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"Humanics" by Maxwell Upson, UND Commencement: June 9, 1931 (Advance Copy)

Maxwell Upson

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Note to the Editors: Here is an advance copy of the address to be delivered by Maxwell M. Upson at the University of North Dakota Commencement Tuesday morning, June 9. Released to evening papers, June 9, 1931

"HUMANICS"

In the selection of a subject for this address, I have turned to a phase of life which is little considered in the University curriculum. It has to do with our human relationships. As we get older, we realize more and more their important influence on happiness and success.

So far as I know, only one of our Eastern colleges has thus far recognized that this subject should have a place in its college training. That institution is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Here, Colonel Charles R. Gow, an engineer of national reputation, a student, an important business executive, was asked to inaugurate the course, which they termed, "Humanics". It is from this course, and from Colonel Gow's theories, that I shall draw largely in what I may have to say.

To signify the importance of this subject, some of its adherents maintain that education or technical training counts but thirteen percent in the success of the individual.

Doctor Charles R. Mann, of the Carnegie Foundation, has tabulated the replies he received to a questionnaire concerning the essential qualifications of a successful engineer. This was distributed among some sixteen hundred eminent engineers scattered widely throughout the United States. The results of this tabulation are as follows:

Character, 41% - judgment, 17½% - efficiency, 14½% - knowledge of men, 14% - technical knowledge, 13%.

It is apparent that if this classification even approximates the facts, the subject is worthy of serious consideration.

One of the first marked impressions that is made upon us as we develop from childhood into manhood or womanhood, is the difference in character, ability and fellow-esteem which is represented in our fellow men. One attracts; another repels. One inspires; another disheartens. One naturally leads; another naturally follows. To one we tell our joys; to another we tell our sorrows. To one we loan our all; with another we deal with apprehension. And yet, we seldom stop to consider what are these elusive characteristics which exist in one individual and are found wanting in another. And what is perhaps more important, we seldom stop to measure our own personal equation with the same formula that we apply to others.

To some of us who have to do with large corporations, this intangible asset known as character and personality must have serious consideration. The successful selection of the individuals who are to come into the corporation, and later take executive responsibilities, hinges on the ability to discern not so much what the man knows, but what are his personal characteristics: Is he honest? Has he high ideals? Does he know the real significance of the Golden Rule? Has he a fine philosophy of life? Has he initiative and energy? Has he ability to get along with his fellow-man? Has he at least ordinary mental abilities?

If all these questions can be answered in the affirmative, his education is of minor importance, since in time he will educate himself. If he fails seriously in any of these characteristics, his usefulness to a corporation is extremely limited; he becomes a mere cog in the complicated mechanism of corporate and industrial life.

Let us consider for a moment the question of honesty. The old adage that honesty is the best policy, tells only part of the tale. In corporate existence, honesty is so essential that an able executive cannot consider the promotion of a man to a responsible position if he fails in this all-essential characteristic. Let me illustrate this with an actual incident of which I have knowledge, and which Colonel Gow sets forth in his lectures:

The President and the General Manager of a large corporation were discussing the effective work that was being done by the head of one of their departments, and were considering giving him very much greater responsibilities. In this discussion, the President made the statement that he feared the man might be too young to be promoted, since he understood he was only twenty-eight years old. The General Manager stated that he thought he was thirty years old.

To settle the matter, they sent for the young man. When he came into their presence, the President said, "How old are you?" The young man, realizing that he was being discussed by the two chief executives of the corporation, sensed that there probably was

impending a promotion. He realized his youth, and in answering hesitated, stammered, and then said, "Twenty-nine years."

The President dismissed him and said to the General Manager, "That young man is not telling the truth. Get his employment card and find out exactly what his age is."

They found that he was twenty-eight years and three months old. Whereupon the President said, "Not only must we give up the idea of promoting this young man, but I want you to arrange to let him out as soon as it can be accomplished conveniently. We cannot have an executive in our organization who will deviate from the truth in order to promote his own interests."

Here, a young man ended a rare business opportunity by a seemingly slight deviation from the road of absolute integrity.

So, too, I have observed, in looking back on the men whom I have known while in college, that those who were prone to crib in their examinations, to take advantage of short-cuts and dishonest practices in recitations, notwithstanding their abilities and seemingly marked personalities, never have attained any distinction either professionally or financially.

Scores of times, I have been forced to the confession, on being asked about the suitability of a certain man for an important position, that he failed in sensing the finest shades of honesty.

So that we may say that honesty is so fundamental, that without it the individual must not hope to associate himself successfully with his fellow men.

Honesty extends itself to all other characteristics, and particularly to loyalty.

Elbert Hubbard has said, "If you work for a man, in heaven's name work for him. If he pays you wages to supply your bread and butter, work for him. Speak well of him; stand by him and stand by the institutions he represents. If put to a pinch, an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. If you must vilify, condemn and eternally disparage, resign your position, and when you are outside, condemn to your heart's content."

We all know with what disdain we look upon a person who speaks disparagingly of his own family. Devotion and loyalty are the cements which bind together this important social group. So, too, are these cements necessary in building up and holding together our corporate institutions.

We may not agree with the instructions and policies that are set forth by our superiors, but so long as they are honest and can be conformed to without stultifying our self-respect, our obligation is to accept these instructions and policies as our own.

The executive prizes the man who will come to him and give a good reason why he thinks his orders or policies are wrong. But it is fundamental that once the policy is discussed and determined upon by the superior, it must be followed with the same spirit of loyalty and enthusiasm as it would have received had it been generated by the subordinate.

The old saying of Decatur: "My country, may she ever by right, but my country right or wrong" - may sound militaristic, but it does stir our hearts, and perhaps is one of the anchors that has held this republic steady during the last one hundred and fifty years.

I was interested to observe, a year or more ago while in China, that perhaps one of their greatest obstacles in establishing a republican form of government, is the utter disregard of the Chinese mind to the principle of the rule of the majority. Their lives have been governed for thousands of years on the basis of an autocracy -- not only an autocracy in government but an autocracy in family life. The head of each family is supreme. No debate and no deviation from the policies set forth are permitted. Therefore every individual is susceptible to force and power only, as against the adjustment of the mind to the will of the majority.

In these days of seeming chaos in politics, it may be that we, too, are getting very selfish in our own aims and aspirations -- unwilling to sacrifice our personal safe-being and ease for the good of the whole -- and that our lack of recognition of this principle of the rule of the majority, so essential to our type of government, eventually shall be our undoing.

In considering loyalty to those above us, we must not forget the all-importance of loyalty to our subordinates. Men working for us make mistakes. All men do. Remember that they are a part of our organization. Possibly some of the mistakes are due to

inadequate instructions. Do not reprimand a man in the presence of his associates. Counsel rather than condemn. When a man comes to you with a new idea that has merit, give him credit for it. And above all, give him credit for it when you talk with your superiors. One of the most encouraging indications of the development of a real executive is disclosed when a head of a department brings in a good idea which he generously attributes to one of his subordinates. This indicates fairness of mind and the recognition of the principles of loyalty, and assures the executive that the man understands the rare principle on which a strong organization is developed.

Loyalty extends to personal conduct quite outside of business hours. In many corporations, the personnel is scattered widely throughout the country and throughout the world. The employee of that corporation, as he lives and carries on his responsibility in any community, represents in the eyes of that community the principles and ideals of the concern for which he works. In consequence, the corporation is judged by the actions of this individual, and therefore its standing may be made or marred by him. There is a saying, which seems to be founded somewhat on fact, that the general principles and policies of the responsible employee of a corporation are taken largely from the men above him. For that reason, if the employee deviates from these principles, he is betraying his trust.

Before leaving this question of honesty and loyalty, I want to disabuse your minds of that false impression that many young people have with respect to the sharp practices and deceptions which are reputed to prevail in big business. This erroneous conception frequently is the result of the misinformed, dishonest, vote-seeking politician, who is willing to impugn any motive and any action of big business in order to build up his own political fortune.

It undoubtedly is true that the heads of some big businesses do deviate at times from principles based on the highest ethics. These are the exceptions. As a rule, the standard of big business with respect to its relationship with its employees, its customers and the public, is on the highest plane of honor, honesty and equity. It is obvious that the head of an organization cannot be shifty, tricky and unreliable, and maintain a standard of ethics among his subordinates that will assure him of their honesty and loyalty. And without these characteristics throughout the organization, no business can become truly great.

Another fundamental which is all-important to the individual who is selecting his personnel in corporate work, is that of energy and ability to work. All of the larger corporations in the United States today have what is known as their Personnel Department. This is manned by psychologists who devote their lives to the study and analysis of those characteristics which are most

essential in the individuals who are giving their services to their particular companies.

One of the first questions that these personnel directors usually ask a college applicant, is: "How have you spent your summer vacations?" If the young man is not able to show that he has taken advantage of these periods either to earn money to defray his college expenses or to familiarize himself with work which is allied to his chosen profession, his percentage of qualification is greatly reduced.

To learn how to work is perhaps the most important training that comes to a young man. Effort and energy are essential to any accomplishment. And in many cases that is a physical attribute. We witness continually the failure of young people who start in a career, because they do not conserve their energies and health for the real effort of life. Late hours, dissipation, attempts to carry on work outside of regular business, all sap the vitality and in consequence vitiate the results of their efforts in their chosen profession.

I recall at one time having a secretary unusually bright and able, with initiative and ability, who began to be listless, inattentive, forgetful, and in general unsatisfactory. I inquired into his habits, since he looked tired and not altogether well. I discovered that he carried on my work in the daytime and played in an orchestra in the evening. It is true that he was receiving for his work in the orchestra almost as much pay as he received

for my work, but he could not do both with justice to himself or with justice to either responsibility.

I recall two of my classmates, men of marked ability and rare talents, who would have gone far in their chosen professions were it not for the fact that they were too ambitious. They were not content to work eight hours or ten hours a day, but insisted upon taking courses and delving into many extraneous activities, which sapped their physical and mental energies that they died very early in life.

Energy must be concentrated in order to be effective, and it must be the result of physical fitness. You will remember that Andrew Carnegie, when asked what was the greatest requisite for success in life, answered, "A good stomach." If you want to keep your automobile ready to climb any hill, or to take a long tour, it must be properly lubricated and adjusted at all times. That comes from constant attention.

Friendliness has much to do with life's happiness and success. Without friends, life would be a dreary grind. And yet, how much thought do we give to those attributes of ours which count towards making friends?

Early in life I read the old adage, that "if you want friends you must make yourself friendly." It has been a helpful thought. But, of course, unless it is analyzed, it may lead us astray.

It is fundamental that we know how to get along agreeably with our personal contacts. We continually encounter the individual

who seems to have a happy way of always knowing what to say, of not saying too much, of making himself understood and respected by all kinds and classes of people. In analyzing his method, we usually find that his mental attitude is genuinely optimistic. He is confident that he is going to find the same degree of cordiality and acceptance on the part of the person he is addressing, as he shows within himself. That thought and that attitude beget a friendliness on the part of all who come in contact with him. He expects nothing but good, nothing but cordiality, nothing but politeness and cooperative effort, and as a result he usually gets them. We must have confidence in our friends and in our acquaintances in order that they may have confidence in us.

This characteristic is all-important in the relationship of individuals in big corporations. I quite well recall a very valuable man, who long worked for one of our corporations with a continual feeling that he was not being given a square deal either by his associates or by his superiors. He was always on the defensive; he was always attempting to blame some one else. That very attitude caused him to be looked upon with apprehension and distrust by his associates.

Although the man was markedly able and did excellent work, his relationship with his fellow men became so acute that it seemed necessary to eliminate him from the organization. Before so doing, I took him aside one day and told him of his weakness. I told him that he had the respect of all his associates, and that they would

be willing to co-operate with him to the fullest extent if he would indicate that they had his confidence and friendship that he must assume in all his relationships with his associates that they were giving him fair service, fair treatment and enthusiastic support; that unless he could so adjust himself we would have to dispose with his services.

He immediately began a series of very rigorous self-analyses, and as a result has entirely changed his attitude, and has become a most co-operative executive, friendly with his superiors as well as with his subordinates.

In picking what we call real friends, we must be choosy. They must be respected; they must be of real character and inspiration. They ought to be educational; they ought to afford us an opportunity to be of real service to them. And above all, they ought to stir the heart and mind to a degree that will build up affection and loyalty that will last throughout life.

Initiative weighs largely in the scale of success. Colonel Gow in his book illustrates that well by recounting the experience of a big manufacturer who wanted a director for his Research Department. From the men who applied, he selected three, hired them, and turned them loose in a small laboratory by themselves, without any instructions of any kind. At the end of the month, one of the three was directing the other two. He got the position. He possessed initiative; he could see clearly what needed to be done, and he possessed sufficient confidence in his judgment to go ahead without being told.

Ideas of every kind are continually being expounded, but it is only the man of initiative who is able to take the idea and weld it into a real accomplishment. Newton was but one of millions who had seen the apple fall, and yet out of this ordinary occurrence he developed one of our fundamental laws.

The man who can do the routine duty is easy to find. The man who can meet the unforeseen and ingeniously find a way to accomplish his end, no matter what the obstacles may be, is a rare genius and is greatly prized.

We all are victims of habit. Our minds run in very definite and prescribed channels. When we encounter the unusual, many of us find ourselves bewildered and uncertain of our course. Here, the man of initiative - that rare and all-important characteristic of leadership - is essential.

In the construction field, of which I happen to have some detailed knowledge, this characteristic is of prime importance. The machine breaks down; the flood washes away a coffer dam; a responsible foreman is hurt; the plans are incorrectly drawn; unexpected underground conditions develop. All these complications must be met with a new and perhaps untried solution. The initiative and judgment of the responsible individual must be relied upon to bring order and progress out of unexpected and chaotic complications.

This ability is a combination of courage and judgment. A man must have an answer to a problem, and then courage enough to

believe that he is right before he acts. This means that knowledge must underlie judgment.

And this brings us to perhaps the most important of all personal characteristics, namely, Judgment. What is judgment? Colonel Gow defines it: "A knowledge of the general laws of nature and of human nature, combined with the power to apply them to specific cases in order that a correct mode of conduct may be decided upon in advance of an event."

This elusive quality is the most difficult to find and demands the highest reward. Honesty, loyalty, ingenuity and energy are easy to find, but he who would procure ripe judgment must search long and pay generously.

Judgment is not born in the individual. Neither is it the result of a compilation of a great amount of knowledge. But it is a combination of knowledge with an ability to analyze and apply such knowledge.

No human life is long enough nor broad enough to permit the individual to determine, through his own experiences, the answer to the many complicated problems that must be solved by judgment. For that reason it is essential that the experiences of others, and the results of their action, be used as a guide in acquiring this subtle and elusive faculty. Histories and biographies, if read by an analytical mind, give a thousand common-sense answers to our present-day problems.

The ability to review before speaking or acting; to generate several possible courses of procedure, always keeping in mind the relationships of the various factors, results in a method of thought which is apt to find correct solutions.

As you review your own acquaintances, you undoubtedly will be impressed by the poise and quiet thoughtfulness which usually characterizes the individual from whom you like to take advice. That poise is not a pose. It is the result of a mental process which is not intuitive, but thoughtful and analytical, and always guided by an attitude of fairness.

As has already been stated, judgment is the ability to make decisions which properly interpret subsequent events. That is the function of an executive. In order to hold his position, the policies that he sets forth must be correct at least fifty-one per cent of the time. The degree of his success depends upon how near he approaches ninety to ninety-five per cent of correctness.

Judgment is not apt to be found in the highly specialized man. It must have a breadth of knowledge extending to almost every phase of life's experience.

In one of our New England colleges, the freshmen are required to subscribe to the New York Times for the purpose of familiarizing themselves with the news of the day, and particularly the problems discussed in the editorials. The well informed man must keep informed on current happenings. The earlier this habit is inculcated, the earlier he begins to build his structure of knowledge and judgment.

The bigger the business, the more important is this general knowledge. It is my privilege to know and to sit in conference with the presidents of some of the largest corporations in this country. I am always impressed by their fairness of mind, their hesitancy to express their opinions until all the facts are presented, and then their rare ability to point out the weakness or the strength of the policy that is being discussed. They are paid salaries ranging from one hundred thousand to perhaps three or four hundred thousand dollars a year, chiefly because of their judgment. It is necessary for them to avoid any detailed responsibility. Their great task is to inform themselves of the facts, so that when a decision has to be made it can be arrived at logically and intelligently.

The maintenance of their position depends upon their unerring ability to pre-determine how certain policies will react on individuals, on the public, and on the success of their corporations. If they fail, they lose the confidence of their subordinates and the support of their boards of directors. Their position is not unlike that of the Prime Minister of the English Parliament; he must maintain his vote of confidence from time to time in order to stay in office.

And so we see that the college course is but the beginning of education. He who leaves his institution of learning with any other thought, goes not far in life's career.

It is all a fascinating game. He who would attain distinction, must learn to play creditably all the positions on the team.

The whole game cannot be understood without knowing the attitude and viewpoint of every player.

You, as a class, are coming into your responsibilities at a rare time. Never were there greater opportunities. Never were there greater responsibilities. The man of today must think honestly, must think fairly, must think clearly. And that, and above all, is the function of the college man if he is going to lead.

We are facing conditions - economic, social and political - that can only be solved correctly by this right-thinking, this right-living and this right-leading which the graduates of our universities must provide. All this must be free from selfishness, from self-seeking, and from the foibles of our political and economic charlatans.

To you college graduates who are now taking your place in the world, will soon come the responsibility of running this great country of ours. It is a rare privilege, and a grave responsibility. During your lives it is probable that decision will be made as to whether civilization shall go forward or backward. We of the older generation will be no longer in the ranks, but our satisfaction will come from evidence that we have rendered aid to you in this glorious contest.