

[Close Window](#)

## The Order Of The Blue Vase

Posted online: Nov 09, 2003 at 0000 hrs

The United States, soon after the First World War, was somewhat of a nation in isolation. The Senate's refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty kept it out of the League of Nations. The influx of immigrants were a drain on the economy and the economy was yet to get its succour from the magic of "mass production". The invincible, ruthless American tycoon was the icon of the day and of screen-writer Peter B Kyne's tales of Cappy Ricks.

Even though Mr Kyne really attained the halo of an author with his best-selling love story *Kindred Of The Dust*, the legend of his crusty timber tycoon *Cappy Ricks* (first published as a nautical adventure story in 1916) and its successors, *Cappy Ricks Retires* and *The Go-Getter* made several comebacks. The Go-Getter, the story of a war cripple turned super salesman, who won Cappy Ricks' confidence and a \$ 10,000 job, first appeared as a serial in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1921.

Business historian Alan Axelrod puts that story back in the bestseller lists, with an "Afterword" on motivation, in times when business worldwide is trying to live down a recession and the aftermath of the terror strike on the twin towers in New York. The Go-Getter according to its publishers, has sold five lakh copies worldwide, but this time it is "non-fiction". The unavoidable declivities of the Ricks Logging and Lumbering Company's roller coaster ride to riches, are parables for modern day managers to learn from, and war veteran Bill Peck is the paragon of 21st Century virtues - the self-motivated achiever.

As Cappy Ricks reminds his old-fashioned general manager, "This is a smart man's world, a persistent man's world, not an old man's world...And the go-getters of this world are as often as not under thirty years of age." If that was true of the United States in 1921, it is true of the whole wide world in 2003 and Mr Axelrod knows it. He uses Bill Peck's foot-in-the-door drive and Cappy Ricks' earthy pragmatism to underscore the winning mantras of the day.

Bill Peck walks with a limp and his right arm has been amputated to the elbow. He had been turned down at Ricks Logging & Lumbering Company, before he seeks an audience with the founder. He gets the job, but with it, an impossible assignment to sell smelly "coarse and stringy" skunk spruce. Bill Peck takes the assignment and sells the wood at a dollar over the price set for it. Cappy Ricks, whose otherwise effective sales manager Henderson, is floundering at the company's Shanghai office, then puts Bill Peck through the test of the Blue Vase.

Peck has to buy a "cloisonne blue" vase, that does not exist at the address given to him, and hand it over to Cappy Ricks that evening. When he finally manages to locate the owner of the store on a Saturday evening, open up the shop and procure the \$ 2,000 vase in exchange for a diamond ring, Cappy Ricks had left town, ostensibly to attend a friend's wedding anniversary.

Bill Peck charts a flight, flags down a running train and hands the vase over to his boss, only to learn that all his travails of the evening before had been contrived. The shaken man then learns that all Ricks' men had to go through the "test of the blue vase" to attain senior positions. Peck finds himself chosen for the Shanghai office at a salary of \$ 10,000.

Mr Axelrod says in his "Afterward" that the blue vase lurks in the path of every achiever and was the real test of his element. Selling skunk wood was in the realm of thankless tasks that often become training grounds for better assignments, but the blue vase was really the open sesame to the top slot.