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The Domain of Effort

The technique of tapping energy varies greatly according to the domain of effort. For the domain determines the volume, hence the pace and to some degree also the pattern.

Dealing with "pure ideas," as in mathematics, consumes very little energy. Dealing with ideas in the form of communicative language uses considerably more. Dealing with ideas and people in the form of public speech uses still more. Handling physical objects uses more yet. And handling people directly uses most of all. Most types of work combine two or more of these domains. The hardest job on earth is that of President of the United States. It consumes daily at least 1,000 times as much energy as, let us say, the purely intellectual labors of a book-keeper whose time is spent in adding and subtracting.

No matter what the domain of effort, there is always only one right way while there are thousands of wrong ways of performing every act. Here we come upon one of the most startling and revolutionary discoveries of modern physiology. *That man who does his job best uses*

the least possible energy. This is true in everything from writing a book to running a race.

The best athletes use the least energy in performing their feats. The last man in at a foot race usually expends much more than the first. So too in jumping, boxing, rowing, and all the more dexterous accomplishments. This is not guesswork. Physiologists have proved it by measuring energy output during athletic contests.

Likewise in artistic and intellectual fields. Genius works along with amazingly high efficiency, while the dullard squanders a week over one mediocre sonnet, a month over an essay which might as well have never been penned, a year over a thick book which contributes little to human wisdom, happiness or hilarity. This does not imply, of course, that behind and before such ease of accomplishment there does not lie immense training and severe discipline. It merely means that he who discovers the tricks of making the least energy go furthest in a desired direction forges to the front sooner or later.

Have you never heard some ponderous pundit declare that some writer cannot be of much account because he turns out too many books and essays in short order, or that some politician has little to say because he speaks so fluently? I have. And I am always amused because, after pretty careful checking on records, I have found—say nine times out of ten—that, while not every rapid and voluminous worker is

superior, almost every superior worker is rapid and voluminous. Still more significant, though, is the discovery that the superior worker does what he sets out to do with marvelous economy of time and energy. He may toil in a field where volume of output is almost impossible, yet he reveals his high rank in his efficiency.

Very slow workers are ever in peril of mediocrity or worse. A delay between the steps of a complex series of observations or deductions increases the chances of a slip. Some important but faint feature may be forgotten over night. Some sequence learned with difficulty on one day may, if not rehearsed for several weeks, go lost beyond all recovery. A few slow minds are blessed with rare persistence and detailed memory; these overcome the handicaps of the tortoise. But most do not. Beware of them in a crisis! They will fail you.