts ...he had from his early years so exercised his mind that on these occasions nothing could happen which he had not been already accustomed to consider." *Joshua Reynolds, 1723-1792*

"... He also brought back a deep respect for the men of the Regular Army and Navy services, who, with astonishingly few exceptions, rose nobly to immensely expanded responsibilities ... It seemed ... that if something of the spirit of the government technical services could be instilled into the politicians, the professions, and even into business, democracy might be cured of some of its ills. It convinced him that the money motive is not essential for high standards of performance. The answer seemed to be in professional tradition and pride of service..." *Hans Zinsser, 1878-1940*



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