

TRAINING FOR COMMERCE

*An account of the training for young people which is being developed at the head office of Unilever Limited in London.**

A YEAR ago the training department at the head office of Unilever Limited considerably widened and developed its functions. In addition to specialized short courses, advanced trainee courses and part-time commercial training, extensive part-time courses for boys and girls of school leaving age were introduced together with—at the other end of the scale—experimental courses for senior clerical staff. The training officer also plans specialized selection and aptitude tests and advises members of the staff who wish to take up spare time courses of study.

As it would be impossible within the space available in this article to survey the entire training activities at the head office of Unilever Limited, an attempt will be made to assess its value from the point of view of communication—an aspect of vital importance in so large an organization.

Part-time Training for Boys

The training course for boys, which is part-time, is designed for those who start as office juniors. They are usually divided into two groups who alternate with each other in the training school and in the departments, where they do junior clerical jobs under normal work-

ing conditions. All the boys while on their training course are on call for any temporary jobs or extra duties.

The syllabus includes tuition in English, history, current affairs, statistics, elementary logic, bookkeeping, public speaking and the Unilever business.

syndicates

In the syllabus particular emphasis has been placed on training in communication and one of the most satisfactory methods has been found to be work in syndicates. Each syndicate comprises three or four boys including the leader. Under his guidance a subject is chosen which is split up between the members and the report is prepared. The report, usually lasting 20 minutes, is then read, and the syndicate is subjected to the questions and criticisms of the whole class. The aims here are: first, to test the leader who is specially chosen to see if he can direct a group and draw up a report; second, to test the ability of the individual boys to do research on subjects which are often unfamiliar to them; and third, to test the ability of the group to hold together against the attack and criticism of the rest of the class. This method is very useful for assessing the initiative of more able and articulate boys by giving them the responsibility of

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directing the syndicate's research but it is also useful as an introduction to public speaking for shy boys. The leader takes the main responsibility and can shelter the weaker members of the group.

discussion and comprehension

Another very successful method has been tried and adopted. This is to combine discussion and English comprehension. A passage of prose or verse is chosen because of its value as an exercise in comprehension and also because it contains challenging ideas. The class first does a series of exercises on the passage and later, when the work is being corrected with the class, a discussion is certain to arise around one of the ideas in the passage. A little careful handling can produce a very good discussion, particularly if a boy finds that some of the ideas he has expressed in his answers are mentioned by a more outspoken boy in the class.

logic and discussion

A third method has been an extension of discussion into the elementary logic classes. In each class when a series of arguments is presented for analysis, discussion invariably arises not only as to the validity of the logic (itself useful training in communication) but also as to the truth and value of the ideas involved.

Girls' Courses

Courses for the junior girls are similar to those for the boys, except that the girls' course includes vocational work in shorthand, typewriting and secretarial practice. There is the same emphasis on the importance of good English. The

girls share with the boys discussions and lectures by speakers from inside and outside the company. Group projects similar to those of the boys' syndicates are undertaken and detailed reports prepared.

Training in the acquisition and communication of information has been given to the girls' junior secretarial courses by surveys, discussions and in the teaching of English.

surveys

These require the girls in groups of three or four to tackle a given subject, find out as much as possible about it and give a talk, illustrated by photographs, sketches and maps. The first survey was of districts of the City of London near to Unilever House. A fairly familiar subject was chosen as most of the girls had little experience in working on their own initiative. Visits to the actual areas and to libraries were made, and the results showed that much hard and careful work had been done. It was found, however, that their ability to select and put over their information in a lucid, interesting way was not equal to the assiduousness of their work. This was quite apparent to the girls themselves and created a desire to know something of the technique of speaking to an audience. Lectures were given to them on the art of speaking in public and of putting over a bulk of information in a varied, understandable and stimulating way. These were followed by practice in speaking. Members of the group gave two or five minute talks on a variety of subjects, and also engaged in more formal speaking in debates.

A month or so later a second survey was set, this time one with much wider scope and requiring more care in selecting material and research in unfamiliar fields. Each group was given a continent or group of countries to investigate under several headings such as geographical, economic, social, historic—and the activities of Unilever in that area.

This time, much greater ability to select intelligently from a mass of material was displayed and an improvement was shown in the methods of putting it over (the thread of Unilever activities running through the survey gave a unity to it). The "survey" method was found to have the advantages not only of training to young people to use their initiative in discovering information, to select what is relevant and to study methods of communicating it, but to discover from each others's presentation the faults to be avoided and best methods to employ.

English teaching

In the teaching of English the necessity for clarity of expression and thought is emphasized through work on comprehension of difficult passages and in written work done by trainees.

Special and Introductory Training

Another aspect of the training department programme includes the courses for returning ex-servicemen. These courses are run at intervals for men recently returned from their National Service. The main aim of the course is to ensure the easy and rapid readjustment of the men to civil life and work.

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Training for Commerce

(Continued from preceding page)

Also included in the training programme are courses for trainees with special qualifications who are selected for secretarial, clerical and supervisory positions. They spend one month in the training department improving their technical knowledge and acquiring more detailed insight into the company. The course lasts approximately one year and during this time trainees are sent to various departments to gain practical experience.

Introductory training plays a large part in the training department programme. On their arrival at Unilever House, new junior employees are not drafted immediately into the normal office routine. They are received into the training department and given a general introduction to the company followed by informal lectures on its history, development, organization and activities, particularly in the United Kingdom. Explanatory talks are given on conditions of employment, social facilities, and amenities, and opportunities for further education and training.

While emphasis has been placed on training in communication, many other facets of the training scheme have revealed themselves. In all cases the aim is to develop initiative and a sense of individual responsibility and to equip the staff with the techniques and knowledge which will enable them to undertake the work required of them, widen their interests, and help them towards the fulfilment of a happy and useful career with the company.

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On recent mailings to ASTD members, several copies of materials have been returned to our office, unclaimed. On checking files we find no change of address has been sent to us. Hence we have "lost" a few of our members. If we do not have your correct address, current materials and the *Journal* will not reach you. Often we can trace chapter members through their chapter secretary, but those of you who are "un-affiliated" members must notify our office direct. *If you have changed your address within the last six months, kindly send us a notice so that our files may remain "current."* Thank you kindly.

Russell L. Moberly
Secretary-Treasurer

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A REMINDER

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