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MERIT – An ancient principle, a modern challenge

Merit travels through history like a tireless old sage: from ancient Greece, where philosophers were already arguing about who deserved what, all the way to modern organizations, where the real debate is more often about who finished the last box of donuts.

For as long as anyone can remember, it has served to recognize the true value of work, to distinguish sincere effort from mere appearances, and to spot solid contributions amid superficial actions that shine for five minutes... then vanish like a Bengal flare that grabs attention but doesn't last long. Yet today, merit is sometimes misunderstood: some inflate it like a hot-air balloon, others pop it just as quickly.

For some, merit is seen as a form of favoritism, a bit like a private club you enter with a secret password. For others, it becomes the universal explanation for every success, even when that success rests more on luck, privilege, or a well-stocked address book than on genuine effort. Between these two extremes, there is fortunately a more reasonable path: that of a fair, transparent, and respectful kind of merit, one that brings people together rather than driving them apart. In short, a form of merit that doesn't play favorites... not even with itself.

In an organization, merit isn't a moral gadget you pull out to decorate speeches. It's an essential tool for managing work well. When it's recognized consistently, everyone understands that their efforts aren't disappearing into some administrative black hole. Progress gets noticed, commitment matters, and motivation rises, not just because of rewards, but because the rules finally feel... fair. A small miracle in the workplace.

Conversely, when merit is ignored, decisions become arbitrary. You start seeing promotions based on favoritism, choices shaped by internal politics, or rewards handed to those who speak the

loudest rather than those who do the work well. A well-structured culture of merit prevents these excesses. It relies on clear rules, precise criteria, and decisions that can be explained without needing a 300-page novel.

Recognizing merit isn't just about applauding the top performers. It's also about encouraging those who want to grow. Merit then becomes an educational tool: it shows what is expected, what is valued, and what needs improvement. In short, it's a GPS for learning... but without recalculating every five seconds. It fosters initiative, autonomy, and the desire to improve, which, let's be honest, is always more useful than a three-hour meeting to say the same thing.

A society that values merit sends a clear message: everyone can contribute, everyone can progress, and everyone can be recognized for their efforts, even those who still can't fold a fitted sheet on the first try. This doesn't mean everyone starts with the same advantages (some begin with running shoes, others with sandals), but it does mean that effort, perseverance, and skills can genuinely shape each person's path. This vision strengthens trust in institutions, shared rules, and the idea that some form of social justice still exists... somewhere.

Merit also plays a key role in the organization of a society, because it manages to bring together two values that usually eye each other like wary cats ready to scratch: freedom and solidarity.

On one side, freedom encourages each person to take initiative, develop their talents, and move forward by their own means — like an explorer enthusiastically charting their own path. On the other side, solidarity ensures that no one gets stuck on the side of the road without a GPS, without a map, and without a helping hand to get going again.

By combining these two values, merit creates an essential balance. It acknowledges the importance of individual effort while reminding us that society must offer fair starting conditions.

Freedom pushes individuals forward, while solidarity gives them a little boost when the slope becomes too steep. Together, they create a framework where personal effort is encouraged without ever forgetting mutual support and social justice, a duo as complementary as coffee and Monday-morning motivation.

Without a genuine consideration of merit, a society can slide into dependency or excessive indulgence, where everyone gets a trophy just for showing up. Conversely, a society obsessed with merit can turn into a nonstop competition where even the breaks are timed. The challenge, then, is to find a balance where solidarity supports effort, and effort strengthens solidarity, like a well-tuned tandem bike.

When merit disappears, mediocrity settles in: institutions lose credibility, citizens lose trust, and organizations become less effective. Merit ultimately reminds us that quality, integrity, and competence aren't optional, they're essential conditions for a society to endure... and to avoid spinning in circles like a tired top.

Merit isn't just a word or a slogan pinned to a wall. To be credible, it must rest on clear, consistent, and understandable criteria. An opaque or easily manipulated merit system becomes unfair and loses all value, like a game whose rules are invented on the fly, by whoever's winning.

Merit isn't limited to numerical results. It takes into account the quality of the work, the consistency of effort, the ability to collaborate, respect for ethics, the willingness to learn, and the positive impact on others. In short, it looks at the whole picture, not just the final score.

Finally, recognition of merit must be given at the right moment, in the right way, and for the right reasons. Recognition given at the wrong time is like applauding at the wrong moment during a concert: it breaks the mood and doesn't encourage anyone to keep going.

Establishing a culture of merit isn't just about adding yet another rule to a manual already as thick as a phone book. It's a true cultural shift, the kind that can transform how an organization or a society functions, a bit like discovering that the office coffee machine actually has a "stronger" setting.

To succeed in this transformation, leaders must show courage, because sometimes old habits need to be questioned, the kind that clings on like an old sticky note forgotten on a computer screen. It's also essential for institutions to be consistent with one another: nothing is more frustrating than a merit principle applied with shifting standards, like a rule that changes depending on the mood of the day.

A shared vision is therefore indispensable so that everyone understands where we're trying to go. And above all, building a culture of merit requires the willingness to raise expectations, to encourage rigorous behavior rather than lowering the bar until it touches the floor.

Merit is not meant to create power struggles or allow some people to play the pack leader. On the contrary, it serves as a tool to help each person grow. When applied properly, it allows individuals to take responsibility for their own path, understand what they need to improve, and recognize their progress, like an honest mirror, but without the snarky comments.

It also encourages participation in collective success, because everyone knows their efforts can truly make a difference. And merit brings a sense of dignity and meaning, both at work and in social life, since it values effort, perseverance, and personal contribution, three qualities that, unlike pens in an office, don't mysteriously disappear.

Thus, a well-established culture of merit, doesn't seek to exclude people, but to help them rise. It aims to create an environment where everyone can grow, be recognized, and find a place that matches their efforts and skills. In short, a place where you move forward because of what you do... and not just because of who you know.

In conclusion, merit is neither a vague idea nor an opinion pulled out at random like a fortune cookie. It is a true organizing principle, a moral GPS that keeps behavior from veering into the ditch. It also serves as an engine for progress, a reliable one, not the kind that starts blinking the moment you turn the key, for individuals as well as for the community.

When understood and applied correctly, merit strengthens justice, improves performance, and builds lasting trust. And no, it's not just about handing out medals: it also values effort, perseverance, responsibility, and each person's real contribution, even when no one is watching.

In the workplace, merit makes it possible to objectively recognize those who invest themselves, develop their skills, and genuinely contribute to the organization's success. It encourages engagement, because everyone knows their efforts can be noticed, not just by the coffee machine.

Management based on merit creates an environment that is more motivating, fairer, and more effective. It reduces the risk of favoritism (the famous "boss's cousin") and strengthens the credibility of decisions made by leaders.

In society, merit also plays an essential role. It reminds us that social progress does not depend solely on starting conditions, but also on the effort made and the choices individuals take. It reinforces trust in institutions and shared rules, because it gives people the sense that they can be recognized for what they truly contribute, not just for their ability to speak loudly in meetings. Merit thus helps raise the collective level by encouraging quality, integrity, and responsibility.

For more effective management, whether in organizations or in society as a whole, merit remains a solid and necessary foundation. It is not a theoretical concept stored in a dusty drawer, but a concrete tool for building a fairer, more efficient, and more harmonious environment. By valuing effort and competence, merit allows everyone to move forward and keeps society from spinning in circles like a poorly adjusted office chair.

To help you apply these ideas to your personal development, and to become a more effective and authentic person, capable of shaping a better future, I suggest the book **MERIT, EXCELLENCE, INTELLIGENCE**.

This book is designed to guide you in creating a clear roadmap for personal growth, success, and happiness, a roadmap that requires neither a compass, nor a GPS, nor a mobile app, just a bit of lucidity.

Through a series of questions, quotations, and reflections, **MERIT, EXCELLENCE, INTELLIGENCE** offers readers the tools they need to explore their own soul in depth, discover their true passions, and improve both their effectiveness and their efficiency. This, in turn, allows them to shape their own success and then help those around them achieve the same goal, without having to reinvent the wheel each time.

The ideas presented in this book draw on forty years of experience working with local and international organizations, businesses, and consulting services in change management, transition, and marketing.

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This 350-page personal development book, available in both French and English and published by WebTech Publishing, is available online at www.lulu.com.

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