

We Are Making Progress—Why?

(The third of a series of articles by Hugh Booth, Secretary-Treasurer of ASTD. Installments one and two appeared in the 1948 September-October and November-December issues of THE JOURNAL.)

Smug satisfaction keeps no company with vision.

The other day we received a warning. The writer of the memorandum stated that he sensed a growing attitude of complacent satisfaction among training people. Although he cited no grounds for his concern, his statement resulted in some serious thought. In fact, the net outcome is the approach we are now making to this third and last installment on progress.

We all recognize that none of us has any cause for an attitude of smug satisfaction with the progress we are making. None of us would admit that we held such an attitude. It is negative. It would retard the cause of training as seriously as the skepticism we discussed in the November-December installment. That skepticism, you will recall, questioned whether top management would ever realize the great potentialities of training as one of the most effective tools of administration.

"Great potentialities!" "One of the most!" There we have the type of descriptive phrase that characterizes the spoken and written evaluations of the training function which we read and hear on every hand! Could it be that such expressions lead some persons to conclude that training people are developing a disproportionate sense of self-importance?

On the other hand, do the facts justify such a generalization? One can reply to these queries only out of his own observation and experience. The great majority of training people whom I have met have impressed me with their sincere attitude of appreciation for, and delight in, such progress as they have been permitted to make. But they are extremely aware of the untouched problems and needs that lie ahead.

As a group, training people have been quick to recognize the fact that the training skill is a job-requisite of every leader in the organization. They accept it as one of their duties to help everyone in the company, who supervises the activities of others, to become

a good trainer. They have openly confessed their inability to make a real success of training without the cooperation of all of management.

Coupled with this appreciation and desire for cooperation, I have, almost without exception, found a dynamic vision. In many cases it is a vision which encompasses the significance of training to the most far reaching problems of our day. I find that these members are thinking of the great potentialities of the training function.

This vision sustains the directors' faith in the face of obstacles. It nurtures humility rather than vain-glory. That is why it is dynamic.

We were discussing this one day in the office with a member of ASTD who directs a very large training operation.

"Training," I ventured, "will help to bring about the day when the interests of stockholders, co-workers and consumers will be considered factually and objectively with an understanding of the give and take necessary to sustain a sound economy."

"I will go along with that," the training director agreed. "We will come to understand this economy and the effect of our actions upon it. Conferences, then, will be activated by a determination that people shall be the masters of their economy, not just puppets within it. No group, governmental or otherwise, will be allowed to deprive people of their free enterprise or regiment them in any way to satisfy their own personal ambitions, economic or political theories."

"Such long range thinking which embraces not only industrial relations but also our total social-political-economy," I asked, "what has it to do with on-the-job, methods, and technical training?"

"Everything!" he replied.

I contended that induction and orientation training, economic programs and programs

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dealing with company operations might to some extent, and in time, contribute to that sort of understanding. It seemed to me obvious that certain phases of pre-supervision training, of supervisory and executive development should prepare men to work and think together factually. Perhaps through this process men will come to the point where they will put, on a par with their own interests, the good of the whole company, of all the parties at interest, of the community and ultimately, perhaps, of the national and world economy, I argued. "But in what way" I asked, "do you mean that technical training, training in operational skills, methods and procedures can contribute to such 'golden-rulism'?"

"First," my companion replied, "there is the matter of productivity. In time technical training, properly conducted will help men to appreciate technical skills and development as an essential factor in maintaining a high standard of living."

"Then when technical training is permeated with genuine belief in both the pragmatic and spiritual, the efficiency and the character-personality developing possibilities of democratic processes, it should be in itself a realistic demonstration of how we can work and live together understandingly, competitively and cooperatively to the mutual good of all concerned."

"Dr. Orlo L. Crissey's panel" he continued, "composed of Martin S. Firth, Richard R. Crow and L. E. Castle at the Regional Conference in Purdue last fall, demonstrated how such situation-changing and people-changing programs could be developed. Training men who appreciate the possibilities of this administrative tool will try to plan all types of programs so that both trainers and trainees, on all company levels, will orient themselves and their responsibilities soundly and constructively within the company, community and economy."

"Constantly we must take on-the-job, technical problems" he concluded, "into our human relations conferences. Human relations discussions must be vitalized with the real, everyday,

departmental, divisional, company and community problems. This, of course, we try to do through actual case studies, role playing and other devices."

We have made an attempt to reproduce this conversation because it seems to illustrate, realistically, that vision of which we are speaking. We found it last summer in communities which were only beginning to realize their industrial and commercial prowess.

In these communities we noticed a very understandable effort to group all administrative staff people within a single association. Nevertheless, after the meeting, training people would express their keen interest in the emphasis that training could mean much more to a company than merely improving technical know-how. Then, invariably, they would tell of the need which they felt for meeting with other training people locally, regularly, to exchange experiences.

It seemed to us that here was the same vision, the same urge at work. Whenever we hesitate to act upon it, we might do well to ask ourselves what would have happened to the impact which safety training has made upon society, had not safety-minded people launched a national crusade to save human life.

Perhaps we should go further and ask ourselves, not cynically or facetiously, but with statesmanlike foresight: "For what kind of work opportunities and life experiences are we saving human lives? For industrial strife, dissension, depressions and wars; or for understanding, freedom of enterprise, competition tempered with open cooperation growing out of mutual respect for one another's rights?"

This sort of sincere appraisal of the facts will lead us to realize the advantages of meeting regularly and frequently with other local training people, on occasion in Regional Conferences, and certainly once a year at the annual ASTD Convention.

In this series we have thought together of the progress we are making from three

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Supervisory Training in Texas—continued

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to realize that many of his problems as a supervisor can be cured if he does a proper job of instructing. We discuss the supervisor's responsibility to management, to his workers, in cooperation, in reducing waste, in breaking in new people, and in job instruction.

Unit II is entitled "Handling People", and in it we discuss the different types of people we have in our work groups and work out ways of handling them. We dwell on giving of orders so they will be carried out properly, evidence and causes of good morale and how to maintain it, worker evaluation, grievance procedures, induction problems and practice in solving job relations problems. Appropriate slide and motion picture films are used throughout.

"Work Improvement" is the title of Unit III. The discussion here centers around production planning, time budgeting and job methods improvement. We go into job analysis and time study to the extent that the supervisor can use them in improving the work methods in his department. Suggestion plans, their use and value, are also discussed.

Unit IV is "Accident Prevention". We first classify accidents to get the supervisor used to the standard terminology; then we analyze some of the hidden costs involved in an accident to get the supervisors to set up a series of objectives of an accident prevention program. One of the first objectives, of course,

is the elimination of hazards, so a hazard check list is developed and each supervisor makes a check of his own department and is helped to set up a plan for hazard elimination. After stressing the establishment of a preventive program, we turn attention to a curative program with a study of case histories and a method of accident analysis. Many safety slide films are used to illustrate points brought out in the discussion.

The final unit, V, is labeled "Leadership". We first study the qualities that make a person a leader; then we help the supervisors analyze themselves in view of the standards set up. A plan for developing those characteristics where the supervisor thinks he needs strengthening is set up. Practice is also given in organizing the agenda and leading small department discussion meetings.

That these sessions are well-accepted is proven by the large number of industries and trade associations who are participating in the program. In addition to those already mentioned, these include the Southwest Utility Contractors, the State Eleemosynary Institutions, the Bureau of Mines, and, of course, the chemical and oil industries. A railroad training program is now in prospect which will require one or more supervisor trainers for several years.

The Texas program of supervisory training, conducted under the direction of the State Board for Vocational Education, is developing in true Texas fashion.

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approaches:

1. What we have found out about ASTD progress should only be an indication of what needs to be done and can be, with our help;
2. The fact that we have accepted constructive change as training's major function, should create in us a feeling of genuine need for the exchange of experiences and skills with other training people locally and internationally;

3. This vision of the opportunities and possibilities of training will most certainly impell us to work intently through the medium of our international society to realize that vision.

We have probably not joined issue with the warning and concern of our correspondent in presenting this third and last approach to this series. But that is hardly necessary to an agreement that where there is vision there is no room or time for smug satisfaction!