

## XV

### *Design and Power: The Plan of Action*

Power without design is mere chaos and futility. Design without power is a pleasant idle dream.

A clear perspective of action must be won before energy can be economized to the utmost. It is not enough to see the end desired, merely as an end. You must get the feel of the entire sweep and pattern from start to finish. This is what the artist gets before he draws a free-hand line in portraiture. This is what the singer grasps when memorizing a melody. This is what the business organizer intuits through a maze of office detail and market tangles. This is what Leonardo da Vinci had in mind when he wrote: "Design is for the master, execution is for the servants." Design, in this sense, is the total sweep of structure, in terms of action. It is, as some psychologists would prefer to say, the inmost nature of a "set" of mind, or an attitude.

Merely memorizing details of an act brings no mastery, no accomplishment. If it did, then every schoolboy who hammered into his head all the French words and the French

grammar would speak French fluently. The pattern of French, as a living function, is not to be found either in its words or its rules. Both words and rules are mere incidents in a linguistic flux which has its own broad designs and directions. Unless the learner comes to feel this flux-form, he fails. And thus ever. The absolute limits of anybody's learning are to be found at that point where he can no longer grasp the "form-quality" of the details over which he labors. When he can no longer see the wood for the trees, he is lost.

The even pace, then, rather than a series of spurts, makes the best use of your energies. How proceed then? Simply by analyzing the job in hand from the point of view of the amount of ground to be covered and your natural velocity in the work called for. Here is a simple illustration.

I am asked to write this book in shortest possible form and to have it ready within four months. I study my calendar, first of all, and find that, in the following 120 days, 42 are already filled with university lectures, conferences with students on their MSS., faculty meetings, and one or two engagements out of town. This leaves 78 days. From these I must deduct at least 20 days for my spring gardening and chores around the farm. Now I am down to 58 days. Here is my maximum time for the book job.

Next I study the job itself. It will run

to 45,000 words, more or less. Before a page can be typed, about 200 items must be verified and rounded off, by going back to scientific journals and monographs. From a careful study of several hundred cases of similar research and reference work in the course of editing the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, I find that this entire task will consume between 225 and 275 hours. Roughly half of it can be handled by Katharine Johnson, and the other half by myself. Let us say that, working not more than six hours a day at this fatiguing labor, we can clean it up in 19 or 20 days. So we still have some 38 days left for writing the book. If I turn out only 1,500 words daily, then the work will be completed ahead of schedule.

As a matter of prudence, allow six or seven days to be filled with unforeseen work. Even so, a steady pace of 1,800 words a day is possible. But unfortunately this does not please me because it is too slow. I would have to put on the brakes, and that would prove disastrous. I must therefore reallocate the labors so as to attain the best tempo, which is about 4,000 words a day. This demands only 11 or 12 days of actual composition. So what I do is to hold this speed and turn the book in ahead of the editorial dead line.

Mussolini organizes his energies relative to his work so beautifully that I cannot resist quoting him at some length. He told the

Fascist Grand Council how he accomplishes so much:

"I have set my motor to a program. I have rationalized my daily work. I have reduced to a minimum all dispersion of time and energy. And I have adopted this maxim which I recommend to all Italians:

"'Plan each day, and then methodically execute that plan. Leave nothing to chance; nothing for the next day. Routine work should be performed with mechanical precision.' My labors seem light to me because I love them. In the difficult ones my will is sustained by faith and my mind easily obeys my will."

Since taking charge of the government, Mussolini has never had a vacation of more than three days. Then he drives about, or visits his family in the country, or inspects his experimental farm in Romagna.

Here is a sample day: He rises at seven, or a little before, and rides one of his six horses for an hour. Then he fences with his fencing master. After this, he takes a shower bath, eats breakfast of fruit and milk flavored with coffee. He drives to the Palazzo Venezia, works all morning, and returns for dinner about one. He usually eats a salad, meat or fish, and fruit, and drinks milk. Occasionally he smokes a cigarette. He relaxes in the early afternoon, and sometimes naps or takes a swim. Often he takes care of his correspondence between four and five-thirty in the afternoon,

receives visitors or discusses affairs with his Ministers. He drinks a glass or two of milk; then works till eight-thirty, has supper of milk and fruit, chiefly, at nine; reads, attends a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council at ten, or, if there is no meeting, continues his reading or plays his violin until late at night.

Magnificent energy is paralleled only by magnificent direction. Mussolini achieves peak performance through fine power in a beautifully clear perspective of action. I would not hold him up as a model, however, because his native abilities greatly surpass those of even our abler leaders.

Few people have minds sufficiently alert and comprehensive to hold the pace of Big Business. A corporation employing thousands of workers, having branches in a hundred trade centers, and buying raw materials in a score of markets presents, at every hour of the day, problems of finance, credit, research and general policy each of which involves hundreds of variables. Usually some of the issues must be met and cleared up more rapidly than even a good mind can function. Hence much guessing creeps into decisions. The department heads work in a fog, while the directors work in total darkness. And sooner or later the crash comes.

In America, during the past century, men have been selected upward for the managing of large affairs chiefly on the basis of push, pull, and pep. Up to a certain point these quali-

ties have served well; but they reach their limit when world business attains a certain scope and tempo. Some time before the limit has come within hailing distance, the leaders show signs of strain. They strive to think as fast as the situations demand and to plan programs adequate to the complexity of the circumstances. This exhausts some while it fills others with vague fears of impending catastrophe. Those who grow tired try to relax but cannot. In their effort, they resort to all sorts of forced-draught methods of resting—a crazy contradiction, of course. They smoke heavy cigars all day. They gulp highballs from morn till even. They play golf until they drop. But all to no avail. The end comes as ordained. Then the receiver enters, locks the front door, and posts his sign, while creditors rage and stockholders weep. Thus ends the tragedy of the Man-Who-Bit-Off-More-Than-He-Could-Chew.