



Watching for the Signals... The Foundation of MANAGEMENT

By Lt. Col. Ignacio E. Coloma, FS



HAVE you ever heard of the word "signal"? Other than the words "Signal Corps"? Or, seen one? Maybe yes. Very likely, however, there are a few of us who really understand what signals mean in our daily lives.

Many Meanings

Webster's dictionary says signal is some sign, event, or watchword that serves to start some action as in the case of a man's words being

the "signal" for an attack. In card playing, a player indicates to his partner a desire for a certain lead from him with the aid of some sort of "sign."

One kind of sign may be a symbol representing an idea, as a word, letter, or mark. Another may be merely a motion or gesture conveying an idea, command or wish. Still other signs may be the more familiar publicly-displayed notice on a

building, office, etc., to advertise a firm's business done there, the firm's name and so on.

Indication of the existence or presence of a thing may be called signs, as signs of a storm. On the street, signals for motorists passing at intersections indicate green for go, yellow for caution and red for stop.

In astronomy, a sign indicates a division of the ecliptic or zodiac. Grammarwise, it means mood, tense, number and case. And in mathematics, a sign shows the relationships between quantities or an operation performed on them, as the signs for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Signal Without Words

There are numberless signals: in our homes, in the offices, in businesses, in the sidewalks, transportation facilities, classrooms — everywhere. Some are formal statements like the educated remark "I thought you already left" from a superior officer who really meant "You damn fool I do not want you to hang around here a minute more." Other signals, however, are without benefit of the spoken word.

To illustrate, there is the girl who was walking on a sidewalk holding so many things, let us say. You as an acquaintance happened to be walking behind her in the same direction. You noticed her plight. Your help was not solicited. And you may be hurrying to your destination. But you offered to help her just the same.

Why?

Common sense dictates that your noticing her carrying a load merit-

ing for her some succor was a "signal" to you to help. With you believing, among others, that knight-hood is still in flower, you responded to the signal without her formal request.

Another illustration is the case of a bright officer, the head of a command. He went by as formal as can be with no hello, no smile, no nod or what have you, notwithstanding the greetings of his subordinates. He soon noticed that the individuals who should be very close to him were very far.

A group of his officers would break up suddenly, or there would be silence as if everyone were in the cemetery, whenever his presence around was noticed. "There is reluctant cooperation," he noted.

"Why?" he asked himself. "What are my characteristics that others abhor?" He examined himself. Soon he found out that he was a high hat. He regarded others as though they were non-existent. If ever he thought that they existed, he considered himself as the best among them so much so that he felt they ought to worship him like a demigod.

The officer found out moreover that his subordinates in the command were not mere followers ticking like robots. Most important, he realized that they are people with five senses like himself. "Could it be possible to have a more cordial working relationship with them?" he asked himself.

The officer in this case noticed the signal: the adverse attitude of his subordinates. This opened his

eyes to the need for a change in his behavior and he acted accordingly.

Signals And Their Implications

Still another type of "watching for the signals" may be seen in the case of an employee who had often been absent. He had not explained the whys and wherefores of his absence, and so he was bawled out left and right by his superior. Considering the side of the superior, it would have been better if on hearing any explanation from his subordinate, he refrained from harsh language before ascertaining the reason for the absences. In carefully-expressed language and in a proper tone of voice, superior could talk to subordinate, thus preventing loss of face of the subordinate amidst listeners. The absentee could have probably recognized his mistakes, and, instead of naturally defending himself, could have offered to make good henceforth.

Off and on, there are alterations in this or that office. It seems a good sign of progress. The step indicates improvements intended to be made. Even an office is supposed to be a living thing that must come up to modern requirements.

But what signal do the alterations of the office present?

The alterations mean, to most of us, that some lumber, nails, paints, and labor are necessary. Comptrollerwise, the alterations are a signal for money expenditures. The meaning can further be spelled out by inquiring as to the necessity of the alterations, now or in the future. Still further, it can be spelled out by inquiring whether the alterations were the result of a study, the out-

come of a consultation with an expert, one who can be depended upon in the planning of office layouts, conformable with good systems and procedures, and consistent with the fiscal resources available as well as the convenience of the personnel.

The signal presented may be that of waste of time, money and effort. Shall there be an "office management" expert at all in the Armed Forces? Shall the military be better off in hiring one who knows his business on a consultative basis? Shall it suffice to have just any officer assigned to this or that position?

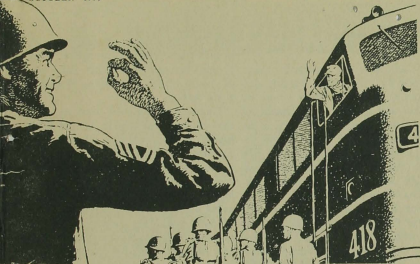
The case of a habitual drunkard in a BCT is another example in a long list of unending cases where looking for the signals is advisable. Naturally, the signal here is obviously the fact of drunkenness itself.

But why is there a case of drunkenness in the command? Is drunkenness rampant? Who are the officers and men affected? How often does it happen? And when? What is the situation in each case? What does it mean? Why?

Questions abound. What can be done to prevent or minimize drinking? What are the alternatives to drinking? What are the procedures to these alternatives if they are proposed? How timely are the proposals?—Who should implement the steps to be taken? There are always signals suggesting the answers to the questions.

The World of Signals

Signals are not only everywhere. They also occur everytime. Regardless of circumstances, in war or in



peace, they suggest or command what are necessary to be done. Signals, may be non-directive or directive. When non-directive, there is persuasion, suggestion, and a sort of diplomat's way of making a requirement as subtle as possible. When directive, there is force, authority or dictation being brought to bear upon the subject.

When a non-directive way of signalling is made, the subject is happy and very glad to respond. He may even think that he has been extended an honor, an opportunity to perform what has been requested for him. In contrast, a directive manner of signalling may be taken as an affront notwithstanding the justness of an action intended to be achieved.

In a civilian installation, grudges and grumblings, if not actual or open defiance by disgruntled personnel are almost certain to happen. Resulting compliance are at most without enthusiasm. Worst still, an under-current of distrust can be born

and nurtured by continuous "directive" ways of making requirements. Of course, there are occasions when a spade must be called a spade. But considering that all men can be corrected in a pleasant manner, harshness and undue language are mere signals of abuse.

Watching for the signals is not everything in management. It is only a part of a big picture in the process of getting results from the efforts of others especially in the military. Specifically, it can mean promotion or appreciation from our superiors or cooperation from our subordinates. It depends, in a great measure, of course, on the viewpoint taken on the challenge of the signals beamed to us.

"Try watching for the signals, act accordingly, and relax," the human relations specialist often states. To that statement it is well to add: "so that you will be happy, so your organization will be managed better, and so that the public will benefit more."