

The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency

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Abstract

Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) was the first efficiency expert, the original time-and-motion man -- the father of scientific management, the inventor of a system that became known, inevitably enough, as Taylorism. "In the past the man has been first. In the future the System will be first," he predicted boldly, and accurately. Taylor bequeathed to us, writes Robert Kanigel in this definitive biography, a clockwork world of tasks timed to the hundredth of a minute. Taylor helped instill in us the obsession with time, order, productivity, and efficiency that marks our age. His influence can be seen in factories, schools, offices, hospitals, libraries, even kitchen design. At the peak of his celebrity in the early twentieth century, Taylor gave lectures around the country and was as famous as Edison or Ford. To organized labor, he was a slave driver; to the bosses, he was an eccentric and a radical. To himself, he was a misunderstood visionary whose "one best way" would bring prosperity to worker and boss alike. Robert Kanigel's compelling chronicle takes Taylor from privileged Philadelphia childhood to factory floor to international fame, telling the story of a paradigmatic American

figure whose influence would be felt from the New Deal to Soviet Russia and remains pervasive -- even insidious -- today.

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