

BOOK REVIEW

Peter Drucker, still essential.

BY MARK WILLIAMS

WHAT WE HAVE in *The Essential Drucker* was chosen from 60 years of Peter Drucker's writings.

The selection was initially done by Atsuo Ueda, a longtime Drucker translator, who picked 57 chapters to represent Mr. Drucker's work in Japanese. The result was issued in three volumes in Japan last year: one on management, one on the individual in organizations, and one on society in general. For the U.S. *Essential Drucker*, however, Mr. Drucker's publisher narrowed the focus to management.

Mr. Drucker displays a consistent tenor through the years. Dozens of pages pass in which one homily-like admonition about the moral nature of good management may follow another—none of it wrong or less than ethically admirable, but sometimes tending toward a thudding Episcopalian earnestness. One keeps reading, however, because at any point Mr. Drucker may drop in one of those brilliant perceptions that arise out of his greatest strength: the ability to see, before almost anyone else, what's truly going on in society and the economy.

When they come, these perceptions are usually supported by facts that would be known to few, if any, besides Mr. Drucker. When I interviewed him, he assured me during a discussion on health care that Franz Kafka had been one of the leading experts of worker's compensation and factory safety of his time (it's possible). Then in the next breath, Mr. Drucker claimed that an Eisenhower ini-

THE ESSENTIAL DRUCKER

By Peter Drucker

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tiative to establish universal American health care in the '50s had been blocked by the United Auto Workers union because at that time the only benefit the unions could still promise was company-paid health care (highly probable). When I asked where I could find out more, he said nowhere: "I am the single survivor of that commission of Mr. Eisenhower's."

Mr. Drucker, currently 91, was a working contemporary of the now-vanished American corporate management that was born in the late 19th century and dominated the mid-20th: Eisenhower, Alfred Sloan of General Motors, and Tom Watson of IBM were some of its leading lights. As his autobiography, *Adventures of a Bystander*, reveals, he has also known the likes of Sigmund Freud, John Maynard Keynes, Buckminster Fuller, and Marshall McLuhan. Privatization, outsourcing, management theory, knowledge workers, and the knowledge economy are all concepts Mr. Drucker originated. Moreover, his mind remains first-class, and he's thinking about the future beyond the information revolution. So perhaps soon his publishers will bring us that volume of Drucker on society that was a best-seller in Japan last year. ■

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