

Personnel Training and Promotion  
for the Lumber Industry

by

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Preface

I have tried in this paper to present a rough general plan for lumber companies to go by to improve certain phases of their personnel management. This is not set up for any certain plant or is it set up for all the companies: each one has their own problems. It is hoped that this paper causes them to realize the need, and starts them to thinking about their own situation and how to improve it. If it does this, it has served its intended purpose.

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## CHAPTER I

## Introduction

"No field of endeavor carries greater challenge to ability than handling and welding together of human beings into an aggressive inspired organization working whole heartedly in a common cause."(10) The proper training and promotion system in an industry does much toward creating an inspired smoothly working organization. In order to get the most out of any organization, the individuals of that organization must have the right spirit.

Interest on the part of workmen and foremen in their tasks must be aroused. This interest has lapsed sadly through the adoption of machine methods and the minute subdivisions of labor, under which the individual worker often is condemned to the daily repetition of a few monotonous processes, sometimes not even understanding what the part is that he plays in forming the finished product. Far too often the laborer looks upon his daily work only as a means of bringing in his periodic pay check. If efficiency of the workman is to be fostered until it will match the efficiency of the machine and of the organization, means must be found to bring back his interest in his tasks.

Too many workers lack training for their jobs or for better jobs.(3) The waste attendant upon the necessity of intrusting some delicate machine operation to a man not sufficiently trained is a serious loss. Many a workman with capacity for responsible positions is held back by lack of

education or trade skill. Industry, and especially the Lumbering Industry, has a vast field for work in training its laborers. Much progress has already been made in this field. More will come in future years.

The problem of capable foremanship is one to which increasing attention is given by forward-looking business management. It has come to be recognized that the foreman has it within him to make or break the best schemes for efficiency, fair play or labor administration. Executives of today realize that not every capable workman is qualified for promotion to foremanship, and that even those who possess the required natural traits need careful training before they are intrusted with the infinitely delicate task of managing men. This is more true in the lumber industry than it is in many other large industries.

A generation ago the nature and size of the average industry were such that the employee with a general training and comparatively broad experience was very desirable. Present industry shows an increasing demand for those who, in addition to a general training, possess a highly developed specialized knowledge.(6) There is also some demand for employees for a few positions which require little or no training. The standardization of processes and the possibility of using a large number of employees on simple and more or less mechanical operations have depreciated the value of the employee possessing general training only.(6) Because the tasks of the employees are becoming more and

more specialized, training on the part of a company or industry is becoming a necessity.

The average workman has a desire for advancement. One of the most valuable services of the entire industrial relations administration lies in utilizing that desire, encouraging it, and making sure that the deserving workman is not overlooked.(3) Knowledge on the part of the workman that he will be judged fairly and squarely and advanced at the first opportunity does much to inspire him to greater deeds. As closely as possible a chain or chains of advancement should be established. By this knowledge workmen will feel more secure in their jobs and there will not be as large a turnover of labor. Having a large turnover of workers is detrimental in more ways than one in the lumber industry.

Personnel promotion and training is only a part of personnel management. Personnel management is much broader and takes in all problems of personnel in industry: employment, records, wages, relations, etc. Personnel administration is an inexact science in the sense that mathematics and even biology are exact sciences. No one yet knows how to accurately measure capacities, interests, and opportunities. Industry has a long way to travel before it will be equipped to weigh and control these factors in reducing waste in the same manner with which it controls such factors as steam pressure, mechanical power, hardness of metals, cutting angles, and so forth.(9)

## CHAPTER II

## What to train for.

Personnel should be trained for more than the job they are doing. They should also be trained for work they are not doing, for future training or jobs and for efficiency.

In planning training which seeks to adapt new employees to greater usefulness to the employer, some consideration to the material itself must be given. The type of instruction offered must necessarily vary with the type of employee who is to receive the instruction.(6) A quite different method would be used for the college graduate than would be used for the uneducated alien. The usual plan presupposes a certain amount of experience and makes little or no attempt to develop any particular trade skill. Its purpose is the shaping of the trade skill already possessed by the employee to fit the particular needs of the organization in question.

All new employees, and some old ones too, should be instructed in the systems and methods of the company. This would be different in the different companies.

As a rule all new employees should receive instruction in the following: (6)

1. Nature of company business.
2. Company policies and organization.
3. Company history.
4. Employment policy.
5. Desired conduct.

6. Office or/and plant arrangement.
7. Personnel with which he must come in contact.
8. Method and date of payment.
9. Vacation arrangements (there should be some).
10. General regulations (no smoking, etc.).
11. Details of promotion plans (when, why, how, where, etc. and also those around him).
12. Safety regulations (what to do and what not to do).
13. Association or benefit societies (social security, insurance, housing, company store, etc.).
14. Educational opportunities.

It is a mistake to assume that the new employee knows these things, or that he will pick them up through contact with the job or his associates. The information may never be secured, or it may be inaccurate and distorted by the personal misunderstanding of some fellow employee. A complete understanding of the purposes of the firm seems the step toward satisfactory employment, and this can most successfully be given as the result of a definite plan.(6)

Much instruction of this general nature can be covered in a pamphlet or manual which explains the nature of the company business, the particular desires of the management, and which presents the facts that the new employee needs to properly understand the company. At times assurance that the employee actually reads them is reached through the use of a questionnaire or examination based on the contents of the book.(6)

In almost every type of operation the employee receives more or less training while on the job. He is shown easier and more efficient ways of working. He is instructed in safety practises that apply to his job. He may trade off with someone near him and learn another job. The spotter learns to be an edgerman by being allowed to run the edger a few minutes a day.

Thus it seems that a training and promotion system go hand in hand. When a logical line or lines of promotion are established the workman may be trained a few minutes a day or at periodic intervals in the work that he will be promoted to. In the case of a trimmerman in a sawmill, much value can be gained or lost in the final product by his knowing or not knowing his job.(2) He must determine at a glance where to trim a board and if it will pay to trim it. In order to do this satisfactorily he must have much practise and a good knowledge of lumber grading, as well as a knowledge of the selling price of the finished product. The trimmer feeder or line up man, who is the logical man to promote to trimmerman, should be required to study grading, etc., in order to learn the job of the trimmerman. It is essential in a large organization that at least two men be trained for all key jobs to keep things running smoothly when the regular man quits or becomes ill. This may seem like a selfish way to look at it, but you cannot find a specially trained man any time you want one. This is especially true now (1941) because of jobs created by the National Defense Program.

## CHAPTER III

## How to train.

As stated before in this thesis the new employee may be trained through use of some publication like a company manual. On the job the employee should be trained by job rotation. He should have the cooperation of all concerned when he is rotated from one job to another so as to gain by the experience of older men. On some occasions the older or more experienced men are reluctant to confide in the trainee, figuring that they learned by hard knocks so the next fellow can learn by hard knocks. Sometimes the more experienced men are reluctant to train a new one because of a fear that if the trainee becomes too good they will lose their jobs. This attitude on the part of men who are asked to train beginners is a problem. "You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink," likewise you cannot make some individuals divulge their more or less professional secrets for the good of the organization. I think that most of the men in an organization that has it clearly understood where each employee stands will not have much trouble in this respect.

There are two ways to train safety. The physical aspect and the psychological aspect may be used to instill safety habits. Regulations in regard to safety should be enforced. Some men are quite insistent that their way of doing a job is not dangerous but one accident is too much. Men of this type should be gently but firmly talked to and made to live

up to regulations. It may be necessary on certain occasions to dismiss some repeated violators because they really deserve it and it has a restraining effect upon the other employees. The psychological aspect of safety may be impressed by purposely retaining around the plant a few objects that will be a reminder of previous accidents. A certain type of poster on the bulletin board or at conspicuous places around the plant may also have a psychological effect in promoting safety.

There is no best way to train men off of the job but a combination of the following may be used. What the men are to be trained in and who they are may be some indice as to the method to use.

1. Home studies.
2. Trade schools.
3. Demonstrations.
4. Lecturing.
5. Recitations.
6. Project method.
7. Discussion under leadership.
8. Moving pictures.

The trainer must first be trained in training before he can do a good job of training. An example of off the job training that is available to most mills in lectures and demonstrations by the West Coast Lumber Association and the Pacific Lumber Inspection Bureau on lumber grading. It should be compulsory for all graders to attend these lectures and all employees should be encouraged to attend. These

lectures come frequently at night at some appropriate place near the mill and the men of course could attend on their own time.

Throughout the plant key men such as the engineer, millwright, dry kiln operator, etc. have helpers. They should be encouraged to train their helpers so they may eventually take over full charge. In many cases they may actually make their jobs much easier by having trained men under them. An example of this is the sawfiler and his helper. If the sawfiler takes time to train his helper in all the tricks of the trade, he will not be required to be on the job as much himself because he may delegate many of his responsibilities to his helper.

At the C. D. Johnson Lumber Corporation at Toledo, Oregon, the chief engineer must have a thorough knowledge of steam, air and electricity.(1) Much of this knowledge he must have received from schooling and outside studies. He cannot learn on the job because that is liable to be very costly. However, he may train his helpers so they will have a good foundation upon which to build. In a case like this the helpers should be encouraged in outside study as well as the knowledge that they gain while on the job.

## CHAPTER IV

## Promotion system and conditions.

The first requisite is to have each employee working on a job to which he is physically and mentally suited. This is quite vital if a promotion system is to be maintained. A man working on a job should, if the system is figured out well enough, be capable of doing the next job in his chain of promotion. As an aid to the proper placement of each employee, an employee's record should be kept in the employment office upon which is listed his "job aptitudes", or the man's supposed capacity for work other than that which he is doing. At least twice each year the employment manager looks through all records and the case of each employee hired in the preceding six months period is investigated to ascertain whether or not he is making progress as has been anticipated.(3) Because a man does his present job well is no sign that he should be left in it, but is a definite sign that he should be considered for promotion. If a company is so careless as to overlook a man for promotion who does his job well, and there are many lumber companies doing that, they will suffer for it. They will have a larger labor turnover because the men have a desire for promotion or change and if the company doesn't do it the man will. In the first, management is losing the services of a man whose skill in his work has been developed at considerable expense. This necessitates the breaking in of a new man and the cost of giving him the necessary training to bring him to the

same degree of efficiency as the man he replaces. During this period of training, the loss, scrap and waste, both in material and time is necessarily far greater than would have been the case had the former incumbent carried on. With the new and untrained man on the job, production is necessarily lessened, not only in the work itself, but in all other occupations which in a routing sense are dependent upon it. Furthermore departmental production as a whole is lessened as a result of the disorganizing effect of the exchange upon the other persons of the department.(9) Such factors as these are difficult to measure. It is hard to set a value upon them.

At the C. D. Johnson Lumber Corporation at Toledo, Oregon, certain rules and regulations have been set up that have aided materially in reducing labor turnover. In all cases of promotion, or increase or decrease in force the following govern: (1)

- (a) Knowledge of assigned job, training, ability, skill and efficiency.
- (b) Physical fitness for assigned job.
- (c) Length of continuous service.
- (d) Dependents, citizenship, place of residence.

"Where factors (a) and (b) are relatively equal, length of continuous service will govern, and where factors (a), (b) and (c) are relatively equal consideration of (d) will govern." You will note from the foregoing that many elements must be considered in replacing a skilled operator, however, in the operation of lumber manufacturing plants there are relatively

few skilled employees in proportion to unskilled and semi-skilled.(1)

Though it is often impractical to have qualified employees on the payroll doing work of lesser responsibility, who are trained to take over a skilled employees position at time of need, this may be accomplished many times by paying higher wages to these men. The wages paid to the lumber plant worker are fairly uniform in all the companies in any certain area but the salaries paid to various department heads must of necessity be greatly varied due to the differences of responsibility involved. Factors to be considered in determining their salary are the number of men employed, amount of production and degree of exactness required.

Besides being very open and frank about all rules, regulations and policy of the company, many companies find it advantageous to provide some means to drain employee "gripes". A suggestion system has been found to work very well for some companies when it is properly managed. Often these suggestions made by employees prove profitable. Boxes for receiving suggestions are placed at convenient locations around the plant. Slips are provided and the employee does not sign his name but signs his number. Experience shows that most of the suggestions are worthless because of the inadequate knowledge of the worker, but they serve their purpose to feel out the pulse of the employees. For those suggestions that increase revenue, save time, etc., the suggestor is paid from one to ten dollars.(1)

Modern companies are realizing that they must spend more time and thought on employee welfare both on the job and off the job. Services of various types that may well be used by many lumber companies are:

- (a) Advice--financial, etc.
- (b) Lunchrooms.
- (c) Employee purchases.
- (d) Housing.
- (e) Notary services.
- (f) Employees' Club.
- (g) Company contributions--library, etc.

Many more services for employees may be added depending upon the size of the company, its location, etc.

## CHAPTER V

## Ending.

Systematized handling of employees is needed and rewards the companies that use it. They will have better employees because the men in the organization will be better satisfied and those outside the employ of the company will have a greater desire to be a part of its family. They will have better efficiency from their employees. The men will build their plans for the future around the company instead of planning on just using the company as a stepping stone to something else. There will be greater loyalty on the part of the employees to the company and the individuals of its overhead because of the unselfish way that they manage. Last but not least there will be a saving of money in the long run. It is true that more money will have to be spent at first to establish and carry out systems in training, promotion and employee services, but once they are established and the employees know just where they stand it will not take as much time or money.

The need for further development of this type in the lumber industry is very great. Out of a survey made by the National Industrial Conference Board, Inc., in which seventeen industries were involved many interesting figures were found. In this survey (7) one hundred and six lumber companies were used and the lumber industry compared with sixteen other industries. It was found that the lumber industry was at the bottom of the list in activity concerning systematized

promotion. Of the one hundred and six lumber companies, only five or 4.7% had shown any activity along this line. The lumber industry was also the lowest in "rating systems for foreman and wage earners".(7) I only mention these two phases of the survey, but it was found that the lumber industry was near the bottom of the list in almost all personnel work.(7) This is not a good situation and it is hoped that the future will find a substantial improvement along this line.

Some naval man said, "Men fight, not ships". This is true also in industry for an organization cannot rise above the level of its members.(8) They are the ones that run the industry.

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