Confessions of an Organization Man

Gentlemen:

The six of you have reviewed a wide range of business issues in these open letters with me this year. Running through all our dialogue—sometimes stated, more often implicit—have been these two basic questions:

1. What turns a man on?
2. What is a life for?

Whether we were discussing specific management training programs or the general responsibility of business for the welfare of mankind, we seldom strayed far from what it is that really gets one particular individual engrossed, what he wants his life to stand for, and where he wants the world to go.

We agreed at the start that students could understand business better and that business could better understand students. We divided students into two groups: men who eventually would enter business, and men who would not. We hoped that the men whom business would "turn on" would not stay out of business for the wrong reasons; we hoped that men attracted to other occupations would understand what had "turned on" the first group.

We felt that fuller awareness of what business is and what its actual and possible social roles are would interest both these groups—the men who would carry out the roles, and the men who would observe and judge from outside.

Your questions and comments this year have been constantly thoughtful, often appreciative, occasionally misinformed, a few times barbed. To judge by the candor and your thinking.

No organization, whether it be The Halls of Ivy or the Executive Suite, is the stalwart, soul-destroying monster it has at times been painted—except to the degree it falls short of its special genius. That "organization man!" whose image you find so repellent is a man who takes root where the organization is failing its mission.

The special genius of the organization has several features which should appeal to men of your caliber and predilections. Each of the four points I mention here is a goal toward which wise leadership aims.

1. The organization is aimed at the future. It is formed to fill a future need; its officials are elected to guide its future progress; its most vital problems are those which affect its future. You are oriented toward the future, too.

2. The organization model is flexible and responsible. You can see this in business when you thoughtfully read the financial news: A merger occurs when changing conditions and changing needs call for changing structures; new goals must be established to satisfy new demands; new talents are required to accomplish these goals; new business activity relates to new social needs. You also prize flexibility, the exercise of talent, social contribution and involvement.

3. The organization does not demand total commitment. An organization is an instrument for the accomplishing of a certain set of a man's total goals. When it begins to become the sum total of life, it departs from its model, wastes its talents, and can lose its talented men. You value freedom now; you may soon come to appreciate structure as well.

4. The organization is designed for, aimed at, and directed by flesh-and-blood men and women. Neither the gray-flannel man nor the beatnik can have a real hand or final voice in the health or the direction of such a structure because neither has matured to its challenges. All participate to the extent of individual capabilities.

If a student has true and deeply rooted convictions as to where he wants his life to take him and where the world should be going, it behooves him to direct his talents and energies toward these goals. He will do this most effectively by becoming involved in one of the several major moving forces or organizations in today's society. Business is one of these.

—Robert W. Galvin
Chairman, Motorola Inc.