

Communications in Industry

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EVERY DAY has its fair share of misunderstandings for most of us. Some of these misunderstandings are simple, easily adjusted matters. Others are more complex and occasionally get quite out of hand. Failure to understand is, regrettably, a common occurrence in industry. And, in industry, it is one of the greatest impediments to production.

We in industry call the process of transmitting a meaning, or the manner in which information passes up and down a line of authority, "communication." The process is complicated by the fact that almost all information must be transmitted through a number of people.

Distortion of Information

As information moves up the line, it becomes more and more generalized. A good deal of it reaches the top in an extremely rarified condition. On the other hand, information necessarily accumulates detail as it goes down each step. Occasionally it has acquired so many embellishments by the time it reaches the worker that it is completely distorted.

All of this is nobody's fault in particular. It is difficult for an individual to transmit information without conditioning it in one way or another. His viewpoint is naturally colored by his immediate concerns. Nevertheless, distortion of information in the communication process remains a problem. As a result of it, those at the top do not always have a clear picture of existing conditions. At the same time, those in the line of authority do not always have a clear picture of the aims and purposes of management. This lack of integration of understanding and effort adversely affects production to a substantial degree.

We are basically an industrial nation. A major factor in our national growth is the rapidly increasing activity of industry. As industry grows, the separate units become increasingly larger and more complex. Most of our major industry today operates in such large units that only a corporate organization can handle them. You might say that we are rapidly becoming a corporate society.

The corporate organization can only operate effectively through unified activity of a number of individuals work-

* From a speech given at the recent annual meeting of the Southwest Social Science Association in Dallas, Texas. It was brought to our attention by R. A. Wagner, Chairman of the Publicity Committee of the North Texas Society of Training Directors, ASTD.

ing in highly-specialized compartments. Its very size often interferes with unified cooperative action. The individual tends to become lost in the maze and is unable to make the contribution which is necessary to the success of the organization.

No matter how big an organization may be, it still depends upon the contributions of every individual in it.

Employees Need Information

To be effective, communication in industry must furnish every member of an organization the information he needs to do his job, and must insure that all information moving throughout the organization is logically interrelated. However, that is only the physical part of the problem.

It is now generally recognized that the worker is not simply an economic unit. He is, rather, an individual human being. Only the person adequately adjusted to the work situation can become an efficient economic unit. The worker must obtain, in the work place, satisfaction of various human needs before he can produce efficiently.

Having the necessary pertinent information promotes efficiency of an employee to a certain extent. But provision must also be made for transmission of his own various meanings to the places where they can take effect. Communication, to be effective, must be a two-way process. The worker must have a sense of participation. Activity alone does not fill this need. He must not only participate, but must realize that he does. He must feel that he is making

a vital contribution to the success of the organization if he is to continue to actually make that contribution.

Development of this attitude is largely the responsibility of supervision. Supervision must be equipped with a sound knowledge of human relations. This involves many things, but has its basis largely in understanding and consideration. The application of this knowledge is the difficult and important part. Unless the individual can communicate his understanding of and consideration for the other individual, his efforts have little virtue. Therefore, communication is part of human relations. Unless there is good communication—transmission of meaning—there cannot be good relations among the various members of an organization. Without this, there cannot be efficient production. The productive work place is that which is, in the opinion of the worker, the "good" work place.

In any situation there is, of course, communication. The more effective communication becomes, the more productive the organization becomes.

Industry, generally speaking, is aware of the importance of communication. Extensive efforts are constantly being made to improve it. Millions of dollars are being spent annually to develop an awareness of the nature and importance of the communication problem and a knowledge of the various techniques of good communication.

Conferences Help Communication

In recognition of the fact that communication is a phase of applied human relations, conferences on human rela-

tions are being held with all levels of supervision. These conferences actually are discussions, by the participants, of the various factors involved in human relations. Various fundamental principles are furnished the conferees, but no effort is made to solve individual problems. The conferees work out the general conclusions on each topic. Actually then, this human relations training is also practical training in communication. Supervision, in turn, is increasingly and effectively putting into effect the conclusions arrived at through these conferences, largely through application of both the system and principles developed in the conferences.

Management as a whole is making a strong effort to furnish individuals not only all the information needed on the job, but, insofar as practical, information relative to the overall aims and situation of the organization.

An effort is being made to impart factual information in a manner geared to good human relations principles. Training in technical matters is more and more being given with a view to the fact that understanding of the relation of a particular operation to the larger project is as important as knowledge of the specific steps in the operation.

Convair Supervisory Conferences

At Convair, management has recently inaugurated a series of supervisory relations conferences which I believe to be a very advanced practice in the application of the teamwork principle. This program is essentially a communication medium and is aimed directly at pro-

moting better mutual understanding and relationships throughout supervision.

The program is intended simply to augment the regular channels of communication. Management has pointed out that it is important that this activity must not in any way supersede or interfere with current procedures and policies and that it must not impair the authority of the line. It is not to be devoted to propaganda, inspiration, or the handling of personal difficulties and problems of detail. Rather, it is aimed at definition and discussion of matters of broad and general interest. Management has stressed the point that it is more interested in gaining than in giving information. *TWO-WAY* communication is the keynote of the program.

Trial Conferences

An especially significant indication of management's thinking is the manner in which the program was developed. A trial series of conferences, each attended by twenty-five supervisors representing a cross-section of level and department, was held for the purpose of discussing ways and means of improving communication and relations within supervision. The current program was set up in accordance with the almost unanimous recommendations of all of these groups.

Resultant Program

Each conference is composed, as in the trial series, of from twenty-five to thirty members of supervision comprising a cross-section of level and department, and is led by a member of the plant executive committee. The schedule is so arranged that every member of

supervision participates in a conference at least three times a year.

To insure that discussions are concerned with matters of general interest and importance, topics are selected from questionnaires submitted by members of supervision.

Each supervisor is notified a week in advance when scheduled for a conference, and is furnished an agenda outline of the topic to be discussed at that time.

Each topic is discussed for a period of four weeks and minutes are kept of each meeting. Upon completion of each four-week series, these minutes are summarized and a copy of the summary furnished to each member of supervision.

The conferences are proving quite a success. Participation in the discussions is general, and valuable information is being disseminated throughout supervision.

At one of the trial conferences, when the matter of the composition of each conference was being considered, a superintendent voiced the opinion that there should not be a mixture of levels in any one meeting. He felt that differences in rank would discourage participation on the part of the lower levels. This point was settled in a manner which has been characteristic of the entire program. Several assistant supervisors pointed out to the superintendent in very clear terms that they personally felt no hesitancy in speaking up regardless of rank, and believed that a better overall understanding could be arrived at through discussions including all levels.

Work With School

Industry is also cooperating with those schools, colleges, and universities throughout the nation which have recognized the communication problem and are attempting to do something about it.

An outstanding example of this is Texas Christian University. They have set up a management training program at Convair which can eventually lead to a college degree in management through intermediate certificates. We at Convair are particularly impressed with T.C.U.'s operations in this field. The University has not attempted to arbitrarily set up education standards with the idea of telling industry, in effect, that this is what is needed. Rather, it has gone to industry, determined its needs, and set up a program devised to answer those needs.

Requirements from Schools

And that brings up the matter of what industry thinks our schools should do to prepare young men and women to take their place in industry. Since the majority of those in industry are graduates of our high schools and not of our colleges, this applies especially to the former.

First, of course, the young people as industrial trainees must be taught some specific trade, job, or profession. Industry today finds it necessary to operate, either directly or through affiliations with various schools, a wide program of technical training in order to fill its needs for technical skill.

But even more important, these young people should learn of their right to a

place in industry and that this right entails a definite responsibility. Their right to a place in industry depends directly upon their contribution to industry. This does not mean the ability to produce alone. It means the ability to produce in cooperation with others. This involves human relations training.

It requires the realization that each benefits from productive effort correlated to the productive effort of others. It is necessary to develop the ability to understand and to be understood.

Awareness of the importance of communication, call it by any name, is a major step in the right direction. That awareness, together with a basic knowledge of the various specific techniques

involved, will go far toward enabling the graduates of our schools to adapt themselves readily and easily to our industrial processes. It will enable them to better assimilate the additional and possibly more complex technical training which it may be necessary to give them. It will make them productive participants in our free enterprise system.

Altogether, effective communication is of vital importance to industry. Communication enters into every process in industry, be it simple or complex, technical or non-technical. We have communication. The problem is to promote increasingly effective communication toward the end result of more efficient production.

President's Message

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hand to A. A. Daly, the Membership Committee, and chapter officers, by stimulating interest in ASTD and by recommending prospective members who will be "credits" to the Society. These people will, in turn, thank you for their opportunities to participate in the plus values of the organization.

Yes, your decisions and actions on Society matters during the coming weeks will definitely influence ASTD's dimensions for 1953. Today, we are stronger in terms of members, finances, services, and worth-while committee projects than at any time in our history. The officers are confident that YOU will assist with the overall objective and program for continuous growth.

W. C. Christensen

Vice President Region III

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At present, Steinie is Director of Sales Training for the Reynolds Metals Company and is located at their General Sales Office, 2500 South Third Street, Louisville 8, Kentucky. His responsibilities are the development and supervision of training programs dealing with industrial salesmen, specialized packaging sales engineers, consumer product salesmen and sales administrative employees.

Steinie has given professional direction to many Community Fund, U.S.O., and Red Cross campaigns. He has been active in many phases of personnel work as a hobby, having been a trustee of the National Vocational Guidance Association and active in the American Personnel and Guidance Association.