

Many business organizations are presently attempting to provide training and advancement opportunity for minority group members. These efforts are undoubtedly not completely altruistic and are probably stimulated by a mixture of awakened social consciousness in the business community.

However, regardless of the reasons, there is intent to upgrade and make advancement possible

for individuals having been hindered from breaking out of "dead end" jobs and earning more material benefits for themselves and their families.

#### Pre-Program Considerations

A training program designed to provide opportunities for unskilled employees (usually minority group members) advancing in the organization should:

Paul B. Edwards

# UPGRADING UNSKI

(1) offer efficient means whereby individuals who lack job skills but who have ambition and sufficient aptitude can acquire skills which will make advancement possible

(2) allow each student to progress through training at a rate suited to his or her abilities, regardless of abilities of other students in the program

(3) provide realistic experience in a setting similar to that which will be encountered in the new job environment

(4) take employees away from their jobs a minimum amount of time so that the efficiency of the organization is not impaired

(5) produce newly skilled individuals at a rate compatible with the number of job openings in the organization which require those skills

(6) be economically feasible (the cost of instructional staff and facilities must be compatible with the results obtained) and

(7) possess a "follow-up" procedure for validation, guidance

and feedback purposes

Anyone designing a training program for a small organization must be particularly mindful of required attributes (4), (5) and (6). Large organizations can usually tolerate greater violations of these requirements before efficiency is impaired than can small organizations.

The institution of a formal training program is a relatively minor problem for a large organization which has a training department capable of constructing and implementing such a program. Even if there is no training department, the large organization can probably afford to hire an outside consulting firm to train a class or two, and the loss of twenty or so staff members for a period of several weeks to participate in a full-time training program has a negligible effect on its total productive effort. When the class is completed, the large organization can probably, because of normal turnover, provide the graduates with jobs which utilize their newly

acquired skills.

To a small organization, however, the institution of such a program can pose problems. Not only may the small organization not have a training department, it may not be able to detach a sufficient number of employees to attend an in-house course conducted by a consulting firm brought in for that purpose. Ten to 20 employees taken from the

low promotion possibilities. When jobs held by other staff members were examined, it was found that there were some which offered low promotion possibilities.

One, which contained a number of relatively unskilled individuals, was that of "mail clerk." Mail clerks sort mail and wheel mail carts through corridors of buildings, delivering mail to the various offices. Some of these individuals

a realistic approach

# LED EMPLOYEES

labor force of a small organization may seriously cripple its output; and the organization may not be able to absorb that number in appropriate jobs when they all become ready for new jobs at the same time.

## Situation Analysis

With all these considerations in mind, personnel of the Education and Training Office of the Applied Physics Laboratory of The Johns Hopkins University proceeded to analyze the situation in their organization.

It was determined that jobs with low promotion possibilities at the laboratory were those which required no high degree of skill or experience to enter.

The Applied Physics Laboratory is a research and development organization employing 2500 staff members. Approximately half of these are scientists and engineers who hold college and advanced degrees and thus do not fit into the category of holding jobs with

are Black and some are White, but all are relatively unequipped by education or training to enter jobs at the laboratory which offer opportunities for advancement.

## Needs Examined

The needs of the Laboratory were then examined. It was found that turnover was such that slots for clerical office workers (clerk typists, secretarial clerks and secretaries) were often vacant. It seemed reasonable to try to train in-house individuals to move into these clerical jobs where pay was better than jobs requiring no skills and where advancement was possible. The clerical skills required for these various categories were examined, and it was decided that the "clerk typist" category, which required the lowest amount of skills of the clerical office workers, was the only one for which presently unskilled individuals could be trained.

A clerk typist is required to have a typing speed of 40 or more words per minute with no more

than 3 errors; is typically a high school graduate with course work in typing and other business subjects, and possesses a vocabulary sufficient to ensure accuracy of syllabication, grammar, spelling and other questions involving word usage.

The clerk typist is required to type letters, reports, memoranda and other communications from rough drafts or corrected copies. Typing assignments may include making tabulations, charts and statistical graphs as required. Other duties require sorting and filing records and reports and performing related routine clerical duties.

Consideration was then given to the kind of program which would train an individual to perform clerk typists' tasks and at the same time be efficient, sparing of the time an employee was taken from his or her regular duties, and produce graduates one at a time over an extended period of time.

What was needed was a program which:

(1) would instruct in the skills required of a clerk typist and would most efficiently prepare unskilled students to fit into a job requiring clerk typist skills

(2) a student could enter at any time, progress at the rate best suited to that student's abilities and graduate as soon as trained. (By controlling the rate of entry, the rate and time of output could also be controlled to some extent)

(3) would simulate working conditions of the clerk typist so that the transition from training to the new assignment would be easy

(4) would take a student away from his or her present job a minimum length of time and require a minimum amount of equipment and instructional time

(5) would have a practical post-training period for validation of the training.

### Training Program Construction

To meet these requirements a training program was constructed as follows:

A typing course on audio tapes which began with the basic keyboard and progressed through programs designed to increase speed and reinforce accuracy was secured. With only a tape deck, desk, chair, typewriter and typing supplies, a student could begin at any time and work as fast or as slow and as often as conditions would allow. Tape decks were equipped with earphones so that students could work in an office environment without disturbing others.

Because of the lack of education of the students, programmed learning texts dealing with spelling, punctuation, and grammar were obtained.

Because of the impersonal nature of the instructional materials, it was believed necessary to have a warm and understanding human being available to interpret, counsel and guide the student through the training, without detracting from the fact that the primary responsibility to obtain the training was the student's. For this reason and because it was desirable for the student who was not familiar with an office environment to become at home in one, arrangements were made for the student to undertake the training program in an office under the immediate supervision of an experienced secretary, who in turn would conduct the program under the supervision of a professional in the Education and Training Office.

By being part of the office force, the student would very naturally fit into the habit of answering telephone calls, obtaining materials, filing correspondence, etc., and becoming familiar with office routines. Later when he or she



"A training program designed to provide opportunities for unskilled employees should provide realistic experience in a



g similar to that which will be entered in a new job environment."

went into an office on an actual job assignment, many of the operations would be familiar ones, and the new job not be so overwhelming as it would be if *everything* were new.

Arrangements were made for the students to be released one hour per day from their regular duties in order to come to the secretary in the Education and Training Office for training. This would cause no appreciable reduction in their daily production.

By judicious staggering of the hours which mail clerks were released to go to the Education and Training Office, the facilities, equipment and instructional staff would be kept to a minimum. For example, one secretary could comfortably oversee the instruction of four or five students per day because they would use the desk and other equipment at different times. The secretary could also carry out the majority of regular duties, because the instruction was programmed and did not require all her time.

#### Clerk Typist Trainee

After successful completion of the program (culmination was passing the standard typing test given all applicants for clerical jobs), the student would be detached from mail room duties, designated a "clerk typist trainee" and placed in an opening for a clerk typist which had been carefully screened and selected as best fitted to the student's capabilities.

If, after a trial period of approximately one month, the supervisor was satisfied that the student was performing satisfactorily as a clerk typist, the student would be so reclassified, given an appropriate raise and officially transferred into the new job. Contingency plans were prepared also in case the supervisor should not be satisfied with the student's work. In that case the student

would be given further training or shifted immediately to a more suitable opening for another trial period.

#### Training Program Operation

The program began experimental operation in August, 1971. It has proven to be so successful that it is now a permanent and continuing laboratory program. One unexpected bonus from the program was that it has been valuable for upgrading the typing skills of those who are already in office clerical jobs. Consequently, in addition to providing means for those with no typing and office skills to acquire them, it has been possible to assist experienced typists to correct minor errors in typing technique and to improve typing speed and accuracy.

Twenty staff members have started the program. Only two have dropped out because of unsatisfactory progress. Eleven have completed the program and been reclassified (nine to clerk typist, two to secretarial clerk). The remainder are either currently in the program or have returned to office jobs better prepared to carry out their duties.

#### Implications

This method for training and upgrading personnel can be adapted to almost any kind of organization, *provided*: (1) the program is designed and supervised by a professional in the organization's training department or by an outside authority brought in on a consultant basis; (2) the areas of need are properly identified; (3) the objectives of a training program clearly determined; (4) the techniques to reach those objectives correctly chosen; and (5) the human beings who are selected to oversee the instruction competent in their fields, objective in their judgments, respectful of human

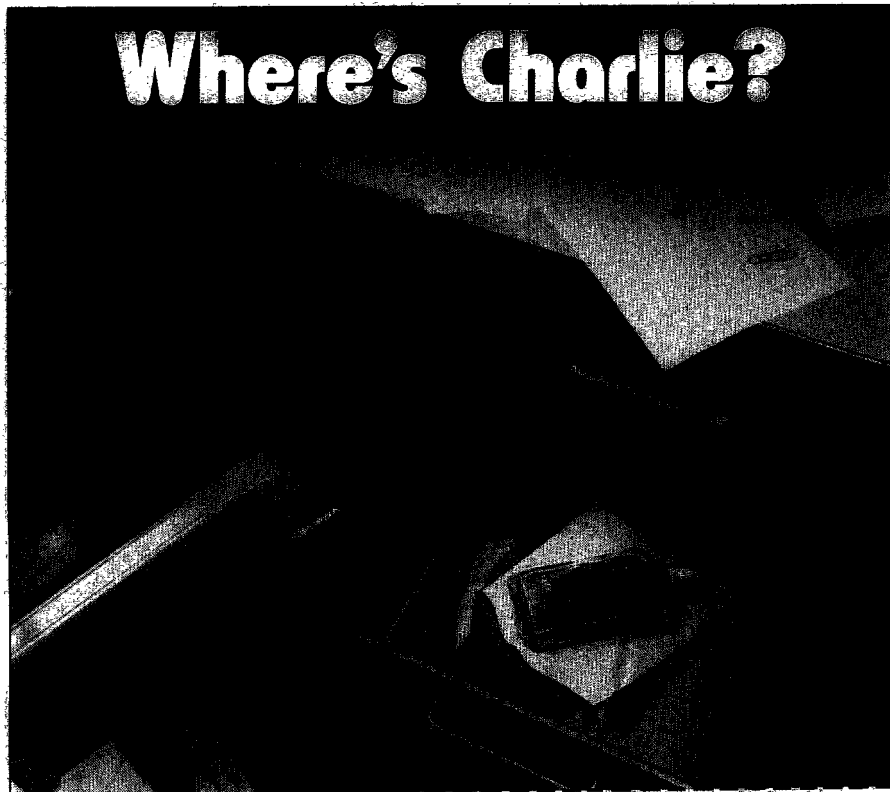
beings as individuals regardless of their station in life, and demanding in terms of quality and quantity of performance required.

A successful graduate of this kind of program realizes that he or she has been given an *opportunity*

to learn but that he or she, and no one else, did the work. Success or failure depends strictly on the effort put in by the student, and a successful graduate has reason to be proud of what he or she has accomplished. Self respect is im-

portant to everyone, and those who complete this program gain self respect as well as marketable skills which can lead to economic gain. They are employees any organization should be proud to have.

**USERSTC**



Paul B. Edwards is supervisor of education and training coordinator, Applied Physics Laboratory, Johns Hopkins University. He received the Ed.D. degree in higher education from the George Washington University, Washington, D.C. His present research interests lie in the areas of scientific education, training and personnel administration. He is a member of the American Society for Engineering Education, American Society for Training and Development and the Washington Technical Personnel Forum.

**Tell advertisers  
you saw it  
in the ASTD**

**training and  
development  
journal**

<b>Alcohol and You</b> .....	<b>28 min.</b>	<b>\$335</b>
<b>Heroin</b> .....	<b>22¼ min.</b>	<b>\$290</b>
<b>Speedscene:</b>		
<b>The Problem of Amphetamine Abuse</b> .....	<b>17 min.</b>	<b>\$210</b>

**Please send for FREE Preview.**

- Alcohol and You (0695-903)     Heroin (1004-903)  
 Speedscene: The Problem of Amphetamine Abuse (0677-903)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send for our new  
16 mm catalog.**

**BFA Educational Media**  
a division of CBS Inc.  
Dept 410  
2211 Michigan Avenue  
Santa Monica, California 90404



Circle No. 324 on Reader Service Card