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INFORMING EMPLOYEES

MUTUAL understanding, as was suggested in our last Monthly Letter, is one of the world's great needs, and there is no sector in which it is more to be desired than between employers and employees.

The simplest things in life are becoming complex. There are thousands of things we should think about or wish to think about, all crowding upon our minds. And most important among them is the relation of the worker to his work.

We need urgently to know how people can work together efficiently and harmoniously. We must try to bridge the gap that sometimes separates the firm's president from the hourly-wage worker. The creed of the business must be passed down from the man who decides policies to the lowliest labourer and office boy, so that everyone in the organization will understand what useful social function he is serving.

It is not so long ago that management, from top level executives to foremen, was so intent upon getting jobs done that it had no time to give information about the why's and wherefore's. Management knows today that in the absence of constructive, accurate and prompt information, the detractors and saboteurs of business step in. They see in the absence of business explanations and facts an opportunity for their negative propaganda.

One important new realization is that industrial relations is made up largely of attitudes. It is the way people look at things that counts. Unless employees understand what management is doing, and why and how, their fullest support cannot be expected.

This imposes upon management the obligation to build on two fronts: the emotional front and the intellectual front. When a meeting of minds is desired, nothing is more important than to explain, and there is nothing in your business or its problems that you cannot make intelligible if you go the right way about it. But following immediately behind the facts must come a relation of the facts to the individual lives of those affected by them.

What Kind of Information?

No one has yet presented a uniform programme for giving facts to employees, and we do not believe that one is possible. Every company differs from every other company, and employees differ from one another. The programme needs to be custom-made. One ingredient of every programme, however, must be frankness.

Those charged with the task of informing workers about a business need the ability to walk all around every proposition and situation, viewing it from the factory window as well as from the management office.

"The kind of knowledge we want our employees to possess requires more than the passive reception of facts," say Alexander R. Heron in his excellent handbook *Sharing Information with Employees*. "It requires the active reception of facts, the exploration of meanings and of the relation of fact to fact."

This emphasizes the joint nature of the project. The worker must be willing to listen, to study, and to understand the presentation of management's position. Management needs to cover three points in detail: (1) how employees, departments, management and the company belong in the same enterprise; (2) how the company strives to keep its policies in line with the public interest, the interest of the thousands of men and women who have entrusted their savings to it, the interest of workers who depend upon it for a living, and the interests of the nation, and, (3) how the company is looking toward the future, preparing for its continuance in business by finding new markets, new processes, new sources of supply, and ways in which to improve working conditions. Approaches like this will lead to mutual respect, cordial goodwill, and common interest in the success of the enterprise.

The Thinking of Workers

As a preliminary, the company needs to survey its objectives with two employee thoughts in mind: what do I want out of life, and what do I want the company to do to enable me to obtain it? People relate everything to their own personality. They think *away from them* — from the conditions surrounding

their own lives and jobs to the conditions surrounding business and the lives of others.

The job is a man's bread and butter. He looks to management to furnish him with facts about how that bread and butter are being supplied, how long they will continue to come his way, and whether there is the prospect, once in a while, of a little jam. Until these questions are answered, we cannot expect to find emotional stability, nor can we look hopefully for the interest in the job which all management desires of workers.

It is worth emphasizing a feature of today's life which has a bearing upon the employee's attitude toward his job — the fragmentation of industry.

In the old days when organizations were small, there was a close contact between the boss and the workers. The worries of the business they carried jointly, and if they had individual worries they always had attentive listeners. It is not easy to preserve that sense of personal relationship and mutuality of interest when the number of employees gets into the thousands.

Another feature of modern business, drawn to attention of an audience by Dr. D. Ewen Cameron in a graphic address, is the way in which today's productive method deprives workers of the satisfaction of completing a job. In the old days a man made a wheelbarrow, from spokes to handles, and when he put the last lick of paint on it he could stand back proudly and say: "I made it."

Today, of course, the parts are made by many men, perhaps in different factories in different parts of Canada, and even in the assembly more than one man may be concerned.

This must be so if we are to have the abundance of things we want at the prices we demand. There is no more puzzling problem in the matter of daily living than the attempt to reconcile our desire for an ever-rising material standard of living with our yearning to preserve the values of a peasant industry.

Part of the answer seems to be to give information to employees which will enable them to understand these points: their particular job or part of a job depends for its existence upon the broad policies of the business, upon management's success in merchandising, and upon the co-operation of every other worker; their particular job contributes in a significant way to the wholesome development of business, and is necessary to it.

Management's Job

It used to be thought that only salesmen and others in close touch with the public needed to know about human relations, but now it is realized that knowledge of what makes men tick and of how they can keep time together is needed from the topmost executive to the lowliest worker.

It is in such an environment that friendliness grows. No section of business knows better than do banks and service institutions the vital importance of friend-

liness among the staff if friendliness is to communicate itself to customers. In our own Bank, friendliness among the staff and friendliness between staff and customers has grown with the institution. In the opinion of executives, it is the greatest asset of The Royal Bank.

How is this friendliness between staff, which is the basis of co-operative work and public relations, to be achieved? The very first principle takes us back to what was said about rousing and maintaining a man's interest in his job. It satisfies one of his basic needs to be recognized as important.

One way to do this is to keep the worker informed, so that he feels he is "on the inside" of the company business, that he participates in the show and is not merely part of a machine.

Unless management views its business and its proposed changes through the eyes of the worker, how can it tell what things need to be cleared away so that the good points may be visible to the worker?

The Supervisor's Place

The executive who asks, at this point, "but what about supervisors, and department managers, isn't that their job?" is putting his finger on an important feature in employee relations. The supervisor is the key man. He is the natural person for an employee to turn to when he wants to know something about the company. But what we are suggesting is the little extra that will build the spirit of belonging we are seeking as a way of consolidating employees' interests with those of the firm.

At the same time, the supervisor must be played up. To do a good job he must be given not only authority and prestige but information. If he is to do a good job of answering employees' questions he must be thoroughly familiar with the company's policies and activities. If these requirements are met, no medium for carrying information can nearly equal the supervisor.

On the other hand, unless the supervisor is informed, and in such a way as to make him feel that his position is recognized by the giving of extra confidence, no programme of employee information is likely to be effective. As it is put pithily by V.O. Marquez, Public Relations Manager of Northern Electric Company Ltd.: "informative material is valuable, but unless it is built upon a sound basis of communication through the supervisor it is dust and ashes."

The supervisory people should know in advance that certain information is about to be given to employees or the public. Furthermore, they should have supplementary explanatory matter that will make them respected as the source of answers to questions. No matter how well the announcement may be prepared, questions will arise in the minds of workers. Being able to answer them, or to discuss them intelligently on the basis of superior information, will raise the supervisor's standing, increase his confidence, add to his feeling of responsibility, and contribute in an important way to the satisfaction of employees.

About Grievances

Some questions will inevitably take the form of gripes or grievances or complaints. This is another field for employer enterprise. Nothing will win the respect of employees more quickly or more thoroughly than the establishment of a reputation for handling grievances in a fair and understanding way.

Much can be done by anticipating areas of danger and giving information in advance. Herbert Kaufman, writer of inspirational essays, said it tersely: "The time to use soft soap is before a man gets the chance to think he has had a dirty deal."

One area in which this technique is particularly needed is in explaining economics, and this education is a continuing process. Even though it is undoubtedly true that our workers get more for doing less than any other workers in the world, that means nothing unless the workers are aware of the fact that they are getting all that it is safe for them to get without endangering the very tools that make their prosperity possible.

The story told by management must look beyond the pay cheque to the broader aspects of business: everything enters into it, from raw material to competition for the customer's trade. All employment comes from customers, and the only worthwhile job security is customer security. Having customers depends upon offering quality goods at competitive prices. Prices depend upon costs, and wages are the principal cost of everything, from the exploration for new sources of material to the delivery of the finished goods at the customer's door.

We said the picture must be presented in its simplest and most understandable way. All mathematics consists of two functions: addition and subtraction. There is, then, no reason why any mathematical condition or feature of business cannot be reduced to understandable simple arithmetic — so simple, be it noted, that it cannot be used as the basis of misrepresentation.

Catching Attention

To these simple concepts there must be linked something inspirational. This is one arena in which business and democratic governments fail to make good. Wallace Carroll says in *Persuade or Perish*: "In the debates of the United Nations, American spokesmen failed to utter a single phrase which stirred the imagination of mankind, and when the Russians used the international platform with some success, the Americans could only bleat that the Russians were making 'propaganda'. As if it were a crime to put a persuasive case before the peoples of the world!"

That is a strong way of saying that those who wish to combat collectivism must come down from intellectual heights and wrestle on the opponents' ground. We have to be able to explain and prove that our system is the best system because it produces the greatest good for the greatest number. We have to prove in an effective way what we know to be true: that under the phoney humaneness of collectivism there is a deadly but hidden inhumanity. We have to stop smiling disdainfully at slick slogans, and counter

them in an effective way with equally attractive concepts bolstered by unchallengeable facts.

This necessity extends all the way through a business concern's announcements, whether made in speech or in writing, by radio or movie, to employees or customers. The first necessity of any announcement is to get it attended to. If that objective is not attained every other objective is futile.

Everyone else but business people learned this long ago, and now business is catching up but slowly. The malcontents of the world like Hitler and Mussolini were laughed at in Britain, Canada and the United States of America for their antics, their whooping things up, their dramatics. But while we were still laughing they launched a war in which millions died. Revolutionaries like Stalin played upon elementary human feeling in a harsh and uncultured way that bewildered us by its grossness. But while we were still bewildered, Stalin enslaved half a world.

Simplicity and Interest

What we need is not propaganda of that sort, but recognition of the fact that human beings respond to certain instincts and emotions, and that the strongest appeal — whether it be evil or good — is made on those lines. Ours is a good appeal, but we must follow the rules. We must learn thoroughly that it is just as important the way a thing is said as what the message contains.

We have to be interesting. We are competing with many attractions and ideas. Many a report, many a weighty and important announcement, many a plan for betterment of business, community or nation, comes to the business man's desk. How much more appealing, how much more easily readable, they would be if each writer had injected just one milligramme of gaiety or charm or human interest into what he wrote.

This is where the art of the executive shows itself best, working through his personnel or public relations staff. He will take the familiar and make it newly interesting; he will take the stale and make it sparklingly fresh. He will take the report which has followed an accustomed groove since the firm was organized, and surprise it out of its rut. Even the same old story can be re-humanized year by year by competent people.

One essential ingredient in everything designed to communicate ideas is simplicity. People who are good workmen and good citizens, well educated and seriously interested in what is going on, often are unable to formulate for themselves any plan of action or way of thinking that is not presented in terms of the experience and language that are part of their lives. They cannot build their thoughts upon abstractions.

Simplicity of language and construction help toward understandability. Even if you have the whole secret of the universe within you, and can see clearly the entire stretch of events to which you wish to call attention, all that profundity is useless for staff or public relations work unless you express it in a manner that attracts attention and in words that are understood.

Using the House Organ

The media of communication will differ according to the audience, the resources, and the judgment of the executive.

Industrial publications are not new. Several names are used to describe them, but *Printers' Ink* stands up valiantly for the title "House Organs". Others wish to call them "Industrial Publications, Company Publications, Company Magazines", and other things. *Printers' Ink* argues that when you say "House Organ" people know what you are talking about.

Whatever it is called, the house organ is a popular institution. There are 353 listed in the latest *Printers' Ink* directory as being published in Canada, and there are 5,200 published elsewhere.

The house organ is the voice of management to its employees, and that is a sobering thought. It is not enough for the president and the general manager to write inspirational pieces for publication, and leave the rest of the magazine to be filled with vacuous articles such as newspapers keep standing in galleys to be used as "filler" in emergency.

Shop gossip has its place, and that place is bigger in certain types of businesses than in others. The employee likes to see his picture and the picture of his baby in print, and when judged by certain standards of minimum interest these pictures are good for morale. But they need to be meshed with established company policy by pointing a message or giving credit to the employee for doing something of benefit to himself, the company or the community.

A company publication edited for staff is useless and fruitless unless it takes advantage of every issue to describe or explain some phase of company policy and practice which has the good of the staff at heart. Every article should have a firm skeleton of facts, padded with human interest and dressed in attractive word garments.

Handbooks

Many firms, working on the belief that the only way to get anybody to do anything is by making him want to do it and then telling him how to do it, are supplying the newcomer with a handbook.

Running through the handbook should be the theme: "This is a good place to work." If the booklet is designed for all the employees, it will be more general in its contents than if a separate booklet is prepared for every class of work. It is important, in either case, that the new worker should learn from the booklet the part he plays in the whole company activity. Every statement must be accurate, unexaggerated and inspirational. The booklet as a whole must be friendly in its tone.

If an information manual is to succeed in its purpose it must not only say what the company wants to say, but it must say it in such a way as to be read. If illustrations are used, they should not be stodgy photographs; they should show people doing interesting things, and they should bear close relationship to what is said in

the text. If rules are laid down, the human failing that resents the word "don't" should be borne in mind. Wherever two or three people are gathered together in some activity, they are the better for having some rules of conduct, but these may be explained in terms of the workers' comfort, benefit and safety rather than as commandments.

Letters, Meetings, Tours

Letters are used to carry important or immediate news to employees. A letter has a more personal touch than a printed article, and the signature of an executive adds authority to the message. However, discretion will dictate the careful timing and use of letters. They must not become so commonplace that they are disregarded; they must not be used to scold or complain.

Meetings and courses are in vogue in many plants, to discuss specific problems and teach special skills. It has been found in recent years that there is an opening for meetings and courses designed to give employees a knowledge of the company.

A meeting of fifty persons with community of interest can be most effective in the two-way employer-employee relations mentioned earlier as being so desirable. Such a meeting enables the employee to satisfy his human desire for personal contact with his employer, and it provides the disgruntled worker with an opportunity to get things off his chest — under circumstances where the executive has an opportunity to give his answer in a way that will reflect honour upon the company.

Office and plant tours have been successful in informing employees. Some factories invite not only their workers but their families and others in the community to come and see what goes on.

Other means of communication may be used: movies, radio, bulletin board posters (but don't rush to the board with trivialities), suggestion systems, contests, advertising in newspapers, and a host of others. Most companies feel their way and test the results of using different means.

Give Plenty of Facts

Every survey designed to find out what employees want to know stresses their desire for facts about the company. Be specific. Give your people something good and factual to think about. That will be much more effective in building their opinions favourably to the company than will abstractions or opinions. And by providing these facts you will be arming them against people who seek to make them dissatisfied.

There are at least ten critics of private enterprise for every defender qualified to trade intellectual walllops. One objective of informing employees is to put them in preferred position to meet these people on even terms. The method found most effectual is to give workers understanding of the firm's importance in life — in community life and in their own lives — and to interpret what you do in terms of the workers' welfare.