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# THE DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

GÉRARD TREMBLAY

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The development of industry and commerce has brought enterprise out of the confines of the « cottage industries » and has transformed it into an impersonal organization. Necessarily the personal relations between employers and wage-earners have ceased, or almost ceased to exist. A rigid hierarchy has developed, from the worker to the foreman, from the foreman to the head of the department, from the head of the department to the manager, and from this latter to the head of the enterprise and, so forth. The decentralization of responsibilities, the disposition of production, and the importance of the working force have made inevitable this break in the personal relationships between the management and the workers.

It is possible to fill this gap by the setting up of a Personnel Department and rare indeed, to-day, are the industrial and commercial establishments of importance which do not possess this service. Since the experienced employer does not hesitate to establish a specialized service for the buying and upkeep of his machines, why should he hesitate to plan scientifically his relations with the most important element of his production — Labour.

What, in brief, are the functions of a personnel office? They must be conditioned by the humane and technical requirements of the enterprise.

At the outset and in the course of its growth, an enterprise needs workers. The problem of their *employment* presents itself. One does not engage staff blindly anymore than one buys a machine on sight. Hiring should be followed by *selection*. And this can only be done after a far from perfunctory interview of the recruits or applicants. Conversations, study of back-ground, examination of tastes and disposition, use of physiological and psychological tests, perusal of references and diplomas — we should have recourse to all the procedures which permit an appreciation of the qualities of an applicant. Then the *placement* of the newly-hired man in a section of the enterprise has to be considered.

The new employee needs to be initiated or at least adjusted to his work. It falls to the personnel director, in collaboration with the foreman and advisors, to facilitate the *training* and *adjustment* of the new hand.

An applicant selected with care does his work well and enjoys it. Consequently, he will not think of quitting his job after some weeks of perfunctory service. Do we realize that it costs \$300.00 to \$1,000.00 to train some-one for semi-skilled labour? Up to \$2,000.00 for skilled labour? Who pays the cost in the case of poor selection? The employer certainly, in a great measure, because his investment is lost. We know as well, that too great a turnover in personnel leads to the disruption of an enterprise. Not least important, the worker himself loses time, money and courage.

The diligent Director of Personnel understands how to reduce *absenteeism* to a minimum. Supervision, sanctions, bonuses, education, social service — all should be used to reduce this scourge of modern industrialism which prevails particularly in periods of prosperity.

Industry exposes the worker to accidents. In Quebec alone, we have reached the level of 100,000 accidents per year. The figure should be reduced. The efficient Director of Personnel will organize a *security committee* in each department to reduce the causes of accidents and to prevent them. Here again we have the saving of money for employer and employee alike as well as the prevention of physical suffering, mutilations and distress.

By association of ideas, we are led to speak here of the organization of a *medical service* which should collaborate closely with the Personnel Department. A medical examination for fitness to work completes the personal index card and also permits a more appropriate selection of personnel. It renders great service to an applicant for a job in an industry to let him know of the

deficient state of his health. He can be directed to other activities more appropriate to his condition. The employer, for his part, stops at their source, some causes of absenteeism and of accidents. Moreover, the periodic medical examination should be compulsory in certain enterprises. Is not prevention better than cure?

The working-man, being human, will at times have *grievances*. The foreman may be the cause of them. How can he make a just and prompt settlement if he is himself a party to the dispute? The Director of Personnel can conduct an objective enquiry and indicate an equitable solution. Likewise, if it is a question of promotions or changes! The enterprise, even if a collective agreement regulates the relations between the management and the union, needs the co-operation of its Director of Personnel in order to give it all useful information on the applicants for promotion or change. The card-index, under the circumstances, is a valuable source of information in aiding the management to make wise decisions not only for itself but for the employee concerned.

Should the Personnel Director participate in the negotiation of a *collective agreement*? Never directly! He should be prepared to furnish to the two parties the information on labour legislation or on statistics which they might need. But he should limit his participation to this field. The Director of Personnel is essentially the counselor of both the staff and the enterprise. In this capacity he should maintain a certain independence with regard to each. Both should realize that he is their disinterested counsellor. The real Director of Personnel tries to establish a common ground between employers and workers. It is essential that he retain the confidence of the two groups. Our experience reveals that an industry which puts in the forefront its Director of Personnel in the negotiation of a collective agreement and in all the important debates as to its application, destroys his usefulness. The Director of Personnel is not an enforcement agent, but, above all, the ambassador of the enterprise towards its employees and vice versa.

Everything on the human and social side should be known to the Personnel Director. Is it

a question of launching an educational campaign for the workers with the idea of increasing their competence? Is it a question of organizing night classes, security courses, first-aid classes? Is it a question of training the foremen in psychology? Does it concern the founding of a technical library, a plant periodical? Is it a question, finally, of a sports organization or of social evenings? The Director of Personnel should be the ever tactful initiator and advisor. Nothing of human or social interest should remain unknown to him.

Many of the employers and more and more unions are giving their attention to social security in the enterprise — organization of sickness insurance including the covering of hospitalization costs, bonuses on the occasion of marriage or the birth of a child, etc. Here again is a field of activities reserved for the Personnel Department.

We can easily imagine the mass of valuable documentation that an experienced, active and unhampered Director of Personnel can accumulate. We can appreciate also, the marvellous results which he can chalk up to his credit and report in the good name of the enterprise and the workers he serves.

Our Department of Industrial Relations is engaged in training competent Directors of Personnel. Already it can boast, in spite of its youth, of having furnished excellent results. Important enterprises congratulate themselves on having solicited its collaboration. For they have thus found not only material profit but the satisfaction of having established really humane relations with their personnel — relations which are translated into the wellbeing of their employees, a fine family spirit and the triumph of a well-rounded social charity.

One cannot improvise a Director of Personnel. But it is precisely this which has somewhat spoiled the good name of Personnel Directors to have perforce received within the profession persons, well-intentioned but ill-prepared from a technical and psychological point of view for their heavy responsibilities!