

The Importance of . . .

The Orientation Program

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If one accepts the value placed upon it by many men well versed in the field of employee training, proper orientation is one of the most important activities for a training man in his organization. From an overall viewpoint of paying off for the time and effort invested, it appears that this appraisal must be accepted. Halsey comments in his Chapter "Induction of New Employees and Information Booklets."¹ "More can be done to make or mar the employee's future during his first few days than in weeks at any other time." Again, Bleicken Von Bleicken is even more emphatic, stating, "The loyalty of an employee is gained or lost within the first forty-eight hours."² Other like opinions could be adduced, but an examination of some of the reasons why such emphasis is given to this phase of training may prove enlightening to those interested in the field of training.

The first thought that may strike one in regard to the new employee is the problem of making him of value as a producer. Now even to the most "moss-backed" employer, it is becoming increasingly apparent by studies, investi-

gations and even personal observation, that the amount of work a man performs is highly dependent upon how he feels about the company in which he is employed, and this feeling in turn, is based upon how the company treats him. The general, though not absolute pattern found is that the better the treatment, the better will be his production in quality and quantity. This does not imply coddling or excessive paternalism, but it does apply in terms of affording him a sense of security, of belonging, of respect for his particular dignity, of interest displayed in him, etc.

While a worker has need of decent treatment at the hands of his employer at all times, this need is felt almost acutely when he first enters into a new work environment and especially in proportion to the degree of change involved. Even if he brings high technical competence with him, the average man is not accompanied by his old surroundings, friends, associates and his "know the ropes" attitude. He may bring with him his tools, his skill and his mental treasures, but he comes alone with them

1. George D. Halsey, "Training Employees," Harper Brothers, 1949.
2. Von Bleicken, Bleicken, "Employee Training Handbook," Canover Mast Publications, Inc., 1953. Chapter VIII.

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and his own particular attitude about the new job is not fully formed.

Psychologically, he is more or less nervous and tense. He must become acquainted with strangers, both fellow workers and supervisors and adjust himself to an entirely new grouping. Often an entire set of new rules of work must be absorbed, new policies grasped, new work conditions, in which to expend his productive efforts, must be familiarized. Faced with these tasks, he is vividly aware of his need for a helping hand, some friendly advice, an outstretched arm of welcome acceptance. If he encounters an effort to fulfill these needs, he is much more likely to react with a friendly response and to attempt to cooperate.

If he encounters only indifference, is lost in the crowd, then what would we surmise to be his feelings? Would he feel well treated? Would he feel that the new company had any interest in him, except as another hired productive unit? Would his whole attitude be affected adversely in respect to the new job and the new company? Actually for some, it is true that their make-up is such that they are indifferent to an indifferent reception, but the average man, and it must be presumed that we deal with the average, does not gain too high an impression and initial impressions are all too important and lasting for casual consideration. Too often, if adverse, they tend to color an individual's thinking and reactions for quite a while in the same negative fashion. A bad start too many times leads to subsequent lack of job interest, company loyalty and cooperation. Particularly is this likely to happen if the new man is by mere random routine lightly turned over to

one of the older employees on his first day and his "indoctrinator" happens to be disgruntled with the company. Historically the damage done by this disorganized method has been documented in one case history after another.

Again, the orientation period is important from the point of view of modern day labor management relations. In the world today, split and torn with ideological conflict, the individual worker is a prize to be captured and held and his loyalty is being constantly sought by advocates of more than one "ism." There is Communism, Socialism, Democracy, Unionism, to name a few. From one side, all too frequently, headstrong, reckless organizers pour salt into wounds left by age old employee-management struggles and seek to win to their cause the mind of the worker. The Communist doctrine zealously aims at capturing new disciples. Hard shell capitalistic advocates energetically attempt to restore their golden era of business baron domination over industry. The middle road promoters of industrial democracy seek to inculcate a medium approach between the extremes.

Located like a slow flowing and eddying pool between plunging rapids, the orientation period can be an apt time for the training man to sow the seeds of correct attitude towards worker-management relations if the mental field of the newcomer happens to be neutral. If on the other hand, the recruit is bitter, disillusioned, bent towards extremes, the time is precious in affording the chance towards readjusting his thinking to a more healthy level. It is at this breakpoint in employment that in being bitter about the past he may be more hopeful that the job change will prove

beneficial. Representing a gap between one job status with all the built-in environmental factors in attitude building and setting and a new atmosphere with new factors present to influence him, the worker is somewhat open to a mental reappraisal of his views. He is standing relatively alone and is receptive, to some extent, to new suggestions, slants and ideas.

Apart from the philosophic, idealistic importance, which to many is a basic consideration, there is the significance of orientation from management's own self interest. Modern industry in the free world is motivated by profits. No business can function on an overall loss basis very long. A healthy society would not expect wholesale philanthropy upon the part of business enterprises. Profits, however, depend upon proper production and this depends greatly upon the combined efforts of the individual workers. Production is closely allied to plant morale, to worker attitude. For management to be indifferent to a golden opportunity to begin forming a right attitude in new employees is short-sighted. They must deal with the newcomer on the assumption that the relationship will be lengthy and total productive output can be appreciably affected by a good start. A good, steady, loyal producer over the years is a profitable company investment from the start. Needless to say, orientation when it assists the new worker to reach acceptable standards of quality and quantity more swiftly than otherwise has a direct bearing on profitable investment.

The training man, reflecting upon his job, finds orientation vital. His para-

mount duty may be described as assisting in developing an effective worker, "through the development of appropriate habits of thought and action, skills, knowledge and attitude."³ A man entering into a new work situation may or may not require development in skills and knowledge, but his attitude is another question and certainly open to development. Each new man gives an occasion for attitude building or attitude alteration.

A fifth aspect bearing on the importance of orientation leads us into its relationship to modern working conditions. With increasing specialization and breaking down of production processes, the problem of the effects of routine, monotony, incomplete fabrication and lack of complete meaning appears upon the scene of many job operations. The worker performing a single operation on an assembly line is often hard put to discover any consistent sense of purpose or achievement. He finds it difficult to grasp the real worth of his part in the whole operational picture. Where this situation prevails, the orientation program can serve a very useful function in bringing home to the worker the positive, beneficial factors of the job. By accenting these, the newcomer is given at the start a helpful aid in assisting him to off-set the deadening influences of boredom and lack of job interest in some of our mass productive techniques. Antidotes to job frustration are healthy aids to the trainer.

It is in the light of these considerations that advocates of employee training place emphasis upon orientation as an important activity in this field.

3. Milton Hall, "Employee Training in the Public Service."