

# Worker Training In Small Business

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This is a preliminary report on a type of worker training program, which, on the basis of the evidence at hand shows encouraging promise. It was instituted by a management consulting company in a small plant of some 265 employees as the third phase of a training program which included executive and supervisory training.

When the topic of completing the program by extending some specific training along similar lines to the worker level was first discussed, top management was apprehensive as to the cost. If the 265 workers were taken from their jobs for only three one-hour sessions (the minimum length considered), almost 800 hours of productive time would be lost, plus the instructional costs. Would the results, if they could be measured (and results from training are extremely difficult to "pin down"), be worth the expense? The only way to answer such a question for this particular company was to try it. Since little or no experience was available on which to draw, it is a

tribute to the progressiveness of management that their decision was positive.

Since the executive and supervisory programs had been directed toward improvement in human relations know-how, the logical objective appeared to be to encourage a better understanding of the personal aspects involved in the work situation to the end that a more cooperative relationship between management and employees might evolve.

In accordance with the objective, a program was outlined for three, fifty minute sessions. Session one would be concerned with a discussion of what workers wanted from life and to what extent these wants might be found through work. Two would explore the feelings, attitudes and behavior of individuals while at work, and the third meeting would be directed toward drawing from the participants basic feelings about the organization of work and suggestions for improving it.

The following outline was used as a basis for the guided discussions:

## Session 1

- I. What do you want from life?
  - A. Money
  - B. Friends
  - C. Self-respect
- II. How an organization of work can help one realize these wants
  - A. By providing a safe place to work
  - B. By providing equipment, materials and machines
  - C. By providing an organization of effort
    1. Why organization is necessary
    2. How our organization works
    3. How you fit into the organization
      - a. What you contribute
      - b. What you can gain—money, friends, self-respect

## Session 2

- I. Your wants—money, friends, self-respect
- II. How you can find these through work
  - A. In belonging
  - B. In feeling important
  - C. In knowing
  - D. In acquiring
  - E. In contributing
  - F. In progressing
  - G. In following
- III. What gets in the way
  - A. Company procedures, regulations and rules
  - B. Physical handicaps
  - C. Lack of aptitude
  - D. Lack of confidence
  - E. Lack of training and education
  - F. Lack of personal desire to get ahead
  - G. Imagined blockings
  - H. Changes in the work situation
- IV. How you may try to get around roadblocks
  - A. Excuse self—explain away the blocking
  - B. Blame others
  - C. Act childish
  - D. Mimic another's actions who appears not to be blocked

- E. Seek satisfaction through substituting another or lesser goal
  - F. Change behavior so that others may not realize the fact that one feels blocked
  - G. Positive, direct, remedial attack on the cause
- V. What roadblocks can do to your personality
- A. Illness—mental and physical
  - B. Extreme suspicion of everybody and everything
  - C. Extreme nervousness
  - D. Feelings of persecution
  - E. Withdrawal from in-plant contacts, both social and non-social
- VI. What you can do about roadblocks
- A. Talk them over with someone—give your supervisor a chance to help
  - B. Think about the what and why of your behavior
  - C. Think about how and what you may be losing of the things you want from life through your behavior—is it worth it?
  - D. Do you really go half way?

### Session 3

- I. What you dislike about your work
- II. What you would like to see done about it
- III. What you like about your work
- IV. How you could do a better job
- V. How you can satisfy more of your wants through work

The first two groups of twelve each were selected at random from newer employees in various departments. Their supervisors, who had been in the previous supervisory training program, explained the nature of the meetings to their respective workers. The meetings were scheduled for fifty minutes each on three consecutive Mondays at 2:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M. respectively. If results were encouraging, after this test run, the program would be continued.

The guided group discussion method built around a flannel board was used.

It was felt that the flannel board would portray interestingly the rather intangible aspects of human nature which comprised the subject matter. An easel pad was provided as an additional teaching aid.

Four weeks after completion of the test program, an attempt at evaluation was made. Seven supervisors who had had fourteen workers in the program were interviewed. In addition, productivity records for four participants (the only workers in the program for whom

uniform, quantitative data were available) were examined.

Each of the supervisors had a very positive, almost enthusiastic attitude toward the program. Supervisors of five workers volunteered the following information:

1. A rather disgruntled worker seemed to take new interest in his work and demonstrated same with the first positive actions taken toward management in months.
2. A new employee who had been rather "hard to handle" had a greatly improved attitude.
3. An older worker who had been having frequent emotional outbursts had not had such since the inception of the program. He has become much more cooperative. (Note: this worker has since left the organization to take a higher paid, supervisory position in another company and at this writing seems to be very happily situated)
4. A new woman employee made a quicker adjustment and shows far more interest in her work than another woman who was employed at the same time but did not participate in the program. The supervisor seemed convinced that the training "was the difference."
5. Immediately after the classes, one of the male participants expressed an interest in college and has since enrolled in night, extension classes.

Production records of the program participants for the four weeks prior to the sessions compared with productivity

for the three weeks of the classes plus one week after revealed increases of from 2% to 23% in three of the four cases. In the instance of the one employee who experienced a slightly decreased output, her supervisor felt that the critical illness of a close relative had been a contributing factor. Another rather interesting comparison showed that the four workers produced on the average as much in the six hours and a half on the days of the classes as they did in seven and a half hours on Mondays prior to the program.

On the basis of this sketchy, incomplete but encouraging data, the decision was made to continue the program with certain minor modifications. For example, the size of the groups was increased from twelve to sixteen; the hours of sessions were changed from the afternoon to the morning at 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.; and selection in the main was from those workers who had evidenced less positive work attitudes and for whom more uniform, comparable productivity records were available.

Three weeks after the second phase of the program, six supervisors having twenty workers in the two groups were interviewed and productivity records for fifteen participants (the only workers in the groups for whom comparable records were available) were examined.

Again, the attitude of the supervisors, without exception, was positive and several expressed the wish that the classes would be continued. They volunteered such information as "the attitudes of three of my problem people have greatly improved. Two of them have come to

me and we got to the bottom of some of our difficulties."

Production records in average units per day are inconclusive, although it can be seen from the following table that

results were far from discouraging. Seven participants showed substantial increases in productivity, while five recorded decreased production. However, in only one instance, that of employee G, was the reduction in output significant.

PRODUCTION RECORDS\* OF PARTICIPANTS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

Employee	Ave. of 3 weeks before	Ave. of 3 weeks during	Ave. of 3 weeks after	Change fol- lowing first session
A	10.7	10.9	10.2	Loss
B	7.1	8.3	8.2	Gain
C	10.8	12.4	10.8	Gain
D	6.0	6.2	5.9	No change
E	0.7	1.4	1.1	Gain
F	14.9	21.4	18.1	Gain
G	153.0	139.2	151.0	Loss
H	79.9	78.8	77.8	Loss
I	6.6	7.3	7.2	Gain
J	0.9	0.7	0.9	No change
K	0.57	0.77	0.7	Gain
L	2.8	2.7	3.2	Gain
M	33.2	32.3	32.0	Loss
N	5.3	5.2	5.0	Loss
O	5.0	5.2	5.0	No change

\*Data based on daily production in units, including all participants for whom quantitative records were available.

Additional data concerning rate of output for the reduced work day on the Mondays of the classes were obtained. Comparable data, available for only seven of the participants, limited the

comparison to the two Mondays immediately preceding the program with the three Mondays during the program. The following data indicates that production for these seven workers was actually

PRODUCTION RECORDS\* OF PARTICIPANTS FOR THE TWO MONDAYS  
PRIOR TO AND THE THREE MONDAYS DURING PROGRAM

Employee	Two Mondays before	Three Mondays during	Change
1	8.5	10.5	Gain
2	9.1	8.9	Loss
3	5.3	6.1	Gain
4	5.1	3.5	Loss
5	4.9	5.9	Gain
6	4.3	5.6	Gain
7	3.1	3.3	Gain

\*In average units per day

higher in the total although each work day was reduced by one hour during the program. In only one instance was there reduced output while in four of the seven cases quite marked increases were made. Added to the brief data from the first groups concerning productivity on class days, we note that for eleven employees on a reduced work day, seven produced above average, two average, and only two produced less than average. Although certainly not conclusive, it is evident that the initial apprehension of management concerning lowered output is not a valid one.

During the last session for each of the four groups, some thirty-seven usable suggestions were obtained. These related to improving the work situation. At least one has already been instituted and notation of the source was mentioned in the house organ. Transcripts of the suggestions, without reference to individuals of course, were made to be utilized in future supervisory training sessions.

Certainly any sweeping claims concerning the effectiveness of such a pro-

gram would be presumptuous on the basis of the sketchy evidence presently on hand. Certain further followup of the participants will be necessary before any definite statements concerning the value of such program could be defended. But the fact remains that the attitudes of the workers and management toward the program are exceedingly positive. For example, other employees are beginning to ask when they may have a chance to "go to school," and supervisors are inquiring relative to the beginning of the next sessions. It appears that this training has indeed accomplished the first step toward attaining the objective—a more cooperative work relationship.

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