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A New Profession for Women

By Lulu M. Tarbell

It is a new profession, but do not think of undertaking it unless, after an honest self-examination, you can say that you believe yourself to have ~~the~~ "physical endurance, quickness of decision, fair-mindedness, ability to labor and humility to learn from all kinds of people, infinite patience, ~~and~~ keenness of sympathy without sentimentality, good sense of business, originality, organizing ability, and, most of all, capacity to 'carry on'!" This sounds as if it would eliminate most of us at the start.

The profession in case goes under the rather cumbersome title of Employment Management. It is no new thing in that portion of the industrial world where men refuse to go by rule-of-thumb and insist that brains and science can be applied to handling ~~men~~ <sup>people</sup> as well as to other departments of human effort. Possibly one-tenth of the industry of the country is convinced that there is a great new profession in employment management. Of the other nine-tenths, a half or more probably never heard of the idea, and the remaining portion are still to be convinced.

For the last ten years particularly,

the ideas involved have been actively discussed and tried out by progressive men. The War suddenly threw their work to the top, and set not only hundreds of private manufacturers to investigating what this advanced few, at whom they had so often laughed, had done; but it set the Government, ordinarily an unprogressive and unintelligent employer, to investigating, with the result that it has laid hands on the whole body of experience and principles and is applying them as rapidly as possible to all its industrial undertakings.

But what is employment management and why does the government think it sufficiently important to establish training courses to teach it at a time when we are so put to it to do things we already know how to do? Briefly and popularly it is a system of so selecting, placing, training and handling workers that they will stay and do their best because they are so minded. Certainly, if there is such a system, it is the business of the Government to use it in war industries. That there is such a one examination proves, but it is still in a pioneer stage, that is there have been no training schools to fit men and women to apply it.

The law in Washington has come to be:-- Whatever promises to be useful in speeding the war program, get, no matter what the cost or the effort. It is a law which is pushing many a good but neglected thing to the front. It brought the needed training courses for employment management into existence in <sup>short</sup> that order. The men who had been most successful in developing sound principles and practices in private business had most of them already been drafted by one government department or another to aid in handling the perplexities which came with the vast new industrial war undertakings. With

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their counsel and under the active direction of Boyd Fisher, now Captain Fisher, for several years director of the Detroit Executive Club, an organization which has long struggled intelligently and fruitfully with the questions involved in hiring and holding men, intensive courses of six weeks in length were planned and launched.

The first was given in Rochester in the spring of this year. Rochester was selected because it is one of the greatest industrial laboratories in the country. In that town some of the finest and most persistent experiments in scientific employment and instruction have been worked out. In Rochester, too, there has been developed a central employment organization, representing the fifty largest industries operating in close conjunction with the Government plants and the minor industries of the town; everything, you see, for ~~the~~ practical observation.

Twenty-four men,—their average age was 35 years,—took the first course. Not one of them had had less than three years' experience in industrial life (that much was required) and one had had 27. All of them had been sent to Rochester by plants private or government that expected to use them in war production on graduation. Several were already counted first class employment managers and these were among the most zealous of the students. The diplomas were given out in the presence of <sup>600</sup> ~~200~~ of the leading employment managers of the country. They had come to celebrate the first organized attempt to professionalize their business by forming a national association of employment managers. It was noted in giving the diplomas that although the graduates had had but six weeks' training, it was six weeks more than anybody else in the country

had had.

There were no women in the first class but this was due to the haste with which the course had been launched rather than to the idea that there was no need for training them in the new profession. On the contrary, everyone concerned knew that there was great need because of the huge draft the war was making on woman power. Moreover, everyone familiar with the progress of private employment management knew that women had already done a great deal of valuable pioneer work in applying the principles. There has been need enough of her efforts. // It is quite unnecessary to insist here on the dissatisfaction and irritation that has long existed in this country over her that we call the woman in industry. She has been very numerous. She has done all sorts of things. Those who have not been familiar with her are apt to think that the war has forced her into existence, but she has long done the bulk of the work in cotton and woolen mills. It is she who has knitted our machine-made stockings, our sweaters and our petticoats. She has done our canning. She has made our electric lamps. She has even been used, though to no very great extent, in our foundries. In practically all sorts of industrial undertakings, there has been for years now a growing number of women.

A percentage of them have done good work and staid by; but the great mass of girls and women in factories and shops have been a roving body. They shifted from factory to factory in the same town. They could not be depended upon for a full week's work. They had no interest in getting on. This, according to the employers' verdict.

And there were reasons enough, taking it on the whole, why this should be so. For the conditions under which these girls were working, as a rule, were such as to make poor work and roving habits inevitable. The girls would not have been half as good material as they really were if they had staid by under the conditions in which the great majority of them were obliged to work.

Some fine bodies of public servants, particularly the Consumers' League, years ago began to attack the problem of the conditions under which girls were working in the country-- the cruel hours, low wages, indifference to health, indifference to morals. Gradually the public was aroused and interested and laws more or less wise were enacted.

Manufacturers, dissatisfied with the way things were going, began to study the relation of sanitation, health, wages, hours to their work, and always with the result, that no matter what the improvement in conditions they affected, they saw an improvement in the stability of the working force and in the quality and amount of work. The intelligent among them began to lay it down as a law that the better you make the conditions, the better the results in product-- a normal, right, humane law that nothing but unbelievable stupidity ever could have overlooked.

This discovery, for it was nothing else, led to an enormous increase in what has begun generally to be called welfare work. Health began to be looked after. Even the psychology of the worker was considered. That is, it was recognized that the girl who had eight or ten hours a day of highly monotonous work to do must, if she was to keep up a standard production and a standard quality, have something in-

teresting in her mind. Dean Schneider-- and probably nobody understands better the psychology of the worker than Dean Schneider-- appealed to by an individual employer who found difficulty in keeping fifteen or twenty girls interested in some not very hard and very well paid work, said, after examining all the conditions, "Keep a cat. The difficulty in your place is that the girls have nothing there that interests them. Give them one little, human, home touch, and they will stay." The cat was secured, and the girls staid-- so the story goes!

In carrying out this idea of making things healthy, pleasant, human for the girl worker, the employer, who for the most part felt he was handling a problem quite outside his bailiwick, began to enlist in the factory women whose special duty it was to look after the girls. Sometimes he felt that the problem would be solved by getting a trained nurse, who, when the girls had their aches and pains and crying spells, would take them into a rest room, give them a proper restorative and send them back sooner or later to their machines. Other employers were strong for a woman who could do more general work, who could organize amusements, run a factory paper, keep a general eye on the floor, trace down the deserters and, if possible, figure out the home or psychological conditions which made a girl a deserter. Out of these experiments came good results. The woman took on more and more functions, that is, she herself saw more and more things that could be done, and if she had an open-minded management and knew how to cooperate, did more and more things.

As time went on those who followed up the problem-- that is, those who were not so satisfied with some first superficial improvement that they let matters stand, or were so discouraged with a first failure that they concluded

at all, it should come in on the side of work, and that the girl must be made to feel, if she is to consider her sex, that it is up to her to prove that she can give equal work. Having this point of view, it was natural that she should insist that the training of women employment managers in the new school should be the same that was given to men, and it was so decided.

Miss Gilson understood, too, that the chief handicap of the majority of the women who offered themselves and possibly the best of them would be their ignorance of industry itself. They would know nothing of mechanical processes. It has frequently happened that able women have failed in making positions for themselves in factories where the modern notions were being applied because they had no sense of the actual work for which they were to employ and train and keep the girls. They did not have the feel of the machine. They had no interest in the making of the thing to be made. They not infrequently looked on the processes as an enemy of the girl, resented the machine. Their feeling was that all this work was something from which she was to be protected, rather than that it was a something of which she was to be made to feel herself a fine and important part. They went to their work with all that very necessary equipment which the school of philanthropy and actual experience as a social worker may give; but they did not know that fundamental thing, the interest and the joy there is in labor, and the fact that if the girl is to be successful and happy in her work, it will depend primarily upon her sympathy and interest in the work itself, not on her hours or wages or whether or not she has rest and lunch rooms. Now, there is no way for a women to get this feel of industry but by actual factory experience. That is, she must sit for a period at a machine.

To meet this need it was arranged that women (and men) who had had no industrial experience but were otherwise desirable applicants should be given two months training in a factory at a machine. The first of these preliminary courses was *at this time 45 women and 3 men are taken U.* started in July in Cleveland. It has been most interesting to see how the women themselves have taken this suggestion that, preliminary to the six weeks' course, they take two months' factory training. The most serious and experienced of them have seized upon it eagerly, as something of which they themselves had already sensed the need.

Here then through the energy and far-sightedness of the Government we have a new profession opened to women. In the training it offers she is received on equal terms with men and there is little doubt that well paid positions will be open for all who succeed in earning diplomas. The requirements are high. A woman must be able to convince her examiner that she possesses the remarkable list of qualities catalogued in the first paragraph of this article. She must be twenty-five or more years of age and have at least a high school education. She must have had three years' industrial experience or ~~later~~ the two months' of work in the factory and she must promise at the end of her course to take a position in a plant on war work *if needed*.

The opening was little advertised, the chief announcement being a letter to factories telling of the opportunity. Yet in a very short time nearly 200 women applied.

I have looked over the first list. It contains the names of women I have myself seen doing excellent experimental work in factories in different parts of the country, women who have told me "I know there is a fine thing to be done

here. I have to feel my way. Can't you tell me of some place where I can learn more than I know?" And all I could tell them was, "You are a pioneer in what will one day be a recognized profession. Go see what Mary Gilson is doing in Cleveland, Miss Klink in the Pilgrim Laundry in Brooklyn, Mrs. Williams in the Plimpton Press in Massachusetts. Don't be afraid to experiment and don't lose your faith in the future of your undertaking."

They have never lost their faith, probably because they were for the most part of such fine material. One sees that in going through the applications for admission to the government courses. Most of them come from women of considerable education and experience. One woman who applied for the six weeks' course had studied a year in the University of Berlin and had special economic and social courses in five different first class universities and colleges. When she made her application she was employed by a big business house which was willing to give her the advantage of this training if she would come back to them. Another woman had been trained nurse and had had four years' experience in a New York business house engaged in interior decoration. The suggestion that she take the two months' training course in a factory was welcome, and she is now at it.

I should say that experience in social work had been the reason for most of the applicants' attempting the course. One woman that applied had had two years in handling the women employees of one of the biggest rubber companies in the world. She had all sorts of references from colleges and social organizations where she had had as a lecturer and organizer done excellent work, and probably because of this experience, she

felt the need of this professionalized training.

An application which interested me particularly, because it seemed to me to go nearly to the bottom of the thing, was that of a woman who for a number of years had been the director of vocational training in a large state normal school. She had also been a lecturer in a leading university. Her interest in industrial problems had led her among factory workers. She had spent several summers in actual factory work. She had long carried on what we call Americanization among non-English speaking factory workers. When her college work was over last spring, she decided to go into a factory that was doing Government work so as to see just how the thing was done. She says she never has received from any expenditure of time and energy in her life as much as she did in working in this factory, which she declares to be a model of its kind. In spite of this varied experience the woman eagerly seized the opportunity to enter the two months' preliminary factory course. She seems to have felt that here at last was the real thing. She wanted it because she says in all that she has so far done she had a feeling of "unreality". It has been mere "dabbling in experience". There is many a woman who has been playing around industrial and social problems in the last decade that will know what she means.

These applications prove that there are scores of women in the country who have been fumbling around for just such training as is now offered. This of course guarantees in advance the success so far as women are concerned of this new profession. It means that we are going to be able to get in a reasonably short time for those plants where great groups of women are employed in war industries, a supervision, instruction and leadership that will not only safeguard the girl from exploitation

but will so train and develop her that she will have a chance of becoming that dignified and desirable thing-- a real trades-woman. It gives the best hope that we have that the worst curse, after all, in our industries for women, that curse of untrained work, will be taken away. When the girl who goes into a factory can go with a sense not only that she will not be exploited but that she will have a chance to learn well a dignified operation, we are going to have the best guarantee that we have yet had that this great industrial class, which has given every thoughtful person so much concern and which is being so enormously increased by the war, that this class has in itself its best means of self-protection and advancement, for there is no protection in the working life that equals that of knowing how to do a task well.

At the same time here is opened to serious women of education and experience a splendid opportunity to get a real grip on the vexatious problems which center about the girl in industry.

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