

## Drucker's legacy: an interview with Joseph Maciariello

Interview by Alistair Craven



**J**oseph A. Maciariello is Horton Professor of Management at the Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management and Research Director of the Drucker Institute.

He collaborated with Peter Drucker to publish *The Daily Drucker* (HarperCollins, 2004) and *The Effective Executive in Action* (HarperCollins, 2005). In addition, he has written two major articles providing a systematic, integrated description of some of the major works of Peter Drucker – “Peter F. Drucker on a Functioning Society” (*Leader to Leader*, Summer 2005), and “Peter F. Drucker on Executive Leadership and Effectiveness” (*Leader of the Future 2*, Jossey-Bass, September 2006).

He taught the course “Drucker on Management” for MBA and Executive MBA students for ten years and has prepared The Peter F. Drucker Curriculum Project for use at the Drucker/Ito School and for universities and professional societies throughout the world. The Drucker Curriculum Project includes a collaboratively taught course called “The Drucker Difference” first offered in 2007 at Claremont.

He has revised Peter Drucker’s *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (HarperCollins, 1973) which was published in May 2008, and Drucker’s book *Management Cases* (HarperCollins, 1977) which was published January 2009.

---

**AC: You collaborated with Peter Drucker on many publications over the years. How do you reflect on your time working with him?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Working with Peter was the highlight of my professional life. I describe the experience in my introduction to *The Daily Drucker*.

He was very much a mentor to me. His standards were very high and he gently prodded me on beyond what I thought possible. I worked hard, but received a lot of help and advice from him. Eventually, I thought I had a good grasp of his thoughts on the topics we were working on, but I was always surprised by the new insights he brought to these topics. One of the most memorable came as he was editing a draft that became *The Effective Executive in Action*. He was much more familiar with the topics than I, even though I had studied them for years. He insisted on finishing the task one day in June 2005. I was worried about how this heavy workday would affect his health, so I became anxious when he started to take what I thought was a detour to reflect on a new biography on Henry Ford that he had just finished. When I left his home, it dawned on me that he was simply giving me another example of the need to focus on strengths, the fatal mistake made by Henry Ford when he fired his vice-president in charge of administration. Ford was a manufacturing genius, not an outstanding general manager.

**“Drucker always believed that one should focus upon strengths, and with great strengths often come great weaknesses.”**

**AC: Drucker's first book came out in 1939 and incredibly he was still contributing to the management literature in 2004. Can you attempt to put into some perspective Drucker's achievements and importance to the discipline of management?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Drucker codified the discipline of management, largely in his first two management books, *Concept of the Corporation* (1946) and *The Practice of Management* (1954). But these contributions were directed to an even larger objective – to create a society of functioning organizations. Here is how he answered when asked the same question on January 18, 1999:

*What do I consider my most important contribution?*

- *That I early on – almost sixty years ago – I realized that MANAGEMENT has become the constitutive organ and function of the society of organizations;*
- *That MANAGEMENT is not “business management” – though it first attained attention in business – but the governing organ of ALL institutions of modern society;*
- *That I established the study of MANAGEMENT as a DISCIPLINE in its own right;*

*And;*

- *That I focused this discipline on people and power; on values, structure and constitution; AND ABOVE ALL ON RESPONSIBILITIES – that is focused the discipline of management on management as a truly LIBERAL ART.*

Each of these contributions of Drucker can be unpacked in light of his entire body of work, and the investigator would be astounded to learn just how succinct this concise summary of Drucker's work is. It appears as the *Epigraph to Management: Revised* (2008)

**AC: You have been quoted as saying that Drucker “thought in circles.” What do you mean by that?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

That was actually a mis-quote by John Byrne in *Business Week*. I wrote about what I meant about his teaching in my Introduction to *The Daily Drucker*, p. xiii:

*“First, he always makes sure he has defined the problem correctly. Next, he seems to weave a tapestry, bringing his vast knowledge to bear upon the specific problem, and putting in ‘stitches,’ or specific portions of the solution to the problem. Finally, once the problem has been circumscribed and the tapestry woven, he outlines the specific actions that should be taken to solve the problem.”*

The “circles” John wrote about must have referred to “has been circumscribed.” In John's defence, the interview was conducted at midnight his time and he was tired. He is a very good friend of mine and Drucker thought very highly of him. But, the quote bothered me and still does today as you can tell.

**AC: Can you tell us about the “Drucker on Management” courses that you teach?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

When Drucker began to reduce his teaching in the late 1990s I began, with his help, to

develop Drucker courses – the best known is “Drucker on Management.” I taught the course over a 14-week period for 10 years and used his book *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1973) and his less well-known book *Management Cases* (1977). In 2006 I completed course development of 14 two-unit graduate courses, one for each of the 14 weeks in the Drucker on Management Course.

**AC: You worked on updating Drucker’s *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* which has been hailed as essential reading for any manager. Can you tell us about the project?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Updating Drucker’s 1973 book *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* was by far the most demanding project of my life. Teaching “Drucker on Management” and developing the 14, two-unit graduate courses were absolutely essential preparation for acquiring the competence to revise his 1973 book. Because the 1973 book is still in print, we titled the revision *Management: Revised* (2008) and his casebook, *Management Cases Revised* (2009).

I tried to follow the same process he followed in updating his 1954 book to his 1973 book. I asked, “what did Drucker do in management during the 20-year period between publication of *The Practice of Management* (1954) and publication of *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1973, 1974)? It turns out he shifted focus considerably – away from for-profit and to social-sector organizations; to a strong emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship; and a heavy focus on knowledge work including the need to manage oneself and to manage the second-half of one’s life.

He agreed to the revision in June of 2005, while reminding me of the size and difficulty of the task. With his death in November 2005 I no longer could rely upon him to answer my questions and review my slow, but steady progress. So, I asked myself at every stage of the revision process, “what would Peter do?” Next, I placed a strong emphasis on the management of knowledge work, a subject Drucker worked on for half a century. I knew it had to be a central feature of the revision. Finally, I took a conservative approach: “when in doubt, don’t,” and above all “do not knowingly do harm” to the Drucker body of knowledge.

**AC: One of your current research interests is “management as a liberal art.” What can you tell us about this?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Drucker called management a liberal art and partly described what he meant by it (see Chapter 2 of *Management: Revised*). But, in other places he discussed the need to fully elaborate upon the concept believing that when elaborated upon it would change both the way we teach the liberal arts and the way we teach management. Here is the way he put it:

*“We do not know yet precisely how to link the liberal arts and management. We do not know yet what impact this linkage will have on either party – and marriages, even bad ones, always change both partners.”*

“Teaching the Work of Management,” *New Management*, 1988.

We have spent 18 months working on the topic “Management: as a Liberal Art”, and with my colleague Karen E. Linkletter – a historian and student of Peter Drucker – have made significant progress in defining the concept. As usual, Drucker was right; management will change as will the liberal arts when this concept is fully defined. We are approximately five months away from having a first draft of a monograph “Management as a Liberal Art.” Our Chapter 1 of *The Drucker Difference* book (McGraw-Hill, 2009), “Management as a Liberal Art,” provides the beginning of what we think is a deeper look at management education and practice. My talk, and our article, “The next book Peter Drucker would have written” for

the Drucker Global Forum in Vienna, deals with another aspect of this project, “Federalism and the Liberal Arts.”

**AC: You currently serve as Academic Director for the development of the Masters of Drucker on Management to be offered in Hong Kong. Can you tell us about this project?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

I have been involved with The Peter F. Drucker Academy in Beijing and Hong Kong for approximately 10 years. My involvement started with Drucker’s desire to have me review all Drucker courses offered in Beijing. Now, Mr. Shao Ming Lo, Chairman of Bright China Holdings and the Peter F. Drucker Academy, wants to develop these courses into an accredited graduate programme in Hong Kong focused upon the work of Peter Drucker. We are six months into this effort and I am beginning to work with course developers as a member of the China Working Group.

**AC: In a video interview you highlight the challenge of handling “big egos” and “star players” in business. Can you tell us a bit more about this?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Drucker always believed that one should focus upon strengths, and with great strengths often come great weaknesses – “where there are peaks, there are valleys.” It was important to Drucker that executives use the strengths of each person in an organization, even those who are difficult to lead – especially if they are talented. But, without integrity of character, these people will do damage in positions of importance and should not be promoted. Integrity is preferred to intelligence if tradeoffs are necessary. Otherwise, one must manage weaknesses, even great weaknesses, by overcoming them with the strengths of others.

**AC: What role does charisma play in leadership?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

Drucker had very mixed emotions about charisma. Because charismatic leaders are sometimes inflexible and narcissistic, they have done great damage. With that said, “charisma” is a gift that can be used to serve the mission of the organization as well as its people. We have an abundance of examples. Drucker was much tougher on charismatic leaders in his writings than in his conversations, willing to err on the side of caution – “beware charisma.”

**AC: Finally, are there any closing comments you wish to make?**

**Joseph Maciariello:**

I was a colleague of Peter Drucker for 26 years. He was a man of integrity and brilliance. He cared deeply about human beings and their development. His long-time friend Warren Bennis put it best in the foreword to *Management Cases Revised* when he said:

*“The truth is that nobody can replace Peter...the beauty, for those of us who are trying to follow in his footsteps, is that, as Isaac Newton once said, ‘We dwarfs have the good fortune of being able to stand on the shoulders of giants which allows us to see further.’”*

---

November 2009.

**“Drucker had very mixed emotions about charisma. Because charismatic leaders are sometimes inflexible and narcissistic, they have done great damage.”**