

FRIVOLOUS BUSINESS

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BUSINESS IS AN ancient and more or less honorable game that dates back to an apple that Eve should not have bought. That was, by dead reckoning, in 4004 B. C.

It has survived various presidential campaigns, and today it has baseball, poker and golf backed off the boards and pulled up lame behind the flag when it comes to luck, science, strategy, reading the other fellow's signals, team work, placidity of countenance, multiplicity and variety of hazards, and previous performances.

Business is absurdly simple to any one who has never been forced to work for a living, and it is as dry as the sun-kissed desert to those who never got closer to it than buying at retail.

Industrial business is especially simple and easy. To be a successful manufacturer consists only of:

Making something, selling it for money, and keeping the money.

This formula is subject to amplification. Speaking in broad general terms, let us note that a manufacturer, in order to hold up his end, is required to: Make things better or cheaper than his competitors.

Know in advance what buyers will want, and be able to deliver it to them where and when they want it.

Employ a lot of men, but not more than he must, and pay them what he has to.

Sell so much goods as to dominate the market, or not enough to attract fresh and dangerous competition.

Know everything his competitors know, and everything they have done, are doing, or may, can, will, must, or are threatening to do; and, at the same time, to keep similar knowledge about himself away from these same competitors.

Hold his expenses down and shove his receipts up. Have everything systematized so that he knows where he is at, and avoid getting into so much red tape as to choke himself to death.

Keep ahead of last week's, last month's, last year's and the previous high records of his own business.

Push his plant so that it will produce all the goods the busy season demands, and push his salesmen so that they will produce all the orders his plant demands in dull times.

Establish and use as much credit as possible, and extend to his own customers no more credit than is unavoidable.

Build up millions of dollars' worth of good will, without being forced to inject it into the balance sheet in order to make both ends teeter.

Build up an organization that will work together



The referee in bankruptcy counts a slow ten

as well in his absence as in his presence, but not so well that his men can leave him at night and establish a competitive plant the next morning.

Keep his stockholders well paid, without encouraging them to wrest control away from him.

Educate customers to the point where they eat out of his hand.

Mollify labor unions.

Impel bankers to beg for his account.

Show big assets to the banks when he needs to borrow money, and next to none at all to the tax assessor.

And, withal, possess a temper so sweet that, if his plant burns down when orders are heaviest, he can wear an angelic smile and announce that he had intended to shut down for inventory and the installation of new machinery any how.

And then, at dinner his wife wonders how anybody can arouse such an appetite when he has nothing to do but to sit in an office all day long.

The word "business" is a compound of the roots "busy" and "ness," and means the ness of being busy. Therefore, when a business man says that business is dull, he merely means that activity is inactive.

THIS CONTRADICTION is basic in business and harks us back to the days when almost every clothier was addicted to the happy habit of assuring us, upon his word of honor, that the nobby cotton suit he was about to give us for a few dollars was all wool, if not silk. Also, it explains, perhaps, how it is possible for a pillar of the Chamber of Commerce to arrive home late from a dinner with the leading lady and satisfy his wife that business is no respecter of office hours.

After a business has been successfully operated for thirty or forty years, it is the easiest thing in the world to wish it on a son who has no taste for that sort of thing, and have him toss it along to a receiver. Baseball catchers are sometimes called "receivers"; but there is a material difference between the baseball receiver and the business receiver, in that the former can't hold his job long except on merit.

Just as we allow our state and national laws to be written by men who have no regular occupation, so our courts appoint receivers from among those court room habitués who have no place to go except home, which they avoid for fear the wife might ask them to wring out the wash.

No matter what happens to the business, nothing can happen to the receiver. The pillow glove, the mask, the chest protector and the shin guards of an up-to-the-minute catcher are a make-believe paraphernalia of defense as compared to those impregnable and impervious safeguards by which the courts protect receivers from getting what ought to be coming to them. It is even illegal to ask a receiver a question.

It may be your own business that is being "received"; but you are a rank outsider when the receiver sits at your desk, smokes your cigars, opens

your letters, prints his own name on your stationery, and tells your bookkeeper to see that you get no iota of information.

As the henpecked husband wipes away and forgets his woes when he transforms himself into the Chief Exalted High Guy in the lodge room, so the receiver forgets both his own woes and yours when he becomes your receiver. And, when in the course of human events, an otherwise harmless individual is clothed with the sanctity and authority of a receivership, the dignity of labor for ever loses its appeal to him and one more unit is added to that small but valiant army that insists upon fourteen half-holidays every week.

But even though it is easy to let a business slip



Nothing to do but to sit in an office all day long

into the hands of a receiver, it is no easier to get it away from him than it was to establish the business originally. Uninformed persons imagine that anybody can start in business. That is a very serious error.

Anybody can start to start in business; but the actual getaway is difficult. For business is a handicap race, and nobody is eligible to start until he has handicapped himself and made victory more or less impossible by putting on his shoulders a load of debt for a factory plant, or a warehouse, or a storeroom, to say nothing of machinery, fixtures, stocks of materials or finished goods, etc., etc., several times.

True, this inviolable rule has been broken on more than one occasion. Men have started with only a small office, a select lot of die-stamped letter heads, and a promise to pay you ninety-nine per cent on any money you may have loose on your person or secreted in the family fireplace.

BUT THESE men always run against discouraging barriers. Even by changing their names, their places of abode and their office addresses, few of them have ever made enough to pay the lawyers, sustain their families while they were doing time, and still have left a sufficient residuum to dignify the entry of "net profit."

Net profit is the Ultima Thule in business, and many a mariner has been shipwrecked before reaching that port. Others reach it while going at such speed that they fail to notice the dock, and keep right on going. It is the uncertainty of reaching the harbor that makes the game exciting.

Net profit is the difference between what you expend and what you receive. The game in business is to determine whether, in a given line of commercial or industrial endeavor, you can eclipse outgo with income. If you can, you win. If you can't,