

Motivation

The Go-Getter

A Story That Tells You How to Be One

By Peter Kyne. Published by Times Books, 2003.

I share this little management secret with you here today. *The Go-Getter* is a great book for motivating employees to take initiative and make decisions without constantly asking for management assent. Early in my career as a department manager, I found myself in the role of “SH&E answer man.” Every time someone in my department had a question, they asked me and, as the “all-knowing” department head, I gladly answered.

What I discovered, however, is that the growth of my department was stunted because my employees didn’t have to think for themselves. Why should they when they had me to think for them? I began to ponder how to wean my employees from constantly asking me to solve their problems. Then I came across this book. What a revelation! I used it to demonstrate my expectations of them going forward. It worked. At one location, they actually gave me a blue vase (an explanation is forthcoming). Since then, I have required all employees young and old to read this book within the first quarter of employment. It is freeing for managers, empowering for employees and sets the tone to unlock their potential.

The Story of the Go-Getter

The story of the go-getter was first published in 1921 by American newspaper magnate and publisher William Randolph Hearst. It is the timeless and moving parable of WW I veteran Bill Peck, who uses a winning combination of integrity, fortitude, enthusiasm and accountability to excel against the odds and win a job as a manager despite his disadvantages and disabilities. Kyne’s inspiring story has lost none of its relevance. By applying the ageless lessons of the go-getter, employees and entrepreneurs can learn to be in command of their careers and maintain their get-up-and-go.

The story is set around an old lumber company and its founder, Cappy Ricks, and Peck, who comes to the old captain of industry for a job. To prove himself worthy of his new job, Peck beats the odds and his quota, and earns the opportunity to be tested for broader horizons. Then one day, Ricks asks Peck to purchase a blue vase for him, purportedly as a wedding gift. He provides sketchy details, then conveniently disappears. This is later referred to as the “blue vase challenge.” Unbeknownst to Peck, this is a test of his ability to adapt, overcome and complete the task at hand without any assistance from his boss. Using the lessons he has learned from an inspirational mentor on the battlefield, Peck overcomes outrageous obstacles with his persistence, determination, passion and a giant sense of responsibility. Peck epitomizes the employee who is able to surpass expectations and

join the ranks of leadership through undaunted effort in the face of numerous obstacles.

In 2003, historian Alan Axelrod updated the original story with leadership wisdom that addresses the issues which surround work and leadership today. The parable works as a starting point from which employees can learn how to excel where others have failed, and leaders can gain insight into strategies that keep employees passionate about their work.

The book also offers timeless advice about meeting goals, learning from experience, asking the right questions and tackling tough projects with unflagging zeal. Through fictionalizations that cut to the core of these issues, this book offers employees at any level the inspiration to tap resources and overcome roadblocks on the way to organizational and personal success.

It is a quick read, only 55 pages, and it’s available as a free text or audio download.

When employees have read the book, you will instill in them:

- the courage to tackle any duty you assign them with little or no management oversight;
- not to take no for an answer;
- that your leader’s request is tantamount to an order;
- find a way to get the job done, period;
- it’s hard to reject someone who will not be rejected;
- don’t wait for people to have a lot of experience before you give them responsibilities.

Providing opportunities and training for employees you lead is critical for the future success of any mission. I’ve come to understand that the best way to manage good employees is to not manage them. I believe these good employees are always in search of managers who understand this tenet. I’ve hired many employees throughout my career, many of whom would work for me again today if I were to ask. One reason is that they are go-getters themselves and they understand the importance of professional freedom.

I’ve taken many personality tests in my career and my favorite assessment labeled me as a submarine commander—someone who gets their orders, submerges and gets the job done with little communication from headquarters. He then resurfaces, resupplies, gets feedback and new orders, and does it all over again. In fact, this book will help you train future sub commanders; really good leaders don’t train employees, they grow future leaders.

In the end, if done properly, this book will allow you the freedom to do your job and to let the employees do their job unfettered by corporate micromanagement. So, what are you waiting for? Go get that blue vase.

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The blue vase challenge tests one’s ability to adapt, overcome and complete a task without assistance from one’s boss.



For a link to the free text or audio download of *The Go-Getter*, visit www.asse.org/psextra.