



Nearing Perfection

By *Francis R. McAllister*
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My comments for the graduating class are embodied in six suggestions intended to help them get from where the BYU faculty have brought them, to “nearing perfection.”

The six suggestions include four pre-requisite attributes and two acquisitions. The pre-requisites are: Ethics, Management, Quality and Communication; and the acquisitions are: Power and Influence. For you graduates these attributes and acquisitions are about the real world, about not getting lost in the crowd, about making your mark, and about truly succeeding.

I recognize nearing perfection by definition is an extreme concept. Something like the commandment “Be ye therefore perfect,” which we embrace as a tenet of our faith. But, that's what it's going to take on the job and in your home. Some employers will allow you to produce below your capacity. You can do that, and maybe, not even lose your job. Many do. Your spouse may allow you to get by, to live below your capacity. You can do that too, and maybe, not even lose your marriage. Many do. But neither performance begins “nearing perfection.”

“Nearing perfection” is embodied in the management concept Six-Sigma. For quantitative types, a unit of Sigma is a measure of standard deviation. For engineers, Sigma is a statistical term used in management to measure how much an engineering process varies from “perfection,” based upon the number of defects per one million units. At Six-Sigma there are less than 4 defects or variances from perfection out of one million units. To be precise it's 3.4 out of one million. So at Six-Sigma a process is “nearing perfection.” Needless to say, this requires exacting methodology to ensure all outputs meet the desired result—a methodology driven by the pursuit of excellence and defined by perfection.

Although not necessarily applied to human performance, if it were, at Six-Sigma, your personal performance would be “nearing perfection.” Using the concept of Sigma, if these six suggestions are consistently applied they will move you from where you are today, toward “nearing perfection.”

ETHICS

First, decide who you will be and then hold fast to that decision. Then remember, in the Real World it's

- Honor, Duty, Trust, Loyalty
- Hard Work, Long Hours
- Family, Children, Friends, Church
- Service to Others, Sharing, Selflessness

Don't be persuaded otherwise. The overwhelming majority of individuals are law abiding, God-fearing, hard working and honest. Don't let associates, the media or your greed convince you otherwise, and if your situation is ever otherwise make it right or make a change. If you don't, your career will become tarnished. Examples abound.

If you do, you like me will remember Joseph F. Smith's encounter with pistol bearing ruffians out to kill some Mormons. As others fled young Joseph held steady and when confronted with the query “Are

you a Mormon?” replied “Yes siree, dyed in the wool, true blue through and through.” So astonishing the ruffian, that he dropped his pistol and said, “Well, you are the [blankedy-blank] pleasantest man I ever met! Shake, young fellow, I am glad to see a man that stands up for his convictions.”

Although ordinary by comparison, I remembered that story 20 years ago this month at a New York lunch honoring our retiring Chairman, Chuck Barber. Deeply engrossed in discussion with our host, Pete Peterson, Chairman of Lehman Brothers, Chuck was interrupted by a frustrated waiter trying to take his drink order. Chuck wheeled about looked directly at me and without hesitation said “I'll take what Frank's drinking.” Then checking, questioned “you are drinking club soda aren't you Frank?” Upon my verification Chuck added “I know my people.” That week, at a young age, I was appointed CFO, and told that one day I too would have “my turn” at the helm of the Company as Chief Executive Officer. I have often wondered what might have been had I been inconsistent in my actions.

While CFO I belonged to a small organization of 20 CFOs called the Officers Conference Group or OCG whose membership included companies comprising the Dow Jones Industrial Average—IBM, GM, Exxon for example. Inappropriate payments to foreign government officials had lead to the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977 and, to my amazement, OCG members expelled Mobil Oil from membership following revelation of its payment practices during the debate over passing the act. In success, the world expects you to be ethical.

MANAGEMENT

On the job and in your spare time, study the practices of management. Make it an obsession. Collect and read good books on management. Get to know, and practice the methods.

- Standard Operating Procedures
- Best Practice
- Continuous Improvement
- Systems Engineering
- Quality Management Systems
- ISO
- Six-Sigma

It wasn't until 1979 when attending the Advanced Management Program at Harvard that I really became aware, then obsessed with management practices. At Harvard, Dr. Samuel B. Hayes taught us Systems Engineering. Our first assignment was dinner at Benihana's. In class Professor Hayes asked about our experience. “Ate dinner” came the response. “No, tell me about the experience, the process. When you got there what happened, and then what next?”

We then learned our experience had included: 1) being in the reception area for 20 minutes; 2) being seated at a full table of 8 people with 3 strangers; 3) watching the preparation of our entrée as we ate our appetizers; 4) eating our entrée; 5) observing the cook scrub the grill which suggested we were finished; and 6) without our cue, being served ice cream and the check because the next 8 people had been in the reception area 20 minutes and were now ready to occupy our table. And the light went on in my head—this was management. I've not been the same since nor will you be. You too will be constantly on the prowl making things better at work, at home, at Church, as you volunteer for good causes and in your community.

I advise my people that good management practice makes you professional, allows you to go home on time with greater regularity and minimizes the times you are called back to work because of a problem. Your quality of life will soar both on and off the job.

QUALITY

For 17 years our family made a Thanksgiving time journey from New Jersey to the Maryland farm of my uncle, a distinguished surgeon recognized at the top of his profession. But, his passion for quality didn't end with his profession. It was evident throughout all he did. He and my aunt collected quality cherry wood furniture and some Persian carpets. He was a master craftsman. His work included the painstaking restoration of their magnificent farmhouse, including an exquisitely handsome family room with a massive stone fireplace. An elegant grandfather's clock had been crafted from the wood of a cherry tree that had once graced the farm and the nearby LDS Chapel had been built while he served as bishop.

But it wasn't the home and possessions. We returned year after year because our family was always treated with the same high quality and respect. Their hospitality and patience were overwhelming. All seven of our young active children were in heaven running and relaxing in their gracious home, sharing the responsibilities for preparing dinner and being taken to the stream in a trailer pulled by the farm tractor during those days of thanksgiving at Uncle Everard's and Aunt Lela's farm. We all love Uncle Everard, Aunt Lela, their family and that tradition.

We endeavor to emulate their example. Yes Marcia and I have some cherry wood furniture and three Persian carpets purchased years ago. Our family has enjoyed them and because of their quality they will become heirlooms worth far more than when acquired. But we also realized it wasn't so much these possessions as it was the example of the attribute of quality. It helped as we established goals for shaping a quality growing up experience for our children.

- An Education - So they could appreciate the world around them.
- Develop a Talent - So they could appreciate themselves.
- The Church - To appreciate Christ's love and their eternal perspective.
- Home - Where love, caring and respite from the world would be found.

As you seek good things, remember it's all right to earn money, and all right to have possessions. It's not all right to do so at the expense of your values and family. It's not all right to be selfish. As you seek good things, know where real quality counts: in family relations, family traditions and in your treatment of those around you.

COMMUNICATION

You're now engineers. But on average, as a graduate engineer your communication skills are poor, both verbal and written. You don't know that yet. And yes, I am obviously wrong about some of you. The rest of you have to do something about this and you have to do it now. It's called practice and more practice—a lifetime for some. Don't accept anything but your best when called upon to speak.

Be prepared. Know what your message is. Say it clearly and when you are done, sit down. Always remember when speaking, visual aids and emotion are the most effective communication tools in a verbal presentation. Four weeks ago I sat through a dinner presentation by one of my peer CEOs. No visual aids. No emotion. Long. Boring. People left. It happens.

Your written skills are equally bad. Learn how to write concisely. Leave out pronouns and adjectives. Your first impressions, both good and bad, will likely be made through something you have written. Oh—and those emails. They should be well written and spell checked. Remember they represent you to others you may never have the chance to meet, if you make a bad impression.

Those are the prerequisite attributes to acquiring power and influence.

POWER

First, remind yourself regarding the Lord's counsel in D&C section 121 on authority and the exercise of unrighteous dominion. Verses 41 and 42 are particularly special and when shifted to the positive, counsel us that “power or influence ... ought to be maintained ... by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, by love unfeigned, by kindness, and *pure knowledge*, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.” I submit this is sound counsel regardless of the situation.

39 We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

40 Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

41 No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

42 By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and with out guile

43 Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost: and then showing forth afterwards and increase of love toward him who thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

44 That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

The OCG members always left me in awe at their breadth of experience, capabilities, qualifications, stature and professionalism. Few displayed a propensity to dominate by personality or position. Although a good 10 to 20 years younger than all, through their forbearance, I was accepted as an equal, even though it was evident by the respective size of their companies that each had substantially greater position and power than I.

Acquiring power based upon the attributes taught in D&C 121 is very important to your career, to your family, to the community, even to the church. Now that should not be a radical thought to you.

Now, to specifically address the acquisition of power. First, there is nothing that makes a man bolder than to know his duty. Learn what is expected of you. Know it cold, i.e. be able to act instinctively. It will allow you to act precisely and promptly, to have a point of view and speak with conviction.

You will each have a first job. At least these people behind me hope you will. Your first job will be based upon your engineering degree. When you accept your first job you relinquish your freedom. You become enslaved. You agree to rules, policies, values—where you live, sit, eat and what to do. In that first job you will rely and draw upon your engineering training to perform.

Your collective experiences will be different as night and day. Some of you will wish you had gotten that accounting degree, stayed with history, concluded to go to law school. Put that aside for a time. Put all your energies into this first job. Complete the work. Get it done. Stay late if needed. As you do, on average, you will outperform your fellow workers and people will begin to count on your work. In time it will be realized that anything you have been given to do, is done without complaint, is done timely and can be relied upon. In time your peers will come to you for your advice, help and counsel. At that point you have earned your first power.

You are a “can do” person on the way to being the “go to” person. Just remember ... persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness.

A position will come open. A step up. If you are doing your job as I suggest those filling the position will say “every time we give a job to Sheri she takes it on without complaint, it is done timely and you can always rely upon her work. I recommend we give her the position.” It may not be a large increase in responsibility this first time, but you will remember someone saying “you’re on your way.”

Now in this next job you must first drop back to your professional skills, your technical training and your experience from the first job. There will be some new rules, some new expectations. Don't allow yourself to get overwhelmed. But expect to put in some long hours getting up to speed on the new assignment and getting the job done. Remember what got you there. “Every time we give a job to Sheri she takes it on without complaint, it is done timely and you can always rely upon her work.” The cycle will continue. And with each progressive move you will gain more power to influence the organization within which you work. And though this process is fairly obvious not many get it.

Justin Oleson does. Justin works for Stillwater. He's a 29-year-old engineer, one of over 130 engineers working at Stillwater. He doesn't know I am talking about him today. He doesn't really know I am aware of him. Here is how my people describe Justin to me:

- He sees a problem—he solves the problem.
- He's focused and has a plan.
- He is organized personally.
- He organizes his crews and their goals are known.
- He provides them tools, commitments, priorities and expectations.
- So—his crews are self-reliant.
- Thus, while they get the job done, he is planning the next job.

My people didn't mention the word management once. I was wondering, where did this young man learn management? We certainly didn't teach it to him. I'd like to see his library of books on management. Is Justin Olesen going to move ahead at Stillwater? Is Justin Olesen acquiring power and influence?

INFLUENCE

I hope each of you are as inspired by the 13th Article of Faith as I am.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all men, indeed we may say we follow the admonition of Paul, we believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things and hope to be able to endure all things; if there is any thing virtuous, lovely or of good report or praiseworthy we seek after these things.

And equally inspired by D&C 121.45.

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dew from heaven.

Power and influence are alike yet differ because of organizational dynamics. In a work situation the exercise of power is backed by an economic incentive to retain one's job. Power allows you to direct people's actions. But the culture of a company can vary widely from a power-based command and control culture to one being team directed.

Outside of work, in your family, at Church, and in community affairs, organizations are more team oriented. Teamwork isn't necessarily natural. Teams work best after acknowledging each other's strengths and learning how to use those strengths. Some teams are poor. Your opportunity is to instill the attributes of ethics, management, quality and communication in teams to which you belong.

Then, be there for the team—family, church, good causes in the community. Commit yourself. Live up to those commitments so you can be counted upon. Understand that you must hold up your part of the team effort. *In doing so you will acquire influence.*

Scouting has influenced, for good, the vast majority of men and women in this audience. So you may appreciate these two stories. On a dark rainy night, on the way home from a church youth activity that Richard our son didn't really want to attend, the car was a sullen quiet. We encountered a large fallen limb in the road where it would be dangerous to other travelers. Without a word I stopped, stepped out and began struggling with the limb—when at the other end of this big limb was Richard. Who influenced whom that night? He remained a team member that night even though we were in disagreement.

On a 70-mile Scout Appalachian Trail Hike, Shenandoah Mountains Virginia it was hot and I became dehydrated and sick—yes, while helping my Scouts understand the need to conserve their water. Suffering on the third and 20-mile day, I fell far behind. Alone, feeling sorry and wondering if I would die of heat prostration, I came upon two people ahead of me: my son Francis and a friend. My son, who had been hiking in the lead, had a feeling that he should come back to find and hike with me. Soon one then the other was carrying my pack as we hiked ahead 5 miles to where they had stashed their packs. Yes a 20-mile hike day for everyone but these two who had now covered 30 miles. Team. They were able. They knew their duty. Influence. At that point I was wondering who was having influence on whom.

A dozen years ago, while on an Exxon corporate plane flying from NYC to Phoenix with Jack and Shirley Bennett of Exxon, Allen and Frances Krow of IBM, and my wife Marcia the men gathered in the front of the plane to converse, while the women visited in the back. It was December and because of a strong jet stream the pilot announced that to make better time we would fly south over Washington DC before turning west for Arizona. Looking down as we passed over Maryland I saw my uncle's home—the Doctor. Amazed I mentioned I could see his home. “Frank, we're at 35,000 feet how can you possibly locate his home.” So I pointed out the parking lot at the Mormon Church where he was bishop and had them follow the road the distance to the distinctive farmhouse.

Minutes later over the Shenandoah Mountains of Virginia and the Appalachian Trail I remarked: “I almost died hiking down there.” Jack, curious, asked, “Who were you with?” Not really wanting to divulge my passion for Scouting to these two distinguished men I responded “Just some guys.” Jack persisted – “Well who were those guys?” Trapped I responded, “It was a Scout troop and I was Scoutmaster.” To which Jack responded “I earned my Eagle rank right down there.” Allan remarked “I'm an Eagle Scout too.” As was I. And there was a new respect between the three of us.

On we went landing at Litchfield Park west of Phoenix. Our purpose was an OCG meeting at The Wigwam Resort. Eleven members, accompanied by spouses, would attend, constituting a group of 22. We were whisked to the Resort, and put on golf carts for the trip to our individual casitas. An opening reception would start 15 minutes after our arrival. Hurrying, Marcia and I made it to the reception at

the appointed time there to find a distraught Shirley Bennett, our fellow traveler, explaining that Jack had broken his leg, was in the hospital, an Exxon doctor was on the way and they would likely leave early. All in 15 minutes?

Astonished, I admit my first reaction was—How would Marcia and I get back to New York? But that was quickly out of mind as we turned our attention to comforting Shirley and the start of a remarkable evening. All 21 of us sat down at one long table for dinner. Following dinner we moved to an equally large sofa in front of an immense fireplace. Remember this was December. Twenty of our crowd fit comfortably on that sofa and Bruce Thomas of USX, still standing, announced he would lead us in singing Christmas Carols. I admit to looking down the couch to see if everyone was on for singing Christmas Carols.

When we had sung all the carols that we could think of Bruce concluded “Well then, let's sing hymns.” Again I looked down the couch. And we sang the *Old Wooden Cross* and *Give Said the Little Stream* at which point Bruce abruptly turned to me and asked, “Frank, what's a Mormon hymn we can sing?” And without thinking, I said, “Bruce I don't know a Mormon hymn that everyone would know, but I'll sing one for you.” I felt faint. My mind was saying, “What are you doing?” And my lips were singing “I am a Child of God, And he has sent me here. Has given me...” and my mind went blank. Marcia, poised and with a better memory, was helping me. And together we finished all three verses.

There was a pause that felt too long and awkward. And then this wonderful lady, Tom Thorson's wife, Carolyn, from Travelers Insurance, broke the silence and remarked “My goodness, wasn't that special?” And we sang a couple more hymns. Shirley Bennett asked, “Frank; Marcia and I talked about genealogy on the plane. Why do Mormon's do genealogy?” So for a time I explained as all listened, our eternal purpose and that of genealogy. And we sang a couple more hymns. And Paul Smith asked, “Frank; Kay Whitmore my boss, CEO at Kodak will stay at work late any night, but Monday. What's on Monday night?” So for a time I talked about the importance of our families and Family Home Evening. I suggested they try it and could startle Kay by asking for a copy of the manual. Yes it included Mormon doctrine, but it wouldn't hurt them. And the one-two punch would be to ask for the words to I Am a Child of God—a challenge to which Paul and his wife, Susan, committed. As the evening came to an end, Marcia and I quietly wondered if we should suggest a closing prayer. And in an extraordinary display of the friendship we all felt, we warmly embraced each other before going our separate ways. Influence bound in friendship and trust.

One year later—Rolling Rock Club outside of Pittsburgh—an OCG reception before dinner. Paul and Susan Smith sought me to ask “Frank, What was I was to ask Kay for?” And Susan asked, “And what was the song?” They had remembered. We moved to dinner with most of the same people from the year earlier. At one end of the long narrow table was Tom Thorson. I sat next to him directly across from his wife, Carolyn, Marcia at my side. And as we got seated Carolyn looked me directly in the eye and began, “I am a Child of God and he has sent me here. Has given me an earthly home with parents kind and dear. Lead me guide me walk beside me, help me find the way. Teach me all that I must do to live with him some day.”

All were now seated and quiet. All eyes fixed on our end of the table. And she continued quietly, but loud enough for all to hear. “I am a child of God and so my needs are great. Help me to...” She needed no help. Astonished, I was needing help. For from a needlepoint kit those words now hung on her kitchen wall for her to recite daily. And she now recited perfectly all three verses for our OCG group, as though a prayer—passionate, caring and reverent. We all felt her

intensity. We were one. We were family. We were team. We were committed to each other that night. We clearly had influence one with another. But who influenced whom? And the answer came loud and clear—it didn't matter. For both evenings had been influenced by the presence of the Spirit of the Lord.

1. Be the Ethics standard, because “we believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous...”
2. Understand the practice of good management, as “... we have endured many things and hope to be able to endure all things...”
3. Know and seek quality, and
4. Develop your communication skills, for “... if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”
5. Acquire power in your career/profession and remember “... we believe all things, we hope all things...”
6. Acquire influence with your family, church, and community, among friends and associates, and in politics for “we believe ... in doing good to all men.”

Of this I testify.



Francis R. (Frank) McAllister

Francis R. (Frank) McAllister is a businessman, a family man, a devoted member of the LDS Church and a dedicated Boy Scouter. He is interested in politics, the economy, and international and community affairs. He just finished reading "Undaunted Courage", a newly published history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition which he highly recommends to those starting a new career.

Frank is Chairman and CEO of Stillwater Mining Company, a producer of palladium and platinum located in Columbus Montana. He joined Stillwater in February 2001 from Asarco Inc. of New York City where he had been Chairman and CEO prior to it being acquired by Grupo Mexico S.A. de C.V of Mexico City in 1999.

Born in St. George, UT and raised in Logan, Frank attended Utah State University. After serving a mission he graduated from the University of Utah in 1966 following which he immediately joined Asarco of New York City. He has an MBA from New York University and attended the Advanced Management Program at Harvard.

He is married to the former Marcia Hutchinson of Salt Lake City. They are the parents of five daughters, two sons and ten grandchildren. Six of their children and four of their children's spouses are BYU graduates.

Manufacturing Leadership Forum

The Manufacturing Leadership Forum facilitates the development of leadership skills in manufacturing students, particularly those involved in the Manufacturing Engineering Technology program.

Organized in 1998, the MLF bridges the gap between technical education disciplines and practical, applied business leadership competencies. We are working to shape BYU's MET students into the future leaders within the global manufacturing marketplace.

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