



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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HOW EMPLOYEES OR MEMBERS PERCEIVE THEIR ORGANIZATION

Once, even in the largest of organizations, except in instances of exceptional mismanagement, a relatively stable work force or membership accepted without much question the policies and manner of organizational management or policy boards.

Their silence may or may not have implied what a poet has so aptly called "the composure of settled distress." (Samuel James Arnold, 1774-1852)

Now a new-found mobility among people has acted to change the way employees and members look at their organizations. Employees and members develop expectations, concerns, and a desire to influence the organization of which they are a part. This is true of a company, a voluntary agency, a government bureau, or a professional membership organization like ASTD.

A number of studies indicate that the individuals' perception of the organization is primarily determined and influenced by the following factors:

First Impression

The initial experience a member has with his organization tends to be lasting, particularly if later experiences are infrequent or casual. The recently joined member who runs into interminable, unexplained delays in getting his membership card or the *Journal* will discredit the ASTD office for years to come.

Past Experiences

The background of the member's relationships with an organization tends to determine his attitude in the future. Management often must wage an up-hill battle in bringing about changes and reforms because the image of the old rubs off on the new.

Particular Situation and Setting

An unhappy event, however accidental it may have been or whoever was responsible, can cause long-lasting damage to the relationship of a member to his organization. A local chap-

ter of ASTD will long view the headquarters office with a jaundiced eye after its members did not get good rooms at the annual conference.

Nature of Communication

Subtle but significant disharmony in relationships can arise when organizational management appears to combine a tin ear with a loud mouth. The longer management refuses to listen — whether it be formal in a member meeting, or informal in simply seeing more than one side to an issue — the more adamant will be the members' resistance to what it conceives to be authoritarian rule.

Stereotyped Mental Images

With the assistance of often unkind stage, screen, television and written caricatures, people are inclined to formulate stereotypes about individuals in the organization, even though they have never personally met the victims of this prejudice. To those who indulge in this peculiar form of blindness, the water commissioner is automatically a blundering "Gildersleeve," the mayor is a crafty politician named "Trottlebottom", all social workers wear thick eyeglasses and all teachers are cranky old maids. When these mental images prevail widely in an organization, it takes a lot of "show and tell" to erase them.

Persistence of Perceptions

Research into people's opinions show that they tend to remain fixed once a perception is established. People apparently need to stabilize their values, and they are not inclined to modify them in accord with more current facts or knowledge. Normally, it takes a rather significant experience or the continuing impact of obvious data before they are willing to look at and modify their opinions.

As people form either a "positive" or "negative" attitude toward their organization they ask certain kinds of questions, either openly, or more often, subconsciously. Some of the more common questions are:

- What was my first experience with the organization?
- What did I think of the people in it?
- How do its goals coincide with my goals?
- Am I "informed" about what the organization is doing?
- Can I influence it?

Such questions are asked by employees of organizations and members of ASTD. It is our hope that those of

us with leadership responsibilities in ASTD can give members a good first impression, appropriately involve members, keep you informed, and give you a chance to influence your professional organization.

All the foregoing, of course, revolves about *membership relations*. Good public relations—or, put another way, getting the people to see you in a good light—is not a mystical process by which you influence the public's perceptions.

The "stamp" or "label" put on our organization by the people it serves is the sum of the collective images of those members and all of the actions of your organization. It is not always easy to pin down a cause for adverse opinion. As Scrooge put it: "It might be caused by an undigested potato."

You can influence what the member perceives about your organization only by making it what you and they want the organization to achieve.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERS PROMOTE CAREER GUIDANCE FOR DISADVANTAGED

Concern for the problems of the disadvantaged and underprivileged, and the increasing shortage in industry of technical personnel, has found expression in a new program initiated by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. The organization is strongly urging its local sections throughout the country, there are over 90, to create local programs for career guidance to underprivileged and disadvantaged youth.

In a statement just released by the Institute, they say, "The American Institute of Chemical Engineers recognizes a unique opportunity and a responsibility for a significant contribution to our profession and to society through career guidance for underprivileged and disadvantaged youth. At a time when there is an increasing shortage of technical talent, these disadvantaged youth constitute an invaluable resource, for their potential has been artificially suppressed by their environment and a lack of adequate communication. Career guidance activities specifically for the purpose of interesting them in technical careers should thus help alleviate this shortage and at the same time aid in the long-term solution of the human and social problems of the underprivileged."

To be carried out in cooperation with other local organizations and school systems concerned with the career aspirations and motivations of the disadvantaged, the Institute has created a special Task Force within AIChE's Career

Guidance Committee which has put together a compendium of materials available and information concerning this problem for use by the Institute's local sections.

This material contains guidelines and suggests approaches in starting up local career guidance programs for the disadvantaged. In these guidelines it is suggested, for example, that Local Sections enlist the support of local industry, and establish liaison with other community action, educational, and minority groups in the area who are working in this field of career guidance. Recognition, it is pointed out, of minority organizations, their leaders and their goals, must be part of any successful program.

Concluding the AIChE statement, "The Council of the Institute has, therefore, endorsed the action of the Career Guidance Committee in establishing a Career Guidance Task Force for Disadvantaged and Underprivileged Youth, charged with the development of programs to point out the opportunity and to motivate these youth to prepare themselves for careers in science and engineering. The Council is strongly encouraging sections of the Institute to implement career guidance programs for underprivileged and disadvantaged youth adapted to local conditions in cooperation with school systems and other local organizations."