

EASTMAN EPISODES

Source: Mr. Hord

George Eastman's management theory was that a single leader should conduct the business, availing himself at all times of the advice of his cabinet. The Eastman Kodak Company was a dictatorship, but the dictator was not headstrong. Yet no amount of detail was too great for his attention.

While Mr. Hord was editing the Kodak Magazine, the employee organ, Mr. Eastman rewrote an announcement to employees that was submitted to him with the rest of the copy for one month's issue of the magazine. Mr. Hord disagreed, and he went to Mr. Eastman to express his disagreement.

"Mr. Eastman," he said. "You are a scientist. When you write, you write scientifically, with direct statement of the facts as the aim.

"My business is conveying facts to people. When I write, I write to produce a certain desired reaction. I think that my copy produces the reaction we want and that yours doesn't."

With no trace of animus or pride of authorship, Mr. Eastman directed that the original copy should be used ... and that is all the more interesting because Mr. Eastman was extraordinarily gifted in writing "humanly."

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Source: Mr. Hord

Mr. Eastman, in the grimmest days of building the business, tended very strictly to business. He had to.

But he had his lighter side. Many anecdotes show it. For instance, this one.

Mr. Hord's desk, at the time when his office was on the second floor facing State Street, was near the head of the stairs, and Mr. Eastman passed it every time he came up the stairs to his office.

Frequently he stopped, over a period of weeks, to ask Mr. Hord for a cigarette -- and with a sidelong smile he walked off with the whole package.

But a practical joke isn't complete until there is a rebuttal. One day Mr. Hord came to the office with his cigarettes in an expensive silver case.

When Mr. Eastman stopped -- as he did before a few days had passed -- to ask for a cigarette, Mr. Hord silently offered him the case. Mr. Eastman took it, examined it briefly, then said "Ha, ha," with a deliberate, sardonic laugh, took a cigarette, and handed back the case.

But Mr. Eastman was the author of one joke at the time to which no known rebuttal occurred. The prank was a common one a quarter-century ago, but the amusing thing about it was to find Mr. Eastman at the root of it.

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One day, while Mr. Eastman was in conversation in his own office, Mr. Noble waited in the anteroom outside the open door. A small book lay on the table, its cover adorned with a "racy" chorus-girl picture. Suddenly there was a sharp explosion.... Mr. Noble had opened the book. The book contained no reading matter, only a cap-pistol mechanism set to go off when the book was opened. Mr. Eastman had set it.

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