

CHAPTER XVIII - THE EFFICIENCY EXPERT.

Unlike most other plants the International Machine Company paid on Monday, and it was on the Monday following his assumption of his new duties that Jimmy had his first clash with Bince. He had been talking with Everett, the cashier, whom, in accordance with his "method," he was studying. From Everett he had learned that it was pay-day and he had asked the cashier to let him see the pay-roll.

"I don't handle the pay-roll," replied Everett a trifle peevishly. "Shortly after Mr. Bince was made assistant general manager a new rule was promulgated, to the effect that all salaries and wages were to be considered as confidential and that no one but the assistant general manager would handle the pay-rolls. All I know is the amount of the weekly check. He hires and fires everybody and pays everybody."

"Rather unusual, isn't it?" commented Jimmy.

"Very," said Everett. "Here's some of us have been with Mr. Compton since Bince was in long clothes, and then he comes in here and says that we are not to be trusted with the pay-roll."

"Well," said Jimmy, "I shall have to go to him to see it then."

"He won't show it to you," said Everett.

"Oh, I guess he will," said Jimmy, and a moment later he knocked at Bince's office door. When Bince saw who it was he turned back to his work with a grunt.

"I am sorry, Torrance," he said, "but I can't talk with you just now. I'm very busy."

"Working on the pay-roll?" said Jimmy. "Yes," snarled Bince.

"That's what I came in to see," said the efficiency expert.

"Impossible," said Bince. "The International Machine Company's pay-roll is confidential, absolutely confidential. Nobody sees it but me or Mr. Compton if he wishes to."

"I understood from Mr. Compton," said Jimmy, "that I was to have full access to all records."

"That merely applied to operation records," said Bince. "It had nothing to do with the pay-roll."

"I should consider the pay-roll very closely allied to operations," responded Jimmy.

"I shouldn't," said Bince.

"You won't let me see it then?" demanded Jimmy.

"Look here," said Bince, "we agreed that we wouldn't interfere with each other. I haven't interfered with you. Now don't you interfere with me. This is my work, and my office is not being investigated by any efficiency expert or any one else."

"I don't recall that I made any such agreement," said Jimmy. "I must insist on seeing that pay-roll."

Bince turned white with suppressed anger, and then suddenly slamming his pen on the desk, he wheeled around toward the other.

"I might as well tell you something," he said, "that will make your path easier here, if you know it. I understand that you want a permanent job with us. If you do you might as well understand now as any other time that you have got to be satisfactory to me. Of course, it is none of your business, but it may help you to understand conditions when I tell you that I am to marry Mr. Compton's daughter, and when I do that he expects to retire from business, leaving me in full charge here. Now, do you get me?"

Jimmy had involuntarily acquired antipathy toward Bince at their first meeting, an antipathy which had been growing the more that he saw of the assistant general manager. This fact, coupled with Bince's present rather nasty manner, was rapidly arousing the anger of the efficiency expert. "I didn't come in here," he said, "to discuss your matrimonial prospects, Mr. Bince. I came in here to see the pay-roll, and you will oblige me by letting me see it."

"I tell you again," said Bince, "once and for all, that you don't see the pay-roll nor anything else connected with my office, and you will oblige me by not bothering me any longer. As I told you when you first came in, I am very busy."

Jimmy turned and left the room. He was on the point of going to Compton's office and asking for authority to see the pay-roll, and then it occurred to him that Compton would probably not take sides against his assistant general manager and future son-in-law.

"I've got to get at it some other way," said Jimmy, "but you bet your life I'm going to get at it. It looks to me as though there's something funny about that pay-roll."

On his way out he stopped at Everett's cage. "What was the amount of the check for the pay-roll for this week, Everett?" he asked.

"A little over ninety-six hundred dollars."

"Thanks," said Jimmy, and returned to the shops to continue his study of his men, and as he studied them he asked many questions, made many notes in his little note-book, and always there were two questions that were the same: "What is your name? What wages do you get?"

"I guess," said Jimmy, "that in a short time I will know as much about the payroll as the assistant general manager."

Nor was it the pay-roll only that claimed Jimmy's attention. He found that several handlings of materials could be eliminated by the adoption of simple changes, and that a rearrangement of some of the machines removed the necessity for long hauls from one part of the shop to another. After an evening with the little volume he had purchased for twenty-five cents in the second-hand bookshop he ordered changes that enabled him to cut five men from the pay-roll and at the same time do the work more expeditiously and efficiently.

"Little book," he said one evening, "I take my hat off to you. You are the best two-bits' worth I ever purchased."

The day following the completion of the changes he had made in the shop he was in Compton's office.

"Patton was explaining some of the changes you have made," remarked Compton. Patton was the shop foreman. "He said they were so simple that he wondered none of us had thought of them before. I quite agree with him."

"So do I," returned Jimmy, "but, then, my whole method is based upon simplicity." And his mind traveled to the unpretentious little book on the table in his room on Indiana Avenue.

"The feature that appeals to me most strongly is that you have been able to get the cooperation of the men," continued Compton "that's what I feared--that they wouldn't accept your suggestions. How did you do it?"

"I showed them how they could turn out more work and make more money by my plan. This appealed to the piece-workers. I demonstrated to the others that the right way is the easiest way--I showed them how they could earn their wages with less effort."

"Good," said Compton. "You are running into no difficulties then? Is there any way in which I can help you?"

"I am getting the best kind of cooperation from the men in the shop, practically without exception," replied Jimmy, "although there is one fellow, a straw boss named Krovac, who does not seem to take as kindly to the changes I have made as the others, but he really doesn't amount to anything as an obstacle." Jimmy also thought of Bince and the pay-roll, but he was still afraid to broach the subject. Suddenly an inspiration came to him.

"Yes," he said, "I believe your accounting system could be improved--it will take me months to get around to it, as my work is primarily in the shop, at first, at least. You can save both time and money by having your books audited by a firm of public accountants who can also suggest a new and more up-to-date system."

"Not a bad idea," said Compton. "I think we will do it."

For another half-hour they discussed Jimmy's work, and then as the latter was leaving Compton stopped him.

"By the way, you don't happen to know of a good stenographer, do you? Miss Withe is leaving me Saturday."

Jimmy thought a moment. Instantly he thought of Little Eva and what she had said of her experience as a stenographer, and her desire to abandon her present life for something in the line of her former work. Here was a chance to repay her in some measure for her kindness to him.

"Yes," he said, "I do know of a young lady who, I believe, could do the work. Shall I have her call on you?"

"If you will, please," replied Compton

As Jimmy left the office Compton rang for Bince, and when the latter came, told him of his plan to employ a firm of accountants to renovate their entire system of bookkeeping.

"Is that one of Torrance's suggestions?" asked Bince.

"Yes, the idea is his," replied Compton, "and I think it is a good one."

"It seems to me," said Bince, "that Torrance is balling things up sufficiently as it is without getting in other theorizers who have no practical knowledge of our business. The result of all this will be to greatly increase our overhead by saddling us with a lot of red-tape in the accounting department similar to that which Torrance is loading the producing end with."

"I am afraid that you are prejudiced, Harold," said Compton. "I cannot discover that Torrance is doing anything to in any way complicate the shop work. As a matter of fact a single change which he has just made has resulted in our performing certain operations in less time and to better advantage with five less men than formerly. Just in this one thing he has not only more than earned his salary, but is really paying dividends on our investment."

Bince was silent for a moment. He had walked to the window and was looking out on the street below, then he turned suddenly toward Compton.

"Mr. Compton," he said, "you have made me assistant general manager here and now, just when I am reaching a point where I feel I can accomplish something, you are practically taking the authority out of my hands and putting it in that of a stranger. I feel not only that you are making a grave mistake, but that it is casting a reflection on my work. It is making a difference in the attitude of the men toward me that I am afraid can never be overcome, and consequently while lessening my authority it is also lessening my value to the plant. I am going to ask you to drop this whole idea. As assistant general manager, I feel that it is working injury to the organization, and I hope that before it is too late--that, in fact, immediately, you will discharge Torrance and drop this idea of getting outsiders to come in and install a new accounting system."

"You're altogether too sensitive, Harold," replied Compton. "It is no reflection on you whatsoever. The system under which we have been working is, with very few exceptions, the very system that I evolved myself through years of experience in this business. If there is any reflection upon any one it is upon me and not you. You must learn to realize, if you do not already, what I realize--that no one is infallible. Just because the system is mine or yours we must not think that no better system can be devised. I am perfectly satisfied with what Mr. Torrance is doing, and I agree with his suggestion that we employ a firm of accountants, but I think no less of you or your ability on that account."

Bince saw that it was futile to argue the matter further.

"Very well, sir," he said. "I hope that I am mistaken and that no serious harm will result. When do you expect to start these accountants in?"

"Immediately," replied Compton. "I shall get in touch with somebody today."

Bince shook his head dubiously as he returned to his own office.