

Speech Training in Industry

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There is currently a great deal of concern and discussion over the problem of employee relations, morale and attitudes as they relate to an efficient organization. Within the framework of the attempt to improve human relations, much is being done in the general areas of management and supervisory training to equip supervision with the basic tools necessary to promote this end. And this effort applies to the improvement of executive management above the operating supervisory level as well as to the productive employee at the machine. The place of speech and oral communication in this general picture of management and employee development is the basic consideration of this article.

It is interesting to note the evolution in employee training with respect to this subject. A generation or more ago, the chief concern was that the employee know the mechanics of his job; training did not extend much beyond job skill and on-the-job instruction. During the past score of years, and particularly within the past decade, a growing emphasis has been placed on supervisory and management development from which has evolved an emphasis on human relations training and the techniques of handling people. Much more recently it has been realized that a vital part of the total human relations picture is the factor of speech and communication between all levels of employees.

The Need for Training

In an attempt to feel the pulse of industry both as to the needs and practices in this general area of training, a survey of representative industries, management associations and labor unions was made through the medium of a questionnaire.¹ This was sent to 80 industrial organizations comprising over 650,000 employees and about 55,000 supervisors, and to 26 other groups and individuals, including management associations, industrial relations and industrial education experts, and labor leaders. This discussion of the survey

is concerned with the replies to these 106 questionnaires.

The extent and nature of the replies are both very meaningful. Approximately 70% replied to the questionnaire, an exceedingly high figure for response to this type of survey. In addition a considerable number of replies were accompanied with letters and materials showing a high degree of interest and enthusiasm, as well as some very fine training being conducted. (The author is full for the interest and cooperation shown.)

The conclusions regarding the need for training might first be examined. The question was asked, "With regard to the following subjects of training, indicate the need or practice in your organization: Public Speaking, Conference Leadership, Conference Speaking and Discussion, and Parliamentary Procedure." (It was assumed that these subjects in large measure comprise the practical speech skills needed in most work situations demanding effective oral communication.)

Regarding Public Speaking, 51 replied that training was needed, six were doubtful, and five said it was not needed—or about 70% indicated there was a need. Regarding Conference Leadership Training, 66 replied that it was needed, one was doubtful, and there were no negative replies—thus, practically 100% recognized the need for training.

The subject of Conference Speaking and Discussion, participation as distinguished from leadership, drew about the same replies, but the general indication was that the ability to ably and effectively participate in conferences or discussion would come from Conference Leadership training. This point of view is interpreted in terms of less training being conducted in participation than in leadership in most in-service training programs.

The replies indicated a very limited need for training in Parliamentary Procedure: 10 said there was a need, five were doubtful, and 37 said no—only 14% feel there is a need. The replies in general pointed to the fact that the need was confined to a select segment of the management group, though labor un-

1. The survey was also extended to government agencies, as is indicated in the tabular results shown in Fig. 1. However, the general picture as it exists in government is not included in this discussion.

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ions, perhaps unanimously, affirm the need for training in this subject.

Concerning all these subjects the question was asked, "For what level of personnel is the training needed?" The general conclusion from the replies points to the need for speech training in general for all levels of management and supervision, and for labor leaders. The trend indicates that public speaking is needed for higher levels of management (although some said that all employees should be trained); that conference leadership ability is needed by all levels of management and supervision in the conduct of staff meetings, production conferences, training meetings, discussions with employees, and meeting with labor union stewards; that conference participation ability is equally needed.

The frankness of many of the replies regarding the need is significant. Here are a few typical statements:

"Is training needed in speech? Indeed Effective speaking is needed by practically every employee who has any ambition whatsoever . . . Conference leadership training is needed by department heads and supervisors." (A large industrial organization)

"I regard training in speech as of paramount importance for all levels of supervision and management, for the improvement of human relations as well as the more efficient operation of American industry." (A management consultant)

"The need for conference leadership training is greater than for public speaking." (A large industrial organization)

"Well trained conference leaders are as essential to a prosperous America as new materials, inventions, better labor relations, or any other single factor affecting industry." (A state department of education)

At least two pertinent conclusions can be drawn from these replies: first, industry attests very strongly to the need for training in speech and related subjects, particularly for management and supervisory personnel; second, the area of greatest need within the work situation is in conference leadership and participation.

The general recognition of the importance of effective oral communication in promoting

human relations is evident from the replies to the question, "How important are these abilities in promoting better human relations in industry?" About 85% said they were very important, 14% said of some importance, and less than 1% said of no importance.

Current Training Practices

It is only after the general need for systematic employee development within an organization is recognized that training in any particular area will be considered. And it is within the more progressive vision of a large group of industrial management leaders that current trends and practices in speech training are growing.

To look at the survey results again by major subject areas as to current training being conducted:

Public Speaking. Of 51 who said there was a need, 22 said they now conduct training, and 29 indicated they did not. About half of the 22 indicated that they conduct in-service training in public speaking; the other half say that their employees get this training outside, through local university evening and extension classes, sometimes by special arrangement with universities, or through other organizations. Only a small percentage, therefore, conduct in-service training. Yet there are some very strong programs in such industries as the Erie Railroad Company, General Electric, Monsanto Chemical, Detroit Edison, Seagram Distilling, and others. The Seagram Company places great stress on individual speech training of the management group.²

The writer has assisted in courses conducted for industrial supervisors by such organizations as the Columbus (Ohio) Foremen's Club and the Maryland State Department of Education, among others. There is a growing interest among supervisors desiring to take such training.

Many colleges and universities conduct courses by special arrangement with industries in their areas. Typical of these are Wayne University in Detroit; Rutgers University in New Brunswick; George Washington University in Washington and many others.

2. See "Public Speaking in the Seagram Plan," by Argus Tresidder, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, December, 1946.

A very significant program for training industrial leaders in public speaking is now being conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers in cooperation with local chambers of commerce. Three-day institutes are held under the title of the "Industry Leaders Program" and attended by industrial management personnel and business leaders. The institute devotes a major part of the time to "Effective Public Speaking."

Another trend is indicated by union incorporating training in public speaking and parliamentary procedure in their regular educational programs in the union halls and in their summer institutes.³

Certain conclusions regarding current training in public speaking in industry can be made: Only a small percentage of organizations carry on such training within the in-service training program; when they do, the courses are brief and practical and sometimes are included within broader training in human relations; most such training is conducted outside the organization and the employee's attendance at university, extension, or other sponsored courses is at his own discretion; some training is planned in cooperation with management associations or universities.

Conference leadership. The replies to the survey and other evidence all point to this as the most active area of speech training in industry today. (Conference leadership ability is generally regarded as a speech skill, though other factors are of course involved.) Forty-nine of the 66 who indicated a need for this training are conducting conference leadership training courses—about 75%. A similar trend is indicated as to training in discussion and conference participation, though most programs in this general area are called "Conference Leadership."

Training courses for developing conference leaders very considerably. Most aim to develop at least three types of conference ability: the leadership of—and participation in—problem solving conferences involving a wide variety of situations; the leadership of training conferences in general; and the leadership of training conferences in a particular

subject. Many industries conduct courses of general conference leadership training which have as their goal the ability to lead any type of conference which may come up in the work situation including staff, production employee morale, and employee instruction meetings. Typical and outstanding programs are conducted by such companies as Johnson and Johnson, American Telephone and Telegraph, Standard Oil, General Motors, and many others.

Other programs place their primary emphasis on the ability to lead training or instructional conferences in general. The conference method as a vehicle for employee instruction is well recognized. A recent survey⁴ corroborates this conclusion: when a representative group of industries covering approximately 950,000 employees were asked what method of instruction was most used, 86% said the conference method.

In many instances the need arises to develop conference leaders to conduct training in a particular subject. One large company has this to say about their program, "We have done considerable work in the field of conference leadership training, but this is usually directed toward a specific field rather than general training in conference leadership . . . We select supervisors to act as training instructors and give them training as conference leaders on the particular subject of the training." The Training Within Industry program during the war had this same approach to developing conference leaders on a vast scale to do training in particular subjects via the conference method.⁵

A word of caution might be given regarding the planning of a conference leadership training program. It is very important that the training director have the objective clearly in mind. A course aimed to develop the general skills of conference leadership will naturally develop some ability to lead any kind of conference. But it is a mistake to assume that a capable conference leader of a meeting called together for the solution of a problem will necessarily be a competent leader of a training conference called to instruct a group

4. See "How Effective Is Your Training Program?" by E. C. Keachie, *Journal of Industrial Training*, September-October, 1947.

5. See *Training Within Industry Report*, War Manpower Commission, Washington, D. C., 1945.

3. For example, the Labor Institute of the United Steelworkers, held in the summer of 1947 at Pennsylvania State College.

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of employees. The distinction sometimes made between these two types of meetings in calling the former a "pure" conference and the latter a "controlled" conference is in large measure a valid one, and different techniques of leadership come into use.⁶

Training in conference leadership is usually directed at supervisory and management personnel. Progressive companies train all levels of supervision; some include union stewards; some train only executive management. The Conciliation Service of the U. S. Department of Labor sponsors a program for union stew-

ards and supervisors which aims at improved human relations through conference participation ability.⁷ Many companies have used this program.

The average length of the in-service course in conference leadership is about 15 hours, though this varies considerably. Courses from three to 50 hours have been observed. One

6. A real contribution which makes an interesting classification of conferences is **Conference Leadership in Business and Industry**, by E. H. Hannaford, McGraw-Hill, 1945.
7. See "Speech and Human Relations in Industry," by Charles T. Estes, *Journal of Speech*, April, 1946.

SPEECH TRAINING IN INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT

Results of Questionnaire Survey—February 1948

Where Sent	No. Sent	No. Replies	% Replies	No. Employees Affected	
				Total	Supervisors
Industries ¹	80	56	70%	650,000	55,000
Government Agencies	31	21	68%	1,070,000	81,800
Others ²	26	20	77%		
TOTALS	137	97	70%	1,720,000	136,800

Pertinent Questions and Replies

Question	Is Training Needed?			Is Training Conducted?		
	Yes	Doubt	No	Yes	In-Service?	No
1. Indicate the need and practice in the following subjects:						
a. Public Speaking						
Industry	44	4	3	20	12	22
Government	12	2	3	4	2	10
Others	7	2	2	2	1	8
TOTALS	63	8	8	26	15	40
b. Conference Leadership						
Industry	54	0	0	40	38	12
Government	19	0	0	16	13	2
Others	12	1	0	9	7	2
TOTALS	85	1	0	65	58	16
c. Discussion and Conference Participation	(Replies in general are about the same as regarding Conference Leadership, though less emphasis is placed on training in this than in Leadership.)					
d. Parliamentary Procedure						
Industry	10	5	37	4	4	35
Government	2	2	15	1	1	13
TOTALS	12	7	52	5	5	48
2. How important are these abilities in promoting better human relations?	Very important: 68			No importance: 1		
Which is the most important?	Some importance: 13			Leadership: 52		
3. What help can the colleges best offer?	Public Speaking: 22			Assist in in-service training programs: 22		
				Offer courses in the community: 28		
				Prepare materials and bibliographies: 23		

¹ Includes a few large retail organizations such as department stores.
² Includes industrial education, management association, and labor union leaders. Replies reflect only the conclusion of the person or organization reporting.

of the most interesting facts about industry's interest in conference leadership training is that perhaps 90% of it is carried on within the in-service training program. The training director or his staff conducts a large share of the training, but in many instances outside agencies are called in for assistance. These outside agencies include the several State Departments of Vocational Education, University Industrial Education Departments (and some Speech Departments), University Extension services, management and training consultants, and others such as the local foremen's clubs mentioned earlier. Associations such as the American Management Association, National Industrial Conference Board, National Metal Trades Association, National Foremen's Institute, and others have manifested great interest in conference leadership training and have prepared many worthwhile manuals and leader's guides in this field.

Parliamentary Procedure. Only four replies in the survey indicate training being conducted in this subject. This is for selected personnel, high management personnel, and some union officials. Meetings within the organization are not conducted by parliamentary procedure except in rare instances. The union are more active in this area than most industry, since union meetings are usually conducted by parliamentary procedure.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is gratifying to be able to record a somewhat optimistic trend toward speech training in industry. But actually the surface is just now being scratched. Much remains to be done. Because the effort for improving industrial relations must go forward, speech training will grow within the framework of this objective. Perhaps the proper place for all speech training is within the human relations training program.

Specifically, the training director planning to assist management in improving the general effectiveness of employee communications and employee instruction might think in terms of program embracing all or some of the following:

For executive management: One or several appreciation meetings to explain and arouse an interest in the need and program to be

started. A course in general speech effectiveness with primary emphasis on the organization of ideas, use of interesting material, and confidence, directness and clarity in presenting ideas. A course in conference leadership and participation with emphasis on types of conferences, conducting staff and problem conferences, and an appreciation of the training conference.

For middle management and first-line supervisors: A course in general speech effectiveness similar to that for executive management but perhaps with less stress on "formal speeches." A course in conference leadership emphasizing training or instruction conferences and an understanding of staff and production or problem conferences.

For union stewards and labor officials: Any of the training for supervision in general might be given, perhaps adding parliamentary procedure.

For all employees: In organizations where it is feasible to train employees at the worker level, a general course which emphasizes basic principles of improving individual speech habits and ability to participate in group discussion would be useful.

Above all, any training in these areas should be practical and consistent with needs. In the training course for developing speech skills, no flowery oratory or polished public speaking should be the goal. Some replies to the survey commented on the stress sometimes mistakenly placed on these goals by college speech teachers. It might be said in this connection that most college speech courses (and professors) are as practical and realistic as industry would have them be—the number of "offenders" is probably small. However this may be, suffice it to say that the need in industry is to improve every-day communications between employees, to develop clarity, directness and confidence in presenting one's ideas to groups or to individuals. There should be as much opportunity as possible for practice by participants, and a minimum amount of theory.

* Consideration must be given to the execution of this training within the organization. Many training directors are themselves capable of planning and conducting such training; many have staff members who are capable. The individual who does this training

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should himself have a minimum background in speech and conference leadership. A general knowledge of speech skills and techniques may be sufficient, plus the ability to understand and apply the psychological factors involved in handling people taking such training. Professional assistance from local university staff members or other agencies suggested earlier in this article would improve the quality of training.

In reply to the question in the survey as to the type of assistance college and university speech staffs can offer, 18 said they could best assist in planning course content for in-service training programs, 22 said courses could be offered in the community to be attended by industrial personnel, and 20 said assistance in the preparation of materials, course outlines, and bibliographies would be most useful.

But the important thing is for industry to include speech training as a continuing part of all in-service training programs. Toward this end, it is hoped that this discussion will in some way serve a useful purpose.

Miscellany

Human Relations for Staff Management is the title of the next University of Wisconsin's Industrial Management Institute. Scheduled for May 10 to 14, the Institute will be under the direction of Dr. Russell Moberly, and will present Roy B. Wehrman, president of Training Services, Inc., Milwaukee; Harold T. Jaeke, vice president of Kohrs Packing Co., Davenport, Iowa; Harold A. Graver, personnel manager, Hardware Mutuals, Stevens Point, Wisconsin; and George H. Reise, director of personnel and industrial relations, Milprint, Inc., Milwaukee.

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The newly organized Philadelphia Training Directors Society held its first open meeting April 27, presenting Allan Tyler of the American Type Founders, Inc., speaking on Role Playing. President C. C. Colozzi, of RCA, announced that the group would be host to the annual Pennsylvania Society conference in October, 1948.

Members who attended the 1946 confer-

ence in New Castle, Pa., will recall the excellent report on the human relations course sponsored by the New York Central Railroad which was made by NYC vice president L. W. Horning. Mr. Horning recently announced that this program was being extended; it now will be offered in correspondence form to employees whose locations or jobs prevent them from attending the conference type meetings. More than 50,000 employees have taken part in the program to date. Merit certificates are awarded to those who achieve an average of 75 per cent or better.

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You will note—on the inside cover—the addition of B. E. Sullivan to the JOURNAL family. Mr. Sullivan, as business manager, should receive all communications concerning subscriptions and advertising. Editorial communications should continue to be directed to the editor at the new address listed for him.

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Received from Charles V. Youmans, superintendent of training for the Oak Ridge, Tenn., plant of the Tennessee-Eastman Corp., is a very clever and complete check list for training. Individual questions are listed on surveying for training needs, planning training, promoting the training plans, getting training into action, checking the efficiency of training, adjusting training for improvements, and reporting on the training. Another excellent form of check list or reminder has been designed by Cloyd Steinmetz, Fiberglas Corp., Newark, Ohio. Similar in form to an ordinary file folder, the form is prepared for each training project, and reminds training directors of the various sections of the project and of techniques which may be applicable.

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The Indianapolis Industrial Training Association recently heard Dr. Elvin S. Eyster, chairman of Business Education and Office Training for Indiana University, speak on "The Office Supervisor as a Teacher." IITA president Robert Skamfer was recently appointed plant manager of the Richardson Company, Indianapolis. L. A. Lukenbill, of the Association, recently was named director of public relations for the Link-Belt Company.