

BOK EDWARD WILLIAM

THE YOUNG MAN IN
BUSINESS

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A well-known New York millionaire gave it as his opinion not long ago that any young man possessing a good constitution and a fair degree of intelligence might acquire riches. The statement was criticised – literally picked to pieces – and finally adjudged as being extravagant. The figures then came out, gathered by a careful statistician, that of the young men in business in New York City, sixty per cent, were earning less than \$1,000 per year, only twenty per cent, had an income of \$2,000, and barely five per cent, commanded salaries in excess of the latter figure. The great majority of young men in New York City – that is, between the ages of twenty-three and thirty – were earning less than twenty dollars per week. On the basis, therefore, that a young man must be established in his life-profession by his thirtieth year, it can hardly be said that the average New York young man in business is successful. Of course, this is measured entirely from the standpoint of income. It is true that a young man may not, in every case, receive the salary his services merit, but, as a general rule, his income is a pretty accurate indication of his capacity.

Now, as every young man naturally desires to make a business success, it is plain from the above statement that something is lacking; either the opportunities, or the capabilities in the young men themselves. No one conversant with the business life of any of our large cities can, it seems to me, even for a single moment, doubt the existence of good chances for young men. Take any large city as a fair example: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, or Chicago, and in each instance there exist more opportunities than there are young men capable of embracing them. The demand is far in excess of the supply. Positions of trust are constantly going begging for the right kind of young men to fill them. But such men are not common; or, if they be, they have a most unfortunate way of hiding their light under a bushel, so much so that business men cannot see even a glimmer of its rays. Let a position of any real importance be open, and it is the most difficult kind of a problem to find any one to fill it satisfactorily. Business men are constantly passing through this experience. Young men are desired in the great majority of positions because of their progressive 'ideas and capacity to endure work; in fact, "young blood," as it is called, is preferred in nine positions out of every ten, nowadays.

The chances for business success for any young man are not wanting. The opportunities exist, plenty of them. The trouble is that the average young man of to-day is incapable of filling them, or, if he be not exactly incapable (I gladly give him the benefit of the doubt), he is unwilling to fill them, which is even worse.

That exceptions can be brought up to controvert I know, but I am dealing with the many, not with the few.

The average young man in business to-day is nothing more nor less than a plodder, – a mere automaton. He is at his office at eight or nine o'clock in the morning; is faithful in the duties he performs; goes to luncheon at twelve, gets back at one; takes up whatever he is told to do until five, and then goes home. His work for the day is done. One day is the same to him as another; he has a certain routine of duties to do, and he does them day in and day out, month in and month out. His duties are regulated by the clock. As that points, so he points. Verily, it is true of him that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. No special fault can be found with his work. Given a particular piece of work to do, he does it just as a machine would. Such a young man, too, generally considers himself hard-worked – often overworked and underpaid; wondering all the time why his employer doesn't recognize his value and advance his salary. "I do everything I am told to do," he argues, "and I do it well. What more can I do?"

This is simply a type of a young man to be found in thousands of offices and stores. He goes to his work each day with no definite point nor plan in view; he leaves it with nothing accomplished. He is a mere automaton. Let him die, and his position can be filled in twenty-four hours. If he detracts nothing from his employer's business, he certainly adds nothing to it. He never advances an idea; is absolutely devoid of creative powers; his position remains the same after he has been in it for five years

as when he came to it.

Now, I would not for a moment be understood as belittling the value of faithfulness in an employee. But, after all, faithfulness is nothing more nor less than a negative quality. By faithfulness a man may hold a position a lifetime. He will keep it just where he found it. But by the exercise of this single quality he does not add to the importance of the position any more than he adds to his own value. It is not enough that it may be said of a young man that he is faithful; he must be something more. The willingness and capacity to be faithful to the smallest detail must be there, serving only, however, as a foundation upon which other qualities are built.

Altogether too many young men are content to remain in the positions in which they find themselves. The thought of studying the needs of the next position just above them never seems to enter their minds. It is possible for every young man to rise above his position, and it makes no difference how humble that position may be, nor under what disadvantages he may be placed. But he must be alert. He must not be afraid of work, and of the hardest kind of work. He must study not only to please, but he must go a step beyond. It is essential, of course, that he should first of all fill the position for which he is engaged. No man can solve the problem of business before he understands the rudiments of the problem itself. Once the requirements of a position are understood and mastered, then its possibilities should be undertaken. It is foolish, as some young men argue, that to go

beyond their special position is impossible with their employers. The employer never existed who will prevent the cream of his establishment from rising to the surface. The advance of an employee always means the advance of the employer's interests. An employer would rather pay a young man five thousand dollars a year than five hundred. What is to the young man's interest is much more to the interest of his employer. A five-hundred-dollar clerkship is worth just that amount and nothing more to an employer. But a five-thousand-dollar man is generally worth five times that sum to a business. A young man makes of a position exactly what he chooses: a millstone around his neck, or a stepping-stone to larger success. The possibilities lie in every position; seeing and embracing them rest with its occupant. The lowest position can be so filled as to lead up to the next and become a part of it. One position should be only the chrysalis for the development of new strength to master the requirements of another position above it.

The average young man is extremely anxious to get into a business position in which there are what he calls "prospects" for advancement. It is usually one of his first questions, "What are my prospects here?" He seems to have the notion that the question of his "prospects" or advancement is one entirely in the hands of his employer, whereas it rarely occurs to him that it is a matter resting entirely with himself. An employer has, of course, the power of promotion, but that is all. He cannot advance a young man unless the young man first demonstrates that he is

worthy of advancement. Every position offers prospects; every business house has in it the possibility of a young man's bettering himself. But it depends upon him, first. If he is of the average come-day go-day sort, and does his work in a mechanical or careless fashion, lacking that painstaking thoroughness which is the basis of successful work, his prospects are naught. And they will be no greater with one concern than with another, although he may identify himself with a score during a year. If, on the contrary, he buckles down to work, and makes himself felt from the moment he enters his position, no matter how humble that may be, his advancement will take care of itself. An employer is very quick to discover merit in an employee, and if a young man is fitted to occupy a higher position in the house than he is filling, it will not be long before he is promoted. There are, of course, instances where the best work that a young man can do goes for nothing and fails of rightful appreciation, and where such a condition is discovered, of course the young man must change the condition and go where his services will receive proper recognition and value. But this happens only in a very small minority of cases. In the vast majority of cases where the cry of inappreciation is heard, it is generally the fact that the crier is unworthy of more than he receives.

No employer can tell a young man just what his prospects are. That is for the young man himself to demonstrate. He must show first what is in him, and then he will discover for himself what his prospects are. Because so many young men stand, still

does not prove that employers are unwilling to advance them, but simply shows that the great run of young men do not possess those qualities which entitle them to advancement. There are exceptional cases, of course; but as a rule a man gets in this world about what he is worth, or not very far from it. There is not by any means as much injustice done by the employer to the employee as appears on the surface. Leaving aside all question of principle, it would be extremely poor policy for a business man to keep in a minor position a young man who, if promoted, would expand and make more money for the house.

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