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Management in Families – What is Home Management?

Michigan State University Extension Service

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Issued September 1964

4 pages

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MANAGEMENT?



WHAT IS HOME MANAGEMENT?

What do you do when you manage? Wash the dishes? Iron the clothes? Dust the house? Plan the meals? Chauffeur the children to school? You do these tasks, to be sure, but is this the management part of your homemaking job?

No, the process of managing, in itself, is something much less concrete than any of these tasks and accomplishments, harder to define and to pull out and look at as a specific job. It's easy to recognize poor management or to see the evidence of lack of management—but it's hard to put your finger on a certain activity and say, "This is management."

Let's take a look at the way some Michigan homemakers view management. In answering a questionnaire they completed the statement, "To me managing a home means," with such phrases as:

—"Making a home a happy place. My children will bring their friends for activities."

—"Giving my family a spiritual security, so they can face life's problems and responsibilities with inward peace."

—"Keeping up with my family's welfare within the home as well as having a part in community activities."

"Maintaining a pleasant atmosphere"



—"Love, patience and trusting in each other."

—"Maintaining a pleasant atmosphere of doing and learning for the children."

—"More than housekeeping; it also involves: developing the family physically, mentally, morally and spiritually."

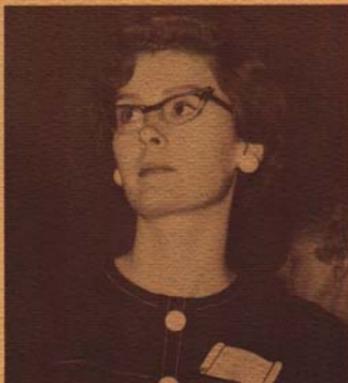
These words express the purpose of home management for these women, the values they cherish and try to maintain. This is the broader look at home management, the newer look.

But how *does* a homemaker accomplish things like these? First of all she has to be clear about what it is she wants for herself and her family. Then it takes initiative, it takes organization, it takes planning and working along with the rest of the family to make the kind of home they all want. In a word, it takes management.

There is no recipe for "good" management. It is like a science—based on certain recognized principles; and it is also an art—based on practices and skills that vary from person to person. Almost everyone can learn the principles and almost everyone can learn to improve managerial skills. Some people have more natural talent for management than others, it is true. These are the so-called "born" managers. But anyone can learn and apply certain principles which will help him to improve his performance—the poorest manager as well as the most skillful.

We can learn from everyday experience—our own and others'. We can also learn from the findings of research. In colleges and universities, researchers in psychology, sociology, economics, and in home man-

"More than housekeeping"



agement itself are discovering principles which can serve as guidelines for any manager—whether manager of a home, a bank, a factory, an army. The principles are the same, whatever the endeavor.

But our *understanding* of management is never a finished product. It is changing and expanding. As in other areas of research, new knowledge gives us new insights. Sometimes the new knowledge displaces—sometimes it supports—old beliefs and practices. But now let's consider some of the basic concepts of management on which there is quite general agreement:

1. That management is a mental process involving certain skills or proficiencies. Planning, organizing, motivating, controlling are words sometimes used to describe these proficiencies.
2. That awareness of values underlying one's goals is crucial for effective management.
3. That decision-making is the heart of management. In contrast to the countless casual choices we make daily—the courses of action we follow with little if any conscious thought—management decisions require reasoned choice—seeking information, considering feasibility of alternatives and finally *deciding* and "putting the wheels in motion," embarking on a course of action and seeing it through.

"Love, patience and trusting in each other."



(For example, you wash the dishes in a routine way, from habit. There may be no occasion for decisions, and habit frees your mind for other considerations. But the issue of how much your daughter or son should help with this or other housework and what standards of performance they should develop might require management decisions of a high order. Or again, if your health should be failing, you might need to take a real look at the way you perform this and similar tasks—in order to find ways to guard your store of energy for more important activities.)

Our list of three is a beginning for your consideration of principles to guide you toward greater skill and satisfaction in managing your home. In contrast to management in business, home management offers unique application of these principles in certain respects:

—In the purpose of the home's existence and in the particular values it strives to foster.

—In the double role of the homemaker, who customarily is the "general manager," and often is the "doer" as well.

—In the status of all family members. (You don't fire your children—or the manager—for inefficiency. Also, you provide for each according to his needs—not according to his earnings.)

—In the shifting of management roles from one member of the family to another. (If Mother feels it's important to help with the church supper or the canvass for the League of Women Voters, Father may take over picnic arrangements. And as Junior and Jane develop, you want them to be-

"Having a part in community activities"



gin to take responsibility—first perhaps for managing pennies, being on time, taking care of toys; later, for broadening responsibility in family affairs. If you stop to think about it, you will see this kind of shifting occurring in your family. It's a way of sharing responsibility and of fostering development in children. It's also "efficient"—if you wish to look at it this way—efficient, in use of family talents.)

All that we have said is a beginning. What can you as a homemaker learn about management that will increase your satisfactions and contribute to effective home management? A homemaker can:

1. Study the values that are considered important in our 20th Century American culture, and examine her own values and the goals she has set in order to maintain them.
2. Study the art (and science) of decision making in the family. A considerable body of research is developing to give us new knowledge about how decisions are made in groups and what makes a "good" decision. Studying and applying this new knowledge can be exciting—and rewarding.
3. Study the resources and tools available to her—from the family pay check, family talents, and work simplification, through community resources—all the material and human resources, as well as methods and procedures for doing things.
4. Study organization—for example, the way resources are allocated, responsibility delegated and plans carried out in many homes.
5. Study "management process"—how all the parts fit together to make a pattern of management.

These are only some of the topics that could be considered in a study of home management, and this is not to say that everyone will—or should—manage in the same way. But an understanding of what underlies the management process can add to a homemaker's competence and feeling of satisfaction in this important role of her life.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What is your personal idea of home management?
2. How can a family's philosophy of management and their way of managing contribute to personal development of the members of the family?
3. Is efficiency the same thing as management?
4. Is home management haphazard?
5. If a family has agreed on their goals, can you see evidences of it in their everyday activities?
6. How are goals related to values?
7. Dishwashing is work—a task or a job. Like any job it can be a meaningless, routine, "has-to-be-done" chore. Or it might be used by the manager to help

carry out certain goals in the family. Can you think of any examples?

8. Which comes first in managing a home, deciding what you want or what you have to work with?
9. What similarities can you see in managing a home and managing a business? What differences?
10. Why do you think decision-making is called the "heart" of management? Some people say that a good manager is alternative-minded. Why do you think this might be so?
11. Joan, a 16-year-old girl, earns a sizable amount of money during the year in various ways—baby sitting, doing housework for a neighbor, working in a local store as "extra" help, etc. (She is able to do this and still maintain a good school record.) Joan sometimes buys lavish gifts for her parents, her brothers and sisters and friends; she spends unreasonable amounts (in her parents' opinion) on clothes for herself, treats for her friends and casual purchases of various kinds. She is saving some money toward college expenses for herself—but makes no financial contribution to the home. She feels that because she earns the money, it is her right to spend it entirely as she pleases. There are two other children who will be in college before she finishes and her family is in moderate circumstances. Her parents are concerned about the attitudes Joan is developing with respect to responsibilities to others in her family (which could extend to a lack of broad social responsibility). They are also concerned about the careless habits she is building up with respect to use of money. What alternatives could these parents consider to handle this situation?

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It is impossible to give proper credit for all contributions to the Management in Families Series. Source materials include the 1960 National Workshop for Home Management Extension Specialists, the 1962 Conference on Teaching Home Management, the 1962, 1963 and 1964 Michigan Extension Home Management Workshops. Acknowledgment must go especially to Dr. Beatrice Paolucci and Dr. Jean D. Schlatter of the Department of Home Management and Child Development at Michigan State University. They provided much inspiration and direction through lectures, writings and informal discussions. Also deeply appreciated is the permission from the publishers to reprint the magazine articles contained within these bulletins.

Cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics. Michigan State University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. N. P. Ralston, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, East Lansing. Printed and distributed under Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914.

IP-10/64-20M-511