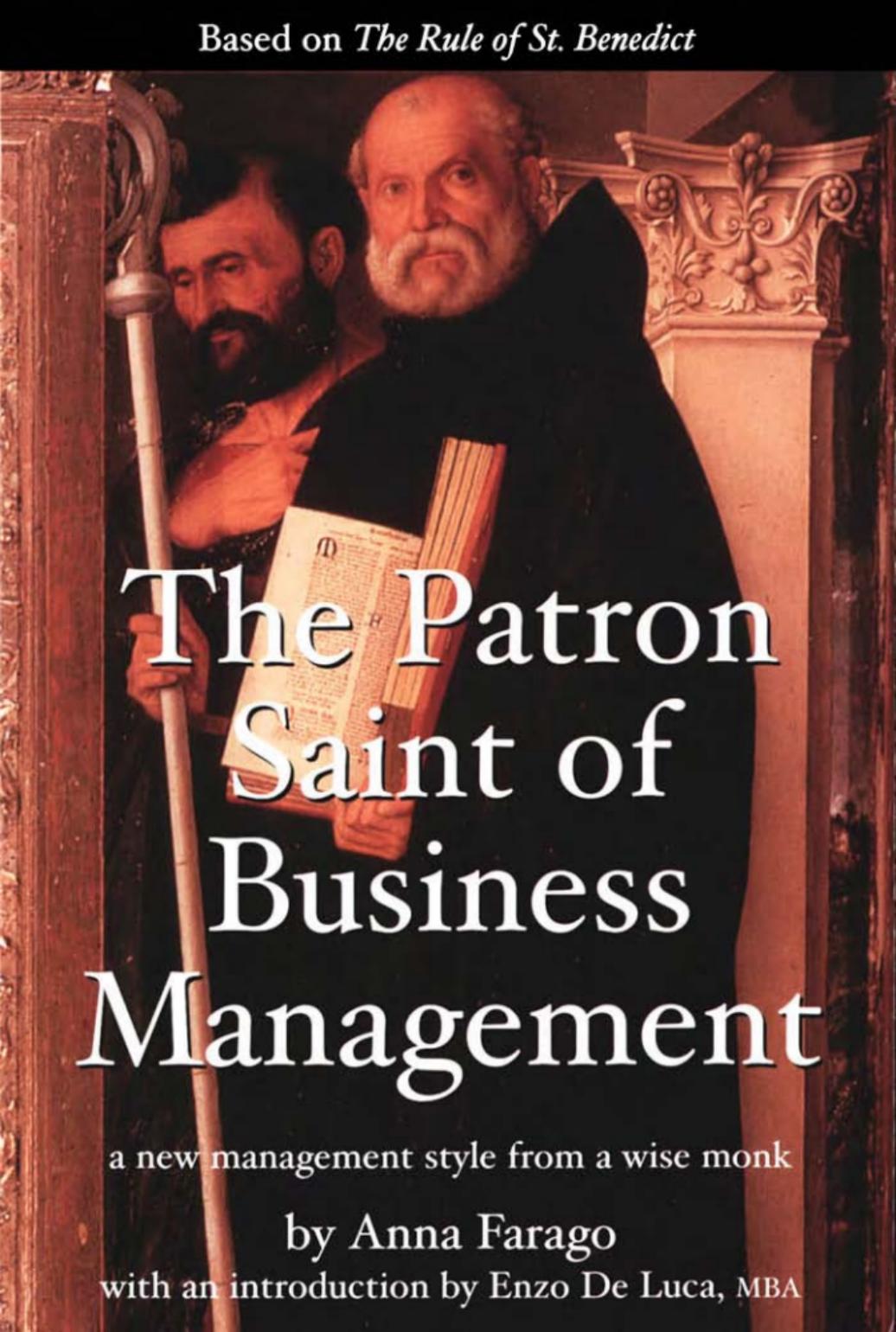


Based on *The Rule of St. Benedict*



The Patron Saint of Business Management

a new management style from a wise monk

by Anna Farago

with an introduction by Enzo De Luca, MBA

The Patron Saint
of Business
Management

Other titles by the author

How to Survive the Recession and the Recovery

The Patron Saint of Business Management

A new management style from a wise monk

Anna Farago



INSOMNIAC PRESS

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Edited by Mike O'Connor
Copy edited by Adrienne Weiss
Designed by Mike O'Connor

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Farago, Anna, 1978-

The patron saint of business management : a new management style
from a wise monk / by Anna Farago.

ISBN 1-894663-30-6

1. Personnel management. I. Title.

HF5549.F35 2002 658.3 C2002-903812-X

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program.

Printed and bound in Canada

Insomniac Press
192 Spadina Avenue, Suite 403
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5T 2C2
www.insomniacpress.com



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In loving memory of Mary Keczan

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Introduction by Enzo De Luca MBA

A patron saint is the special guardian of a person, group, trade, place or country. It appears that St. Benedict—described here as the patron saint of business management—was way ahead of his time with his great knowledge and experience of what we as business people encounter each workday. We deal with sales, marketing, accounting and organizational issues. We endure intense competition, overbearing customers, stifling bureaucracies, strained capital resources and an intransigent workforce.

Financial markets today are suffering from the greed and duplicity of some of the once mighty leaders of billion dollar corporations—the paradigms of twenty-first century business. Born in the early fifth century in Italy, St. Benedict himself lived in a perilous political, economic and religious time. With the fall of Rome, the European countryside was torn to pieces, while political and religious organizations were breaking down. As security gave way to anarchy, and disease and invasion depopulated the countryside, people needed to compress and insulate themselves for sheer survival. It was due to this need that St. Benedict wrote his Rule—a guide to daily life firmly based on ascetic and monastic principles.

The Patron Saint of Business Management takes 43 of St. Benedict's rules and deftly applies them to modern-day business to show how, like the Benedictine order, a business can learn to prevail and flourish. Based on self-betterment, communal agreement on and observance of fixed rules, the order (or business) is a single entity headed by an abbot (or manager) who leads by example.

The order maintains open lines of communication, facilitated by minimizing the levels of hierarchy. It demonstrates humility in its community, looks after its members, but also corrects them if they should stray. Work is structured but varied in order to maintain enthusiasm and maximize output. The Rule focuses on other aspects of the order from hiring, firing, managing of assets, dealing with competition, and how to receive visitors into the monastery.

One of the most compelling rules is about the order or structure of the monastery. The books and theories one reads in business school use a pyramid to emphasize the power of the CEO and the levels of hierarchy beneath him. In contrast, St. Benedict's Rule uses the image of a tree with strong varied branches representing three different levels of management: corporate, business and functional. What this tree-structure proves is that *fewer* levels work to strengthen communication, organization and productivity.

The Rule of St. Benedict grew out of necessity. Its observance by the monks has enabled it not only to endure, but to flourish. The Rule remains a relevant guide for business management today and beyond—in good and bad financial times.

The Life of Saint Benedict

Little is known about the man who was St. Benedict. All that we know of his life comes from the writings of St. Gregory in his *Second Book of Dialogues*. However, his account of the life and miracles of Benedict cannot be regarded as a biography in the modern sense of the term. Gregory's purpose in writing Benedict's life was to edify and to inspire, not to seek out the particulars of his daily life. Gregory sought to show that saints of God, particularly St. Benedict, were still operative in the Christian Church in spite of political and religious chaos present in western Europe.

What we do know for certain is that St. Benedict, the founder of the celebrated Benedictine order, is the most illustrious name in the early history of Western monasticism. The monastic system, destined to exercise an enormous influence for centuries, owes its expansion and organization to him. According to St. Gregory, Benedict was born at Nursia in Umbria around the year 480. He belonged to an old Italian family, and was sent as a boy to Rome to be educated. However, the disorder and vices of the capital drove him into solitude while still a youth. The Roman empire was crumbling, shaken by the successive assaults of barbarians, and average people were prey to

violence and corruption. Young Benedict fled from the wickedness around him.

Benedict took refuge in a solitary gorge formed by the Arno River, about 40 miles from Rome. There, in a dark inaccessible grotto near Subiaco, he found solitude and shelter. A neighbouring monk supplied him with food let down by a rope. Yet, grave dangers assailed him. After spending about three years in seclusion, a neighbouring convent of monks insisted upon choosing him as their leader. He warned them of the severity of the rule he would exercise, but they would not be dissuaded. He had hardly commenced his office when some disgruntled monks attempted to poison him. The cup containing the poison was no sooner in Benedict's hands than it burst apart; and, calmly reproving them for their ingratitude, he left them and withdrew once more into his solitude.

By this time, however, Benedict's fame had spread, and it was impossible for him to remain closed off from the world. Crowds gathered around him, and he founded twelve cloisters in the lonely valley of the Arno and on the adjacent heights. Young patricians from Rome and elsewhere were attracted to these fraternities. But with increasing fame came also threats to his life. An envious priest tried to poison Benedict—he miraculously survived. The same priest then tried to discredit Benedict and his monks by sending "seven lewd girls" into the monastery, to seduce them. Benedict decided to leave this dangerous neighbourhood, regardless of having spent thirty years there. He journeyed southwards, and settled at Monte Cassino, an isolated and picturesque hill near the source of the Liris. At the time an ancient temple of Apollo remained a place of

worship for the local residents. Benedict, in his holy enthusiasm, demolished the temple and erected two oratories in its place. Around these oratories gradually rose the famous monastery which was destined to carry the name of its founder throughout the Christian world.

Benedict lived for another fourteen years at Monte Cassino after beginning this great work. His sanctity and influence grew during this period, as illustrated by his encounter with the barbarian king Totila, who made himself master of Italy and its capital. Totila sought Benedict's approval, and, prostrating himself at his feet, accepted a rebuke for his cruelties, and departed a humbler man.

Benedict's last days were spent with his sister Scolastica, who had also forsaken the world and given herself to a religious life, having established a convent near Monte Cassino. The rules of the order allowed the brother and sister to meet only once a year. He had come to pay his accustomed visit. They had spent the day in devout conversation, and, in the fullness of her affection, Scolastica entreated him to stay the night at the convent. Benedict was not to be prevailed upon. His sister burst into tears and bowed her head in prayer. Immediately the heavens became overcast, thunder was heard, and the rain fell in torrents—it was impossible for Benedict to depart for the night. Scolastica died in the morning. A few days later Benedict died quietly in a church. He was buried at Monte Cassino by his sister's side.

Benedict's *Rule* was meant to be understood as a manual for living everyday life like Christ, in the service of God. Written, developed and implemented in a

dangerous political and religious climate, the *Rule* and its author attracted a following no one could have predicted would endure for centuries. With incredible perseverance and unparalleled holiness and devotion, the Benedictine order continues its practices today making it one of the most successful “organizations” in human history.

History of the Benedictine Order

Orders can be defined as structural hierarchies or understood as “commands” given by a person of authority to individuals of lower rank. Religious orders recognize both the structural and commandeering nature of hierarchical systems. The authority of Orders is centralized in one location and in a board of select members. One of the defining characteristics of the Benedictine Order in contrast, is that it is governed not by a hierarchy of superiors, but by a list of Rules that has earned the respect of its members to such a degree that it achieves the bond of allegiance that would ordinarily be created by a centralized authority. And the Rules can be modified according to the needs of each house of the Benedictine Order.

No verifiable proof exists to date that St. Benedict founded any Order in particular. He began his legendary founding of the Benedictine Order in a grotto in Subiaco, a small city near Rome, where he sought solitude and dedicated himself to hard labour. Already known for his sanctity, a following of monks quickly formed around Benedict leading to the development of twelve monasteries each housing twelve monks. From the grotto Benedict moved on to form the celebrated Abbey of Monte Cassino. It is believed that Benedict

wrote his Rules at Monte Cassino for the twelve monasteries that he had established. It is his philosophy that would become the foundation of his monasteries. The monks abided by his *Rule* as they would the Bible, but were not obedient to Benedict himself.

It is unconfirmed but most agree that the third abbot of Monte Cassino is responsible for beginning to spread the Rules beyond the confines of the original twelve monasteries. After Monte Cassino was ransacked by the Lombards around AD 577, the monks fled to Rome and presided there for over 140 years. It is believed that the diffusion of the Rules to the rest of the Christian world occurred within that short time span. St. Augustine carried the *Rule* from St. Andrews monastery in Rome to England around AD 595 in a mission to evangelize England. The *Rule* was promoted both through example and print with monks distributing its traditions as well as copies during their tours, particularly throughout France. Some monasteries took from the *Rule* what they desired while others rebuilt themselves based solely on its words. The monasteries founded by St. Augustine were some of the first to embrace an organizational structure.

Following a decrease in the need for community presence due to Christianity's rapid spread, the Benedictine monks retained their unity but needed to revamp their organization to draw a new source of motivation. The English monasteries attempted a reform with a new set of rules called the "Concordia Regularis." Less than a century later, more rules were introduced into the monasteries to regulate the monks' lifestyles. The new rules were meant to create a centralized authority by those that implemented them, but

the strategy did not work.

The *Rule* existed for the first four or five centuries after St. Benedict's death as the only common link between all the new monasteries that had been established. Monasteries were like businesses that keep departments isolated from one another though they all work towards the same goal. The premise of the monasteries that were under the *Rule's* guidance was that they were independent and not ruled by a greater governing hierarchy.

The fact that the Benedictine monasteries never fell under the rule of one solitary congregation and have remained an entity without experiencing any period of dissolution, makes them unique in history. Of course, monks, being human, strayed from the *Rule* and failed their Christian beliefs. The history of the Benedictine monastery is peppered with scandal. However, the reformations that repaired these cracks in the Benedictine foundation are stronger than the scandals because they were drawn from the *Rule* itself—there were no external influences for reform.

The *Rule* impacted the people and institutions of England more than any other country. The history of the English Church *is* the history of the Benedictine Order. Preceding its popularity in England, the Order travelled through Germany, then Denmark, Scandinavia and Iceland. About 100 years later Spanish monasteries adopted the *Rule*. By the ninth century, the Benedictine Order had become the only form of monastic life in Western Europe, excluding Scotland, Ireland and Wales where Celtic observance would prevail for another 300 years.

After a few centuries in which the separate monas-

teries coexisted, the monasteries grew so much in number that they recognized the need for change. The fact that monasteries were self-contained was beginning to be a problem because the increasing population required amalgamation. As a result, the monasteries began developing branches that retained dependence with or connection to the originating monastery. The *Rule's* guidance still prevailed, but the monasteries began congregating independently, which strengthened and shaped the Benedictine existence.

For organizational purposes, and not power-seeking ones, the monasteries began to amalgamate, taking their lead from an example set by the Abbey of Cluny around 910. The abbot of Cluny, St. Berno, became the head of a group of dependent monasteries and initiated the first governed order of monasteries. By the twelfth-century St. Berno's efforts proved fruitful as the congregation grew to more than 300 new monasteries in Spain, England, Poland, Scotland, Italy and France.

Many monasteries attempted to match Cluny's success—using the *Rule* of St. Benedict to nourish and grow an order—but many missed one essential part of the equation: community. In France, around AD 817, Benedict of Aniane attempted to reform a group of houses by confederating them. With powerful friends like Louis the Pious (Benedict connected the central monastery to his palace), Benedict sought absolute uniformity among all his residing monasteries by assembling a council that did not include the community beneath him and by developing a series of eighty new or modified rules (called *capitula*). Though the *capitula* contained rules that were current to the times, the lack of community involvement broke a basic Rule, and cen-

tralized authority ended with Benedict of Aniane's death.

Even Benedictine monasteries that lived by the *Rule* did not necessarily follow it in its entirety or else they operated independently without community involvement from fellow Benedictine monasteries. Yet by the twelfth century almost all the Benedictine monasteries that existed independently joined forces with the abbey of Cluny. The confederation did not aim to strengthen a centralized government at Cluny—it aimed to better maintain the Rules of the Benedictine order. Cluny encouraged the same mutual dependence that the *Rule* encourage.

Cluny was successful in unifying the cause of Christianity and making the work of the monasteries within communities more efficient. Following Cluny, such respected abbeys as Monte Cassino and Subiaco modelled their spiritual life after St. Berno's example. Uniform observance prevailed into the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries among monasteries that followed the customs and policies of Cluny. This uniform observance was maintained among the monasteries while enabling them to govern independently.

A number of Benedictine abbeys maintained their original independence well into the twelfth century despite centralization. The last of the independent monasteries was drawn in when a council in 1215 decided that all monasteries would unite into a congregation. The congregation was to hold meetings regularly with representatives from each abbey to retain effective communication between all the monasteries. In a sense, 1215 was the beginning of corporate level management. In each congregation one abbot was elected