



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MILWAUKEE

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Some Thoughts in Connection With
Work in Industrial Research Division
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I am attempting to set down here some thoughts covering outstanding results and possibilities in connection with the work carried out in the Industrial Research Division.

Taking up, first, the Test Room, since that was the first study made, the outstanding result was the increase in production of from forty to sixty per cent, and I think it has been conclusively proved that the major part of this increase was brought about by the removal of fear and suspicion on the part of the employees and a consequent improvement in their morale. Certainly the result was had without any drive as such.

A recent suggestion coming from the shop that perhaps the foreman should do nothing but the personnel part of the job, may be revolutionary. Certainly increased production in the Test Room was brought about by deliberately subordinating output and doing a nearly perfect job of improving the morale. Increased output to an undreamed of figure followed as a natural consequence. The efficient foreman or supervisor of the future may devote the major instead of a minor part of his time, as now, to so-called personnel work, and production may follow almost as a by-product, as in the Test Room. To my mind there is a possibility that this thought may almost reverse our previous ideas as to the duties of a foreman or supervisor, and the results may be as outstanding as were those in the Test Room.

The interviewing of employees so far has given us three major results, namely:

- (a) A beneficial effect on the employee interviewed;
- (b) Increased material for supervisory training;
- (c) Another method of supervisory training through the experience gained in interviewing and in the holding of discussions.

There is much evidence as to the favorable effect of the interview on the employee as witnessed by the fact that _____ per cent of the supervisors in the Operating Branch stated that employees were easier to supervise after being interviewed; the case of the employee who complained of not having received a two cent increase and also that promotion was impossible without a pull of some kind, and then on the next day seemed perfectly happy when he told the interviewer he had decided to forget his grievance. Later on this same individual was promoted to section chief rank and now does not recall that any pull is necessary to obtain a promotion, his feeling being that to obtain a promotion one must have the goods. A third case illustrating this point is that of a female operator in the Cable Plant who complained bitterly about the service in the Restaurant and about a week later thanked the interviewer for having corrected all the things she complained about, in spite of the fact that no change whatever had been made.

Hundreds of cases are on file where employees have stated that they felt better after the interview. There are many comments to the effect that employees appreciate and in many cases are surprised that the Company is interested in them. All of which seem to indicate that we are heading toward a new personnel technique.

While the value of interviewing to employees is difficult to appraise, the comments and specific cases are of great significance and can not be disregarded. It is interesting to look back on the situation existing in 1933, at which time we were giving to all supervisors a course of seventeen lessons, one of which was entitled Morale.

At the time we arrived at this subject we had begun to get information from the Test Room on supervision and we felt that the subject could not be covered in one lesson. We therefore decided to expand it to five lessons. We had some difficulty in working up subject material for five discussions and before the five lessons were finished we had started to interview in the Inspection Branch and immediately discovered that the comments from operators were ideal for discussion with the supervisors. As a result this subject of Morale and its related subjects have been under discussion with supervisors almost continuously since 1928.

This raises the question as to how long we should continue to dwell on this subject, and taking it in its broad aspect I am inclined to feel that we shall be discussing it with our supervisors as long as we do business. In 1925 we started a campaign on Safety First and after about a year of discussion of this subject in our various Branch meetings and other conferences the question frequently came up as to whether the subject had not become somewhat shopworn and monotonous. We began to see some results from the effort and were not sure but that we had accomplished all that could be done. Fortunately, however, the campaign was not dropped, and is going on to-day to a much greater extent, and the results year after year plainly indicate that any attempt to get a large group of people thinking and acting differently than they have been accustomed to is a long-period job.

It seems to me this principle applies in the education of our supervisors perhaps to an even greater extent. The subject of dealing with people is vastly more complex than that of Safety, and

by that token the change may come about even more slowly than did the change in our thoughts on Safety. So that while we have hundreds of comments to the effect that supervision has been greatly improved since the inauguration of this plan, we know that we are still far from one hundred per cent realization, and that a continuance of the present program or some program will be necessary continuously.

When approximately _____ per cent of the supervisors in the Operating Branch vote that they have been benefited by this program and wish to see it continued we have no cause to feel discouraged at the results to date, but there is still much to be done. We have interviewed eighteen people who have served as interviewers or discussion leaders and since returned to the shop either as workmen or supervisors, and the results of these interviews bring out what might have been foreseen; namely, an embarrassing situation for some of them due to the fact that they go back to the shop working for or with supervisors who still have entirely different views as to the best methods of handling employees. The general tone of the interviews, however, clearly indicates the value of this training, as some of these individuals point out that they some times refuse to give out orders to employees as they have been directed by their superior, feeling that the tone of some of these orders is entirely wrong. This situation, of course, subjects them to possible criticism by their superiors for not having obeyed orders.

To sum up, - it is my personal feeling, and I believe that of all who have been closely connected with this work, that within a period of perhaps five or ten years the results to date and future

developments stand in a fair way to revolutionize our whole method of handling employees, and in consequence improve all of the factors which go to make for efficient manufacture, such as productivity, quality, waste, et cetera, and I feel very strongly that there is a great likelihood that our past methods may be reversed in that the major part of our effort in the future should be placed on establishing the proper relations with employees and the other desired results will follow somewhat as a matter of course.

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