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In case you wanted more of the history of civil service that we discussed in the Success Series webinar, here's a great article from The Bridge, July 2010.

Charles Dunbar and Civil Service Reform

By Becky Cresap

“De-ducts,” “deadheads,” and “double-dippers” are funny words when you first glance at them, but these definitions are all too familiar when looking back on Louisiana’s political history and its infamous “spoils” system. The spoils system was one in which a politician or political party awarded government jobs to specific individuals as a reward for voting for the winning party.

These appointments often required a “de-duct,” or a percentage of your paycheck given to support the incumbent’s candidacy and party. During the years of the spoils system, certain methods were used to keep individuals voting for the same political party. “Deadheads” were persons who collected government checks for doing little or no productive labor for the state, and “double dippers” were individuals on two or more state payrolls.

The history of Civil Service is the story of the struggle between the supporters of the spoils system and the advocates of an employment system based on merit. From the early 1800's through the administration of Huey Long, the spoils system was the customary way of government employment.

Only in the late 1930's, during the governorship of Richard Leche, did change begin to occur because some state employees objected to "de-ducts" and went public with claims of corruption.

More change came as a result of the 1940 Governor's race when Sam Jones, on a reformist platform, defeated spoils system supporter Earl K. Long. Governor Jones promised a complete reorganization of state government and formed a civil service reform committee to that end. At the head of the civil service reform committee was Charles E. Dunbar, Jr., considered today to be the "father" of civil service in Louisiana. A prominent lawyer and civic leader from New Orleans, he led the committee in studying leading civil service laws of both the United States and foreign countries.

The statute drafted by Dunbar and enacted into law created a comprehensive Civil Service system for state government. The Civil Service law established a statewide "Office of Director of Personnel" (known today as the Director of Civil Service) that was not appointed by any governor. It also provided for the creation of a classification plan by which state jobs are placed into various classes, called for competitive qualifying examinations, and declared who would be a classified or unclassified employee.

The Civil Service law established the Civil Service Commission and charged it with certain responsibilities, such as approving pay plans and hearing employee appeals. Employees could be subjected to disciplinary action, including dismissal, but "cause" had to be shown by their appointing authority if such actions were taken. Political or religious reasons were not "cause" for disciplinary action.

Finally, the Civil Service law forbade any person from using political pressure in connection with any appointment or promotion for the purpose of

influencing the vote or political action of any employee. In return, an employee in the classified system was forbidden from contributing to a political organization or purpose, becoming a member of a national, state, or local committee of a political party, or making public speeches or statements as part of a political campaign.

Throughout the 1940's, supporters of the spoils system continued to attack the new statute and eventually repealed the prohibition of political activity by classified employees.

Department heads used coercion and threats to influence voting and encourage partisan political activities of employees. Although the threat of politically-based disciplinary action was gone, the risk of denied pay raises, promotions, and transfers to less favorable locations still influenced employees' political behavior. In 1948, a special session in the Legislature repealed the state civil service law.

The Louisiana Civil Service League, created in 1940 and led by Dunbar to promote the merit system concept, recognized that the challenges to the civil service system could only be overcome by having a constitutional amendment to establish and protect it. Dunbar drafted the constitutional amendment and it was adopted in 1952.

Now, established by the State Constitution, the civil service system cannot be repealed or amended except by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and subsequent ratification by a majority of voters.

The Louisiana Civil Service system has seen many changes since the early reform days of the forties. However, pioneering the initial reform through much opposition was a man who believed in a fair and just system, Charles E. Dunbar Jr. Today, his honorable name lives on through the Dunbar career service awards given out each year by the Louisiana Civil Service League to classified civil service employees who distinguish themselves through unselfish service to the citizens of Louisiana.