

XI

STARTING THE NEW EMPLOYEE

THE PROCESS of selecting the new employee, discussed in the preceding chapter, culminates in two decisions. The first is the decision by the representative of the employer that the person being interviewed is acceptable to the firm or establishment and acceptable for the particular job. The second is the decision of the candidate that the employer is acceptable to him as his employer.

If the selection process has been thoroughly carried out, the employer can be reasonably sure that the employee is satisfactory. The techniques have been so well developed that there is no need to rely on the trial and error methods of the past. There is no need to put the new employee to work and then watch him for two weeks to see whether the employer really wants him or not. There is no need to endanger the poise and efficiency of the new man by warning him that he is on trial and that the employer has some doubt of his desirability. There is also no need to put him to work on the assumption that he is considered completely satisfactory, and then to make an enemy of him by firing him at the end of the first pay period because he was found unfit or unsatisfactory.

The decision of the worker that the employer is satisfactory to him can seldom be made with equal finality. He still reserves the right to try out the job for a week or two. He may have a substantial fund of evidence that this is a good place to work, but he still needs to find out for himself. On the docket he may have the enthusiastic comments of his brother-in-law. But the brother-in-law has a sweet job as assistant shipping clerk, and the shipping clerk himself is a "right guy." The new employee may have an accumulation of

favorable impressions from chance items in the newspaper over a period of a year or two, the good way in which the union has been able to renew its contracts, the activities of the plant soft-ball and basket-ball teams, the public dinner at which the long-service emblems were presented, the story of the graduation exercises of the company school.

He also has all the stuff which the employment man gave him, the information about wage rates, promotions, the union relations, safety, lunchroom facilities. It all sounds good. He has seen the plant buildings, and has talked to the Old Man in the department where he is to work. Yes, it all looks good, but a fellow can't be sure until he tries it out. Suppose he has to team up with an old so-and-so who expects the new man to do all the hard and dirty work? Suppose he lands in a crew where the old-timers gang up to make it tough for a new fellow? Suppose the straw boss turns out to be a heel, instead of a regular fellow like the foreman? Suppose some payroll clerk wants to argue about the rate which the employment man promised him? Suppose the shop steward has a knife out for him because he wanted his own nephew on the job? Suppose a lot of things out in the plant are just not the way this personnel man thinks they are?

By a careful investment in good methods of selection, the employer has greatly reduced the prospect of expensive turnover. He may have reduced, by 80 or 90 percent, the chance of having to let the new man go as unfit after a week or two. But he cannot assume that the larger prospect of turnover based on the dissatisfaction of the new employee has been measurably reduced. When he takes the job, the new employee has made only a tentative decision that the employer is satisfactory to him.

If jobs are scarce and he needs this one badly, he may keep it without showing any dissatisfaction. That can make him a "steady employee" without insuring that he will ever be a satisfied employee. And a dissatisfied employee, chained

to his job by the need for the pay check, is a focus of trouble. The investment which the employer makes in the new man is not sound unless he gets one who is satisfactory by the employer's standards, and one who finds the employer and the job satisfactory to him.

The new employee has automatically met his future foreman or supervisor, in the selection process itself, if that process is a good one. He knows that he is not going to start with the handicap of being unwelcome because the employment office has handed him to the foreman against the latter's wishes. He knows, in fact, that the final decision that he is wanted and welcome was made by the foreman. As a start, this knowledge is indispensable.

Since he has been so carefully selected, a substantial further investment is justified. If he is expected to become a permanent member of the team, that result can be greatly advanced by giving him a visual understanding of the enterprise as a whole. Although it is relatively new, the conducted plant tour for a new employee, before he goes to work, has already become a definite part of good induction procedures. It has opposition among some intelligent employers. For instance, they point out that the new man is usually hired for the least desirable job. They believe it will generate dissatisfaction to show him through the pleasant, comfortable departments and then put him to work in one which is hot, noisy, and smelly. Perhaps so. But perhaps it would be worse if he had to assume that the whole plant is hot, noisy, and smelly, and that there are no better jobs toward which a good man can look.

The conducted tour offers another chance to help make definite the decision of the new employee that he approves of the employer. This is the opportunity, almost the necessity, of explaining problems and even policies, in the process of identifying departments and their functions. This department handles all incoming materials; it has been able to reduce

damage losses by nearly a hundred dollars a day, by the use of the new pallet boards. This department inspects all finished products; it has also saved a great deal of money by showing the manufacturing and finishing departments how to avoid certain faults; actually it saved one customer account which buys enough of our products to represent thirty-two jobs in the plant.

He can see the boiler room, and learn that it uses fuel oil costing seven hundred dollars a day, and that a man in the machine room turned in a suggestion for saving steam which actually did save ten barrels of oil per day; and incidentally, that this employee received over two hundred dollars as an award for that suggestion.

He can see the skilled and experienced operators on the machines, shake hands with two or three of them, especially Henry who has been here for thirty-two years. He is likely to absorb the impression that the company has a sincere respect for skill and experience and long service.

When he finally starts on the job of unloading ceramic clay from tank cars, and gets the fine dust in his nose, and must wear uncomfortable goggles to keep it out of his eyes, and gets the irritation of the gritty stuff on his hands, he knows how this task fits into the whole job of creating the beautiful china dinner sets which he saw in the salesroom. He has gained an acquaintance with the enterprise which should hasten his ability to feel at home. And he has gotten an intangible feel of the organization, from the easy conversation with the man who conducted him through the whole plant.

This conducted tour is orientation rather than induction. Its purpose is not the pointing out of locations of locker rooms, washrooms, lunchrooms and factory entrances, nor instruction for the particular job he is to fill. For this reason, there is a wide range from which to choose the person who conducts the new worker on his tour. With almost equal

logic, the conductor can be a person from the personnel office, or a safety supervisor, or a full-time guide, or an assistant supervisor in the department where the new man will go to work, or a fellow worker from that department. Whoever is chosen must be given a full understanding of the purpose of the trip, and must accept the responsibility of trying to reveal the company truthfully. If such a revelation is not helpful in clinching the decision of the new man to become a part of the outfit, there is usually a rich dividend to be collected in ideas for correcting the conditions which make a bad impression.

The technical details of inducting a new employee have been amply described in the literature dealing with personnel administration. They should be obvious without the literature. And yet they are sometimes overlooked. Employers have sometimes paid the penalty of lost working time and inefficient performance, and the less evident penalties for the worker's feeling of strangeness, uncertainty, and unimportance, merely because he was not properly informed about such simple things as how to punch the time clock and which washroom to use. It is important that he have all the information he needs before he goes to work. The best guaranty that he will have it is a check list instead of someone's memory. But how he gets the information is just as important. It may have even more effect on his decision as to whether this employer and this job are satisfactory to him.

On the job itself, most employers and supervisors have been inefficient in telling the new worker what to do and how to do it. This weakness was both exaggerated and emphasized in the war production program, when nearly thirty million people were "new workers" on their wartime jobs. This instruction is a highly important part of the process of starting the new employee but it is also an inseparable part of the whole training procedure. Therefore, it is discussed more fully in the chapter dealing with training.

In an earlier paragraph it was stated that an employer today need not go to the expense of trying out a new worker for a week or two, before he can decide that the worker will be the kind of man he wants. A much smaller investment in pre-employment tests will give a much better indication of his mental maturity, skills, interests, attitudes, and fitness for specific work assignments and conditions. But this does not reduce in any degree the need for careful and systematic follow-up of the induction of the new employee. The purpose of the follow-up is not to see whether he is proving himself a good worker. It is to see whether he is being fitted satisfactorily into the team of which he is a member. It is a check-up on the employer himself, as to the quality of his supervision, instruction, and working conditions.

This follow-up usually consists of an interview, on company time, by the personnel man who did the hiring. The interview explores as many angles as possible of the way in which the employee has been absorbed into the organization. It uses indirect methods to some extent, but chiefly frank and direct questions. It deals with his own problems of housing, transportation, need for special clothing. It checks any information which he still needs, as well as information he wants as a matter of interest or curiosity rather than need. It "feels out" his attitude toward his particular job, and encourages thinking and suggestions as to work improvement.

This follow-up interview with the personnel man is good, if it is consistent with the actual experience of the man during the week or two he has been at work. If it is not consistent with that experience it is poisonous and dangerous. If the actual work associates, the foreman, straw boss, and fellow workers, have shown no interest in these same problems of the new worker, the interview in the personnel office becomes evidence of the insincerity or ineffectiveness of the company policies. This is not an imaginary situation. It is a real one, common enough to be an element of danger in the employee

relations of all of us. It is regrettably easy to develop a splendid program of employee relations in the front office, and either try to administer it there, or else fail to enlist the line supervision. "Good employee relations" does not consist of a program or even a policy. It is a way of life.

As an element of this way of life, the real follow-up of the new employee, the assurance of his adjustment into the new surroundings, must be conducted on the job. The interview with the personnel man, after the first week, can be discarded in many instances if there has been the proper and constructive interest by the line supervisor and the fellow worker and the union steward. Such interest is not only an evidence of good employee relations, of a good way of life; it is a very important factor in creating and maintaining that way of life.

One of the standards for selection which is frequently overlooked was emphasized in discussing the selection of the new employee. That standard is his fitness and acceptability to be a member of the working group in which he is to live. Assuming that some attention has been given to this factor in his selection, the desired result is not guaranteed. The task of "fitting in" the new employee after he has been selected and hired is an obvious demand for a practical application of a good employee-relations program. It is an insistent opportunity to put the program to work.

If this task is viewed by the industrial psychologist or the sociologist, it is likely to be described as a problem in assimilation. If it is viewed by the practical supervisor on the job, it may be described as a problem of teamwork. More crudely, the supervisor is likely to register his judgment that "the new guy fits" or that "the fellows just don't take to him" or that "he's either scared of the gang or trying to high-hat them."

Employers who have made real efforts to make new employees feel at home in the plant have sometimes done little about the contacts in which the "at home" result is actually

determined. The new employee may have been loaded with literature, conducted through the whole plant, directed to the time clock, lunchroom and washroom, and carefully introduced to his foreman. From that point it is too easy to take it for granted that the foreman or supervisor will carry on, in the same spirit and with the same skill. The main factor in determining whether the new worker is going to "feel at home" is in the manner of his introduction to fellow workers, and the manner in which they accept him.

Instead of discussing the good and bad techniques for making this introduction, it may be profitable to look at this particular incident in the work experience from a viewpoint which provides perspective. We are discussing the subject of this chapter essentially with the thought of producing desirable results in the attitude of the new employee. That is important; this chapter is written to emphasize that importance, beyond our usual recognition of it. But the wider and longer view, the added perspective, enables us to see also the values to be gained through the effect on the older employee, the way in which good performance in this function contributes to the general objective of good employee relations.

There are many good reasons for removing staff, management, and supervision from the process of induction and orientation, at a much earlier stage than we have usually considered. One reason is that the effect on the new employee will be better. A bigger reason is the far-reaching effect on the older employee.

To illustrate, it is possible to list several steps in the process which can obviously be carried out by an operating employee, at least as well as by a man in a white-collar staff job. As a minimum, such a list would include making the new employee familiar with the employee entrance, location and use of time clocks, locker and washroom facilities, lunchrooms, first-aid equipment, smoking areas, and similar simple but important items, both physical and procedural. Granting

that there are many other things which must be done by the personnel office, it is not difficult nor illogical to postpone any item in this particular list until after the new employee has been turned over to the foreman. It is not difficult to arrange that the foreman will limit his part of the induction procedure so as to leave most of this list to be the responsibility of an older employee with whom the new man is to be directly associated.

The chosen older employee (possibly chosen for that day only) might profitably be excused from his productive work for half an hour or an hour, to show the new man the ropes. He might take him immediately to see such locations as the locker room, washroom, and supply room. He might be the one to introduce him to three or five or seven other men in the same group. He might exchange information with the new man on living accommodations and transportation problems or even invite him to "share a ride" with two or three others who live in the same general direction. He might even be the one to conduct him on the tour of the whole plant.

The older employee might volunteer to take the new man with him at noon, to the time clock and the lunchroom, and there introduce him to a few others. He might offer his services to help on any question that may come up during the morning. In total, the older employee might become an unofficial sponsor for the new man during his first days on the job.

The value of all this to the new employee is obvious, but still needs to be emphasized. Less obvious but much greater is the value of the effect on the older employee. He has been given recognition and responsibility. He has acquired immediate status in the mind of the new man. He has necessarily been invited ahead of time to do such a job, and coached to some extent on how to do it. He has not only been impressed with the sensible concern which management and supervision have for the proper induction of the new worker,

but has been led to make that concern his own. Some very expensive efforts have been made to produce this effect in other ways. The enlistment of the older employee in the process of induction and orientation is probably the least expensive and most direct of all possible methods.

Of course, there is a danger. He may plant unfortunate ideas in the mind of the new man. He may warn him that the foreman is hell-on-wheels every Monday. He may advise him not to exert himself too much or he will kill the job for the rest of the gang. He may plant seeds of doubt as to the sincerity of the company attitude, or as to the ability and fairness of the shop steward. Even so, the odds are in favor of giving him the responsibility of helping to induct the new man, helping to hasten his assimilation. If these tendencies toward destructive criticism arise from actual plant conditions, the mind of the new worker will be promptly poisoned anyway; perhaps more effectively if he has been kept entirely in the hands of the employment man and the foreman, up to this point. If the tendency originates in the personality of the older employee, there is much more than an even chance that it will be curbed by the sense of responsibility and the opening for self-expression brought by the task of sponsoring and guiding the new employee.

The best possible collective bargaining relationship is no substitute for the work the employer must perform in the selection, orientation, and induction of new employees. But such a relationship can be of priceless help to the employer and the worker in this process.

The worst possible collective bargaining relationship does not prevent the employer from doing a good job in the selection and induction of new employees. It does make the good job difficult. But it also makes it infinitely more necessary.

The best possible job of selecting and inducting new workers is not a substitute for collective bargaining, nor a rival nor obstacle to a union. It can be and should be a most

important influence toward creating the best possible collective bargaining relationship. It is beyond collective bargaining in the sense that it is outside the scope of practical contract provisions, and in the more important sense that it goes farther than collective bargaining can go, in the direction of co-operative employee relations.