

# Tributes to Peter F. Drucker

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## Father of Management

by **Geoffrey Colvin**

Editor-at-large, *Fortune* magazine

WHEN IT CAME TO PETER DRUCKER, the world suffered from Great Man Syndrome, but he did not. He was justly lauded and adored as the greatest management thinker and writer of all time, but he wasn't interested in that. Whenever I encountered him, as I did into his 90s, I found a man who was smiling, cheerful, and funny. His hearing and sight were fading, yet he wasn't old. I don't know how you get to be 95 without growing world-weary, but he did it.

He was fun to talk to on any subject. Since Drucker had been a journalist as a young man, he had license to be scathing at times, as he was when it came to management consultants who are low on substance but high on marketing pizzazz. He skewered both groups: "The reason reporters call these people *gurus* is that they're not sure how to spell 'charlatan.'"

Drucker simply didn't care about the conventional view on any management topic, and he disdained the modern vogue for exalting leadership, as distinct from paltry old management.

There were many things Drucker wanted no part of. Big universities, for instance. He scorned them all to remain at tiny Claremont College—payback, perhaps, for the scorn they'd heaped on him early in his career. Economists dismissed his work as cheap sociology. Sociologists had no use for business. And Drucker was dismissive of them all, becoming the undisputed father of management.

Drucker's career was so productive for so long—his first U.S. book was in 1939, his last *Harvard Business Review* article in 2004—that he ran the table on management topics. Think of virtually any "hot topic" and odds are that Drucker wrote about it with extraordinary perception, before 1970. He predicted the rise of the "knowledge worker" in 1959! There isn't any Nobel Prize in management thinking and writing. But it's just as well—because it would have been won every year by the same man—Peter Drucker.

## An Extraordinary Teacher

by **Michael G. Winston**

VP of HR and Leadership, Countrywide

PETER F. DRUCKER WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY writer, teacher, and consultant with large corporations as well as with nonprofits, small and entrepreneurial companies, and with agencies of the U.S. government. He has also worked with the leaders of several nations and authored 31 books, which have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Drucker was revered as the father of modern management for his work on innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategies for change.

Decades ahead of his time, Drucker correctly suggested that one of the highest priorities is to prepare people to deal with rapid, and often unpredictable, technological and marketplace changes. Rather than fearing change, he encouraged people to welcome it, embrace it, and to turn the ability to handle change into a competitive advantage. He created an unprecedented focus on human capital management, shaping the way people are managed and deployed. His work provides the blueprint for success.

## A Simple and Humble Man

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

Executive coach and author

AT ONE MEETING OF THE BOARD of the Peter Drucker Foundation, I asked Peter, "You have written much about mission—what is *your* mission?"

He replied, "To help other people achieve their goals—assuming that they are not immoral or unethical!"

Along with his brilliance, he was a simple and humble man who wanted to help others achieve their goals. He not only taught me about management, he taught me about life. By his example, he showed me the importance of loving what you do—and communicating this enthusiasm.

He loved his wife, family, friends, work, and life. His zest for living was always there—even at the end. I visited

with Peter shortly before his death. He took the time to have a lively discussion about the state of the world and the future we face. I was amazed at his sense of history, his deep insight, his passion, and his caring. Peter Drucker did not just teach by what he wrote—he taught by who he was.

## He Did It Just For Us

by **Frances Hesselbein**

Chairwoman, the Leader to Leader Institute

WHEN I FIRST DISCOVERED *The Effective Executive* by Peter Drucker, I had no idea who he was, but his philosophy and vision were so right for the Girl Scouts that I thought, he wrote this book just for us.

There was a magic about Peter. He wrote and spoke to us in elegant,



spare language that connected, inspired, moved us into the future. The vision he held before us embraces us; we make it our own. And we think, "He did it just for us."

Gone is the cold, austere command-and-control style of the old hierarchy. Alive and passionate are mission, values, people, accountability, and performance—the Drucker management philosophy. His work is found in 32 books. "The purpose of the organization is to create a customer," Peter wrote. And, "The business must be so managed as to make the public good become the private good of the enterprise."

We will remember Peter as long as we live in the world he made better. We will remind ourselves of his wisdom that was exactly right for our times, our work, our enterprises. We remember: Innovation creates a new dimension of performance.

We all share a new call—not just to keep his legacy alive but to carry his philosophy and works wherever we go in the future. Peter will illuminate our future as he illuminated our past.

## He Taught Me Five Lessons

by **L. Ara Norwood**

Speaker and leadership consultant

I WAS FORTUNATE TO BE A STUDENT of the late Peter Drucker. His passing has caused me to reflect on what he taught me. Here are five lessons:

1. *Going from good to great isn't always adequate.* The ideal is not to be good or great but to be inspired.

2. *Unraveling the dichotomy between being a generalist versus being a specialist.* Drucker taught me that it is possible—even preferable—to be both a generalist and a specialist. He made it a life-long habit of acquiring new knowledge in disparate areas of learning. Yet, his understanding of management as a formal discipline was unmatched.

3. *We never really arrive.* Drucker taught me that the journey is every bit as important as the destination, and that process is precious. He never felt his work on any subject was the last word. He always strived for clearer expression and better results.

4. *Arrogance is anathema.* I learned this lesson the hard way, through the submission of an assigned essay. After recovering from his reprimands, I approached my subject with greater humility, perspective, and openness.

5. *The power of the pen.* Drucker reminded me that the writing (and publishing) of ideas is to be taken seriously. He told me that the main difference between himself and the rest of us was that he was willing to lock himself up in his study daily and write. Then revise it again and again.

Peter Drucker will continue to inspire me as I revisit his writings.

## A Man of Great Insight

by Bob Nelson

President of Nelson Motivation and author, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*

PETER DRUCKER RECOGNIZED THAT dedicated people are the key to success and that “the productivity of work is not the responsibility of the worker, but of the manager.”

I was fortunate to have known Peter since 1989 and was a student of his at The Peter F. Drucker Graduate School of Management at Claremont Graduate University, Pomona, Calif. “Leadership,” he said, “is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations.”

Much can be said about his uncanny ability to cut to the core of things and make simple, provocative and well-supported insights. Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

Much less has been said of his effective teaching style. Dr. Drucker was from the classical style of teaching: He’d make a point, then launch into a lengthy discourse for 20 minutes drawing from many fields, until he had woven a tapestry of evidence and come

full-circle to his original observation, convincing you along the way that his conclusion was, in fact, the truth..

“There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all,” he said. After class, I used to drive him to his modest house. “The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said,” he said. “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

## Incalculable Impact

by Cornelis A. de Kluyver

Dean of the Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management, Claremont Graduate University

PETER DRUCKER HAD AN INCALCULABLE impact on business. Until he came along, management was an incoherent collection of ideas. He organized it into a discipline that could be taught and practiced. I credit him for making management accessible to millions of people by giving structure to the classic ideas of leadership, by adapting the management to organizations, and by explaining how to teach it and apply it.

Sadly, you won’t find a course on Peter Drucker in any major MBA program (only courses on management), and in their texts, Peter gets, at best, a footnote. But I see this omission as a testament to how central and accepted his ideas are. When you stop quoting someone, his ideas have become the accepted notion. That’s what happened to Peter. Many of his breakthrough ideas are so common today that people don’t even bother to ask who suggested them in the first place.

## The Right Man for Our Times

by Tom Peters

Best-selling author and Chairman of Tom Peters Company

PETER DRUCKER DIDN’T “INVENT” management. The Chinese probably did thousands of years ago. Sun Tzu’s roughly 2,500-year-old *The Art of War* is a full-blown “management” text. But Peter Drucker did arguably 1) “invent” modern management as we now think of it; 2) give the study and craft of management-as-profession credibility and visibility; and 3) provide a toolkit-framework for addressing and even mastering the problems of emergent enterprise complexity.

And he did something else: He popularized the study and appreciation of modern management. Doubtless Mr. Drucker would have been appalled to be described as a “popularizer”—after

all, that was one of his abiding and biting criticisms of me. But the truth is that, though his consulting was carried out in the stratospheric confines of CEO-world, his books and articles were very comprehensible and accessible to all. In 1968, when at age 25 I left Vietnam, I read (devoured!) my first management text, Drucker’s *The Effective Executive*—and was profoundly influenced.

Drucker wrote continuously on a variety of issues; he was a genuine polymath. His works—*The Concept of the Corporation*, *The Practice of Management*, and *The Effective Executive*—are the tracts that launched the “practice of management” as we know it to this day—and as we will know it for decades to come.

## A True Leader

by Phil Harkins

President and CEO, Linkage, Inc.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, PETER DRUCKER served as a faculty member at Linkage’s Global Institute for Leadership Development (GILD). He delighted our audiences with his wisdom and always received a standing ovation. He would find the talisman tip that would get everyone to take notes so that they could say they heard from Peter Drucker himself. GILD will never be the same without him. However, we will always remember his words of wisdom and his spirit. The last time Peter spoke at GILD, he was 91 years old. We had arranged a car to take him and his wife, Doris, home afterward. As I walked him to the car, I saw Doris behind the wheel of their car. I said, “Peter, we have a car to take you home.” He replied, “Thank you, but we don’t want the neighbors to think I have to be driven around; we prefer to drive ourselves.” Peter Drucker, a true thought leader, will be missed.

## A Mentor of Stature

by Rick Warren

Minister of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*

PETER DRUCKER TAUGHT ME ABOUT competence. I met him about 25 years ago. I was invited to a seminar of CEOs, and Peter was there. As a young man (I was about 25), I began to call him up, write him, go see him. Before his passing, I would sit at his feet regularly. He honed into me hundreds of one-liners and taught me that growth always comes from the outside—from people who are not now using your product, or listening to your message, or using your services. LE