



The Employees' Publication

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THE EMPLOYEES' PUBLICATION

One of the many devices that have arisen to meet the loss in personal contact between employer and employee is the employees' magazine. This magazine or newspaper is published within a business organization, not primarily for the purpose of selling goods, either by direct appeal to potential customers, or by inspiration of salesmen, but as a means of communication between the members of the organization. It may be intended to accomplish one or both of two ends: first, the promotion of a better acquaintance and thereby a stronger feeling of good-fellowship among the workers; second, the education of the workers in production, waste-reduction, safety, health, regularity of attendance, thrift, or understanding of the company policies.

The need for a magazine to accomplish these ends is obviously greatest among the larger organizations. The School of Commerce and Administration of the University of Chicago received answers to a questionnaire, sent out in November, 1921, from 175 companies publishing employees' magazines. Eighty-nine per cent of these were companies employing more than an average of 500 workers, and 65 per cent employed more than an average of 1,000 workers.

The recognition of the importance both of good spirit and of information among the employees, rising to a height during the war, was reflected by the initiation at that time of a large proportion of the magazines which more than 500 companies have published at some time during the last five years. Twenty-six per cent of the companies answering the questionnaire had begun publication before 1917; 71 per cent began publication during the years 1917 through 1920; and only 3 per cent began in 1921. When the stress of the war-time labor demand relaxed, many companies discontinued their publications. Twenty-three per cent of the companies answering the questionnaire reported discontinuance during the year 1921. These discontinuances do not appear to have resulted from failure to accomplish the ends of

publication, but from a feeling that the efforts of the management need not at present be concerned with the attitudes of the workers.

As a personalizing device, however, which has been used extensively, and to which resort will doubtless be made again, the employees' publication still has interest. A survey of the contents of magazines published by approximately 300 companies makes possible certain generalizations concerning the value, as an aid to good industrial relations, of certain types of material.

I. PLANT NEWS AND PERSONALS

A large proportion of space in all the magazines is devoted to plant news and personal references. Some editors deprecate the use of such trivial items, and continue to print them only because of an unmistakable demand on the part of the readers. The replies to a questionnaire which circulated among the employees of the Dill and Collins Company, eliciting a request for more news items about the workers, reflect an attitude apparently widespread among the readers of plant papers. The value of such items consists, however, not alone in the interest aroused, but also in their effectiveness as a means of giving each worker a sense of the importance of his own relation to the organization. Among the incentives to human effort few, if any, are more important than the desire for self-respect and for recognition from others. Publication of production standings, bonus awards, commendations by patrons, and other individual records are some of the more obvious ways in which the employees' publication makes articulate the recognition of the worker by the management; and even casual personal references may also help to give the worker a sense of individual worth. But the employees' publication cannot, manifestly, replace the real recognition of promotion and wage by mere word flattery and paper praise.

II. EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

A. PRODUCTION AND SERVICE

A second type of material found in the employees' magazines is educational material. One of its forms is that intended to affect production or service. It may consist of technical instruc-

tions concerning processes and operations; popular articles written to increase the worker's interest by showing him his job in its relation to the whole sequence of operations; articles written to show the importance to the worker individually of high productivity; or accounts of production campaigns and individual instances of efficiency.

B. WASTE REDUCTION

Side by side with education for increased output goes education for decreased waste. Stories showing how waste occurs and how it could be prevented, what it amounts to in dollars and cents, and how this loss affects the workman himself are accompanied by contests between departments for minimum spoilage. A number of the magazine editors feel that the excellent records for reduced spoilage in their plants can be traced in large measure to the efforts of the magazine.

Suggestion systems are a valuable way of encouraging interest, and have been used by the magazines especially in connection with increasing production and decreasing waste. At times the accepted suggestions are dealt with in some detail in the magazine. One feels in general that the mere listing of awards without attention to the detailed suggestions for which the awards are given is an inadequate handling of this matter. Publishing not only the awards but also the suggestions for which awards are given indicates the kind of ideas that are valuable, and encourages other employees to offer theirs. One would expect good results from such a column as that in a recent issue of the *Maypole Mirror* (Maypole Margerine Works, Southall, England) giving "suggestions for suggestions," and meeting some of the objections that may rise in an employee's mind when he considers making a suggestion.

C. SAFETY

Accident prevention is a special form of waste reduction with which the employees' magazine can deal. The National Safety Council furnishes copy on this subject. Some of it has very good attention value; but the fact that it appears so often—in many cases every issue contains some safety material—decreases

the interest unless special effort is taken to give it variety—and often no such effort is taken. The magazine is particularly helpful in giving publicity to interdepartmental and interplant safety contests. Such a contest as the Niagara and Kimberly Mills of Kimberly-Clark Paper Company have been carrying on could hardly have been effective without *Co-operation* to print their challenges and boasts back and forth, with news of the progress of the contest. Suggestions as to possibilities for decreasing accidents can also be given publicity through these magazines.

It is difficult to measure the results of all the different kinds of safety material used, but the editors seem well agreed that they bring results. Only one editor was found who believes that safety material has a directly opposite effect. She refuses to call the employees' attention to accidents, lest, when their minds are focused on the possibilities, what they fear will occur. The company is carrying on a hazardous type of production, and one wonders if the hesitancy to print accident standings may not be based on a realization that they are abnormally large. At least, the results in plants using safety material do not seem to justify this editor's fears. The editor of the *Marathon Runner* (Marathon Paper Mills), for example, believes that the 35 per cent decrease in accidents in their plant can be traced to the *Runner*. The Four Wheel Drive Company gives *The Goodfellow* much credit for helping to bring about a decrease of 97 per cent in the number of hours lost on account of accidents in 1921 as against the number of hours so lost in 1917.

D. ABSENTEEISM AND TURNOVER

Absenteeism is another cause of waste which the employees' publications attempt to influence. Educational material is used to show the importance of regular attendance, and attendance records for departments are employed as incentives. Suggestion in the form of photographs of old employees and special honorable mention for long service, and occasionally arguments, are employed in attempts to reduce labor turnover. The influence on turnover traceable to the magazine is, however, usually felt to come from the *esprit de corps* created rather than as a result

of any special efforts directed toward turnover alone. A majority of the firms answering the questionnaire felt that their magazines had helped in reducing turnover.

E. THRIFT AND HOME-OWNING

A subject frequently dealt with is individual thrift. The advantages of saving are set forth and often supplemented by advice as to the kind of investment to make. Several magazines print offers to give advice through the labor department, without expense, as to any propositions for investment, and warn against fraudulent propositions. The works magazines of the International Harvester Company print occasional advice as to business transactions of the individual, such as a recent lucid article on contracts, intended primarily to warn the housewife against signing so-called orders which may be contracts binding on her husband.

Home-owning also receives its share of space. Some magazines merely call attention to the advantages of owning one's home, others, probably with greater effect, call attention to individual instances of home-ownership among the employees.

F. AMERICANIZATION

In many employees' papers a large share of space is devoted to Americanization propaganda. It may take various forms: presentation of the desirability of learning English; instructions as to principles of our government; advice as to obtaining citizenship papers; names of men who have taken first or second papers; and stories about opportunities and advantages of this country.

It was a surprise to find that one company using the first type of material provides no means of aiding the employees to learn English. One would hardly expect such Americanization propaganda, unaccompanied by free classes either in the plant or the community, to have high value. Another company, indeed, is postponing emphasis on Americanization until a system of classes has been worked out.

The second, third, and fourth types of material were used especially during the war. One of the plants of the International

Harvester Company used such articles extensively in a successful campaign to make every employee an American citizen.

The fifth type of material may be the biography of some prominent American who came to this country as an immigrant, such as the story of Professor Pupin in a recent issue of the *A. W. Employees' Booster* of the American Woolen Company; or it may be the biography of one of the company's own employees who is an immigrant, and, possibly, a comparison of his working conditions in this country with those in his native land.

The magazine in a plant where foreign workers are employed may help not only to interest those workers in becoming Americans, but also to create respect from the American workers for the foreigner. An article, for example, in the September number of the *A. W. Employees' Booster* on the "Reconstruction of Lithuania" might be expected to give not only pleasure to the Lithuanian workers, but education also to other workers. An article in the *M.M.C. News*, published by the Millville Manufacturing Company, appeals to American workers to abandon the use of derogatory nicknames for foreign workers. Such articles show a true American spirit. On the other hand, it is occasionally distressing to find the word "American" used out of its meaning. Calling the open shop "the American plan" should be regarded as no more legitimate than using the American flag in commercial advertising, since it attempts to employ patriotism to cover a very different issue.

G. BUSINESS POLICIES

1. *General.*—It seems surprising that so few of the magazines use their pages to explain business customs and policies which workers are likely to question. To be sure, it is not easy to write such explanations in a way that will really promote understanding. The publicity manager for Swift and Company says that the little articles appearing in the *Arrow* giving "The Truth about Swift and Company" have presented some of the most difficult writing problems his department ever faced. To explain concepts like surplus, interest, or profits, in language that can be understood by the reader of the least education is no easy

task, and the editor of the employees' magazine has the added difficulty that he is attempting to explain these abstract ideas to people who already have preconceptions and prejudices about them.

Perhaps the absence of such articles in many of the magazines may be in part accounted for by the difficulties in making them really explain. At all events, it is with a distinct sense of discovery that one occasionally encounters articles such as that in recent publications of the International Harvester Company upon "The Company's Annual Report, 1920"; the explanation of time study in the Dennison *Round Robin*; the discussion of the piece-rate system in the *Chester Compass* of the Merchant Shipbuilding Corporation; the description in *Clothcraft* of the way in which Joseph and Feiss push a staple product in slack times to stabilize production; Mr. Young's remarks in the *Sower* on the occupational rating plan of the International Harvester Company; or the explanation in the *Employees Service News* of considerations in reducing the working force of the Cincinnati Milling Company.

2. *Wages*.—Discussion of wage reductions have appeared in a great many employees' publications within the last six months. Many of them are found, as one would expect, in papers which report industrial council meetings. Swift and Company, the International Harvester Company, the Commonwealth Steel Company, and the Continental Mills have discussed in their shop papers council action on wage-rate and time reductions. The Dill and Collins Company answered in the *Diamond Dee* an anonymous letter complaining of a 10 per cent wage reduction. The James McCreery Company, which has not lowered salaries, uses the *McCreerian* to urge that wasteful expenses be reduced and sales increased in order that salaries may continue at the present figure.

The common use of frank references to wage reductions in other establishments for giving emphasis to a plea for efficiency seems justifiable. The effectiveness of such references, however, may not lie entirely in the realization on the part of the worker that his co-operation will help his company to make profits

which will allow the continuance of his present wage. Some companies do not hesitate to stress another aspect of the matter—that when other men's wages are falling, one's own job becomes more desirable—both to one's self and to others. The threatening implication seems out of place in an employees' magazine, which is ostensibly for the creation not of fear but of good will.

The disadvantage in the use of fear as an incentive is that it cannot be permanent. Industry moves in cycles, and the time will inevitably roll around when there will no longer be crowds waiting at the gates for work. Then the company which has been building up fear may find its good will seriously injured, both among the employees who have been with it during the period of depression, and with a wide range of other workers among whom its reputation has spread.

3. *Unions and strikes.*—The attitude of a company toward unions is often an even more delicate subject to handle than are its wage policies. It seems extremely doubtful whether anti-union propaganda should ever have a place in the employees' paper. Even though a workman is not himself a union member, his sympathies and confidence are to be expected to go out to his fellow-workers who are unionists, because they have the same intellectual background and the same problems as he, rather than to the editor who, for a salary, writes down theories learned from books or from the lips of company officials. The editor who wages a campaign against unionism will probably find it costing him heavily in good will. Statements such as one paper made in a recent issue, that unions exist solely for the support of the leaders, and are most successful among workers of the least ability, seem particularly unwise, because so strongly inviting argument and refutation.

An editor may avoid the union difficulty by merely maintaining silence. Some follow the same policy with reference to strikes. If a large proportion of the workers participate in the strike, the paper may miss an issue or two. The attitude of most editors is probably well represented by the one who said: "We publish in the employees' magazine the things we want them to think about. We don't call attention to labor troubles or

strikes; but after the strike is over, we may call attention to evidences that things are going well now." More ingenuous, and therefore probably more likely to win confidence, has been the policy of another paper which has included each week a brief mention of the progress of a strike in their plants—a report of the number of workers (without names) out on strike and the number at work. Perhaps this paper would not, however, have followed such a plan if the ratio of strikers to non-strikers had been larger.

4. *Socialism*.—Not only the immediate measures of unionism and strikes, but the more theoretical programs of socialism, communism, and so-called bolshevism are dealt with in employees' papers. Such articles as the series in the *Morse Dry Dock Dial* on "Theories of Wages" might be expected to give a little order to confused thinking on questions of industrial organization. Too large a proportion of such discussion, however, loses the opportunity to give constructive instruction as to the fundamentals of organization, for the easier alternative of pointing out past failures in communal undertakings or government ownership and vilifying radical leaders.

5. *Discussion of controversial questions*.—Forty-nine out of seventy-two firms reporting as to their attitude toward the discussion of controversial questions by the employees state that they discourage such discussion, and eleven more do not encourage it. Fourteen of these feel that controversial questions are adequately handled through other channels—chiefly through shop committees. One of the fourteen is sanguine that in its organization of 2,000 employees such matters are all disposed of orally.

Seven of the forty-nine avoid controversial questions because of the difficulty of controlling the discussion. Concerning this objection, it might be suggested that such discussion is much more easily controlled when caught in the plant paper where the light of facts can be brought to play on it, than when it flits about surreptitiously from group to group of the workers. Discussion in the plant paper would not "plant the seed of doubt and discontent" as one editor fears, but could only discover whatever

crop of that sort was already growing. The anonymous letter printed in the *Diamond Dee* concerning the wage reductions illustrates one way in which the plant paper, by open discussion of a cause of discontent may, indeed, act in a way to help in removing it. The possibility which one editor fears that "questions would arise upon which the employees could not be cognizant of the facts" is the very opportunity of the plant paper, which should furnish the facts that will correct misconceptions and give a basis for fair understanding.

One company of the forty-nine feels that the size of the organization (75,000 employees) prohibits discussion. It is true that the task of handling an open forum for an organization of such size might assume alarming proportions. But a policy of encouraging discussion does not necessarily involve the printing of all that comes to the editor's desk, for many of the needed explanations can be made to the individuals without open discussion. One would suppose that the larger the organization the more desirable would be the employment of the company paper as a channel for discussing questions of general interest.

Another company fears the possibility that magazines containing discussion of controversial questions would get into the hands of outsiders "who would immediately make use of such articles for malicious purposes. That is, we feel that we could talk over with our own men almost any industrial question if the audience could be limited to our own men."

Nine of the forty-nine companies feel that discussion is not consonant with the purpose of their papers. "It is simply an employees' paper for publishing news, not propaganda," says one. "It is edited for the purpose of distributing news," says another. "It belongs to the employees and we feel that as such could not be used for discussion." The paper which refuses to print either side can hardly be accused of unfairness. It may, however, be losing a real opportunity to gain the employees' confidence, encourage them to think about their company and their jobs, and learn their viewpoints. To be sure, if the shop paper is to allow discussion of controversial questions, the

management must feel reasonably confident that its policies will bear inspection.

In looking over the papers edited by the twelve who say that they encourage individual expression of thought by the employees, no very striking evidences were found that the opportunities were seized. The lack suggests that something more is needed than editorial open-mindedness. The secret of the employees' silence in some plants may be contentment; but there are other reasons which are sometimes operative, and the editor can do little to elicit free discussion if the employees feel that the management will find a way of eliminating workers who are not tractable and submissive. It may be highly desirable that the shop paper be a medium of communication, not merely from management to workers, but between management and workers; yet the extent to which it can be such a medium depends not on the ruling of the editor in matters of censorship so much as it does on the whole policy of the management in all its industrial relations.

H. OTHER MATERIAL NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PLANT

Although in general material not directly related to the plant may have little value, in some instances its use seems more than justified. The condensed Associated Press report which an isolated lumber camp prints in its daily news sheet, and the community items which supply the lack of a daily paper in three very small towns seem to fill a real need. A home page may have value in tying up the employees' occupation with his life away from the plant. The value of so-called inspirational material and humor, on the other hand, is probably increased several fold by being definitely related to the plant.

III. EMPLOYEES' CO-OPERATION

One of the values of an employees' magazine is often found, not merely in issuing a certain amount of printed matter, more or less educational, but in having one more enterprise in which management and workers unite in working for a result. Most of the magazines have staffs of associate editors or reporters chosen from among the workers, occasionally by popular election,

and nearly all encourage contributions from the employees. Interest is often increased by bulletins, meetings, and special awards.

Co-operation is occasionally carried a step farther, to the financing of the magazine. Charging a subscription price tends to result in a higher standard for the material submitted, stronger interest, and a greater confidence in the shop paper. There is, however, a disadvantage in the danger that new employees and employees least interested in their work and the company—two classes the paper ought especially to reach—will not buy it voluntarily. An arrangement might be made whereby the company would present each new employee with the magazine for two or three issues, and thereafter expect him to purchase his own copies.

IV. COST

The average cost per copy, as shown by the data from the questionnaires, varies according to the size and type of the magazine, the extent to which company facilities can be used for printing, engraving, and art work, and the number of readers among whom it circulates. The following table gives the

CIRCULATION	SQUARE INCHES OF SPACE IN ONE COPY OF MAGAZINE				AVERAGE FOR ALL
	—500	501-1000	1001-1500	More than 1500	
Less than 1,000	6	16.5	33*	42*	12.5
1,000-1,999	8	15	17	22†	13.5
2,000-2,999	4.5	11	18.5	21.5	14
3,000-4,999		11	15	17	14.5
5,000 and over		10	9	16	10.5
Average for all	6	13.5	14.5	22.5	14.5

*Only 2 cases.

†Only 1 case.

average cost, to the nearest half-cent, per magazine for 96 magazines, classified according to the size of circulation and the total space in the magazine.¹

The distribution of costs also varies with the size of circulation. The amount expended on salaries and on printing and

¹ In the case of costs reckoned without including salary, 32 per cent was added if the circulation was less than 1,000, 25 per cent if more than 1,000.

paper decreases with an increase in circulation, while the amount for engraving and art work increases. The rough average for magazines of all sizes of circulation are 27 per cent for salaries, 55 per cent for printing and paper, and 18 per cent for engraving and art work.

V. CONCLUSION

The accomplishment of the ends which the various types of material seek depends, obviously, not only upon the material itself, but even more upon the plant policies which it represents. For example, it has been said that the employees' publication can be useful in giving the employee a sense of self-respect; but if the white-collared time clerk treats the shop worker with supercilious condescension, if the foreman patronizes him, and the gang-boss bullies him, if his wages remain stationary in spite of increasing efficiency, and the lines of promotion are closed, the employees' magazine can do little to create in the individual worker's mind a sense of recognition. The use of the magazine to develop a sense of loyalty to the organization has been commended; an instance was discovered of workers who stayed with their organization when higher wages were being paid elsewhere, because they liked to work with their fellow-employees. But the company which tries through the employees' magazine to substitute good-fellowship for the higher wages it could afford to pay is likely to find its efforts meeting with the same results that came from the old welfare work. The discussion of controversial questions in the magazines has been commended; but it was noted that the presence of such discussion depends less upon editorial encouragement than upon the whole attitude of the management in hearing questions and complaints or settling grievances. If suggestions or requests have been regarded as interfering with prerogatives of management, it is not probable that the employees will come out boldly in type with further requests or suggestions.

The employees' magazine can no more create good labor conditions than a telescope can create a sky full of stars. But it can bring to the attention, and perhaps the understanding, of the workers, the conditions and policies that are existing.

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