

Promote From Within ? How ?

A Pre-Supervisory Program at Bendix

Gordon C. Kennedy

Old stuff? Sure it is, but I want to tell of a program we used that helped us . . . Wait, I want Bob Jones to read the conclusion first. ("Echo to Thibodeau," Training Directors Journal, Sep. 1965, p. 22.)

Conclusion: The technique used in this particular program is good . . . if a company is really serious about promoting from within. Invite everyone interested in Basic Management to spend about an hour and a half once each week with the training department. The sessions were made up of lectures, discussions and visual aids.

From records and observations, we gained a long list of probables. The list was turned over to the personnel department. Over a period of eighteen months we have promoted twelve people that were on the list.

Now for the details.

The problem of picking new supervisory material is a rough one. As much as we plan against Friday promotions that become effective Monday, we face it too often. Usually the excuse for the rush, goes like this: "The need was unexpected" . . . "Didn't realize that time had run out" . . . or, just another "panic." Whatever the excuse, it is a poor one. The new supervisor or foreman accepts because he was either pressured into it or, motivated through fear of losing a job or another chance being offered one.

We have all heard, at some time, a statement from a superintendent that goes like this, "He's my best operator—he should be the one to be their foreman." Too many times he loses a good operator and gets a poor fore-

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man. The "best operator" that can handle people as their supervisor, is a rarity.

Selection Errors

As a first step in building a supervisory selection program, perhaps it would be wise to examine some of the errors and inadequacies of selection that has been used in the past. Experience has shown that there are several faulty approaches which have accounted for the most errors in selecting employees for supervisory responsibilities . . . such as:

1. Relying heavily on seniority. This means that the simple ability to hang on to a job is being accepted as predictive of success as a supervisor.
2. Selecting the best worker in a particular line of work to supervise that work, considering only his technical skill. All too often, we find this to be in error. Technical ability, though important, should not be stressed to the point that leadership ability is ignored.
3. Choose the most popular man in the group to be the supervisor. The true role of supervisor is such that popularity alone is no guarantee of success. In many cases, popularity fades with the transformation from worker to boss.
4. Relying on the judgment of a supervisor up the line from the job to be filled. This not only restricts the field of candidates to those known by one man, but also limits the factors considered to those most emphasized by him.

Among selection methods, perhaps the one subjected to the most abusive criticism on one hand and which, on the other, sometimes inspires the blindest loyalty, is the written test. All written tests are not all good tests. They don't measure personality characteristics. Personality characteristics

are measured by other methods. Test alone may "indicate" the man is capable—but a question may be, *can* he, or *will* he, use his capabilities?

The "whole man" is desired—a man of technical, judgmental, management, and human relations competence—along with the *desire* to become a supervisor.

No Perfect Plan

We have not come across a "perfect" plan for supervisory selection as yet. Many companies have tried recruiting, applications for openings, posting on the bulletin boards, testing, and new approaches to old programs. Many of these methods are said to have been the cause for a breakdown in the morale. Eventually, they returned to the old trial and error methods, or let each supervisor recommend a candidate and then get out of the picture by turning the problem over to the personnel department.

From past experience in business and industry, we believe it is dangerous to dangle a carrot before a man to motivate him . . . Too many changes can take place that can change the man's goals—or at least the route he planned. He only needs one set-back to drive him from being a management man. It is too risky to tamper with human feelings, morale, and moods if we want him to be with us in the future.

We do not refer to our program as a "Pre-supervisory Program." This implies that a promotion is waiting . . . we are promising something in exchange for his time. We call our course "Basic Management." We felt that men who have the desire and interest to develop themselves would probably fill our conference room. We stunned a few people by stating that we will train anybody that wants to attend our sessions. Let's train them *all*.

Figure 1. Manpower Survey Letter

THE *Bendix* CORPORATION

BENDIX PRODUCTS AUTOMOTIVE DIVISION • SOUTH BEND 20, INDIANA

TO ALL HOURLY AND NON-SUPERVISORY SALARIED PERSONNEL.....

AUTOMOTIVE DIVISION MANPOWER SURVEY AND INVENTORY.

DO YOU HAVE THE DESIRE---

TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FIELDS?

(Check one. If you have more than one, list them as you rate them...#1, #2, etc.,)

MANUFACTURING ASSIGNMENTS _____ TIME STUDY _____

SUPERVISORY OPENINGS _____ PROCESSING _____

MATERIAL & PRODUCTION CONTROL _____ QUALITY CONTROL _____

OTHER AREAS OF INTEREST? _____

DO YOU HAVE KNOWLEDGE, OR EXPERIENCE IN ANY OF THE ABOVE?

(Explain): _____

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING A COURSE ON

BASIC MANAGEMENT? YES _____ NO _____

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR COMMENTS? _____

SIGNED: _____ Dept. Clock Number

Gordon C. Kennedy
Education Director

Lee E. Kidder
Supv. Training

PLEASE USE ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. DROP IT INTO ANY SUGGESTION BOX, PLANT MAIL, OR IN GOODLAND BUILDING (CORNER BENDIX DRIVE AND GOODLAND AVE.,)

Train, Then Select

Our concept is to train them first and then select. Not new or unique, it is merely an application of the principle of selection education which is as old as the teaching profession itself.

Not only will we endeavor to solve the problem of selection, but at the same time minimize the adverse morale factor which would have been present had the selection been limited to a choice few.

Our Basic Management program ran for twenty weeks. The sessions took one and one-half hours of the participant's time each week. All three shifts participated. Although the title of the course was Basic Management, the content was a combination of our orientation program and pre-supervisory course . . . tailored to meet the needs.

First, we sent a "Manpower Survey" sheet with a letter to all hourly and non-supervisory salaried personnel. On the survey sheet, we asked the question, "Would you be interested in attending a course on Basic Management, on your own time?" (See Figure 1.) Upon return of their survey sheet, we sent each a letter of thanks. We then set up the session schedules and notified the people when and where the course was to be conducted.

We mailed out 2,779 letters and received over 600 survey sheets, with 240 saying they wanted to attend the course. Actually, 209 started the course . . . 204 men and 5 women.

Attrition

Communications were not what they should have been. One week after the program started, there was a plant-wide reduction of force. Our losses: 17 due to lay-off, 17 no-shows, and 10 drop-outs. (Three due to extended illness, four could not read or write.)

One hundred sixty-five finished the

course. Three had been laid off but continued the course. The attendance record was almost unbelievable.

The hourly people are represented by the UAW-CIO union. When we talked to the officers of the bargaining unit, they were suspicious and stated that we would "brain-wash" their people. We invited them to look over the course material and sit in the sessions. At least five former stewards were in attendance. We gained the confidence of our conferees and learned much about them that we should have known years before.

Many expressions were heard during our discussion periods, such as: "The company should have done this ten or fifteen years ago," "For the first time since starting to work here, I can see the other side of the story," "Now I can understand the economics required to run a good company," "No doubt about it, we need profits to guarantee new business and steady employment."

Results

The survey told us of hidden talents and updated the people's records. Many had taken courses on their own and would not report it. In the past eighteen months, we have made twelve promotions from the group. Follow-up shows us they are doing a good job. In fact, in some areas, these new supervisors are doing a better job than some of the "old-timers" . . . the morale is great.

All our records of the people that completed the course were turned over to the salary and hourly personnel administrators. Hardly a day goes by that we are not asked when we intend to start another course. Others, who did not sign up for the first course, are requesting that we start another Basic Management program. We intend to keep this program alive.