

WAR PRODUCTION BOARD

Labor Division
Training Within Industry

Bulletin #7

INCREASING WAR PRODUCTION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN

Employing women in war industries in increasing numbers is inescapable, but should not be looked on as a substitute procedure. Employing a woman for any job that she can do, or learn to do, will release a man either for work not suitable for women or for active armed forces.

The employer who has never had any women employees on his force may need to be reminded, in some cases, that a new woman worker is just a new worker. Careful selection should furnish women who are good prospects—the same as men. New women need training—so do new men. They are entering a new environment, but so are farmhands who take factory jobs.

The place of women in industry has been well established since the last war. One-fourth of manufacturing workers are women, and a number are in technical or managerial fields. Employers who think that the employment of women introduces some mysterious element into the factory situation need to be reminded that they have known women all their lives—secretaries, nurses, waitresses, saleswomen—and that women from all these groups will inevitably become part of the war production effort.

This bulletin draws on the experience of a number of industries where women workers have had an important part for many years, and on the experience of British war production.

C. R. Dooley, Director
Training Within Industry

WOMEN IN THE LABOR SUPPLY PICTURE

In many industrial centers there already are labor shortages. In general, women will not add to the supply of skilled labor, but they do present a large and promising source of workers for a wide variety of operations. In England it has been necessary to require young women to take part in the war effort, either through auxiliary service or actual productive work in factories. There are many women who now need to earn wages. Curtailment of civilian production releases numbers of women with varying degrees of skill. These women are available for retraining for war production work.

SPECIAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN EMPLOYING WOMEN

Introduction of women workers in industries or plants where they have not previously been employed will often mean that women will actually be put on “men’s work.” It will not always be a simple placement and training process—but, when the snags are anticipated, British experience shows that remarkable results are achieved. Management needs to give advice, and immediate consideration to some general facts—some limitations, some advantages, and some changes in facilities and equipment.

State Laws Regarding Women Workers

Many states have “protective” legislation which sets standards for working conditions for women, limits hours (both as to length and time of day), and restricts occupations. In some states provisions have been made to permit modification of standards where necessary for war

production. State laws covering a particular plant should be checked as the first step. The Industrial Commission or the State Secretary of Labor can supply specific information.

Physical Limitations of Women Workers

There are some physical limitations for women. As a means of overcoming them, mechanical aids may be used, for example, in load-lifting, roller conveyors and pedestal lifts are helpful. Tools may need to be scaled to women and benches made lower for female assembly workers.

Safety and the Woman Worker

The safety records of women are better than those of men, but there are special hazards to be recognized. It may be necessary to require the wearing of protective clothing. The safety engineer who selects caps and jumpers will do well to consult with the women who will wear the clothing; his interest may be in finding a cap which will insure that hair will not catch in a machine, while the employee may also be concerned about a cap which will protect hair from dust and not ruin a new hair-do. It is poor practice to select clothing which requires disciplinary action to enforce wearing or which causes resentment.

Absence Records

Women's records for days off are worse than men's. They are not altogether due to illness but frequently to unavoidable home responsibilities. A "flying squadron" of utility operators who can fill in on numerous jobs is a common solution.

Labor Turnover

Women do not change jobs as often as men. Good supervision, satisfactory working conditions, adequate wages, and fair treatment will hold women to their jobs and thus, by decreased turnover, reduce overall training time.

Supervision

Many persons will advocate the employment of a woman personnel officer to work on problems connected with working women. This is based on the assumption that there is an innate and intangible difference between men and women as employees that will be beyond a man's experience. This is not the best basis for the introduction of women to the production shop. Women are entering war production on the same terms as men, even if it is necessary to make physical segregation in a few respects and to separate groups in individual situations. Their relation to the personnel department is the same as new men. Women have a useful place in personnel offices, but not necessarily as concerned with women employees.

The woman who is new as a factory employee is making a change. Skilled personnel people should handle cases relating to people new to industrial situations.

Women as first-line supervisors can sometimes handle routine departmental problems concerning women more easily than men, and women can train women. The opening of even minor supervisory positions to women will provide a promotion incentive. However, if women supervisors do not correspond in authority with men in similar positions, the employees may be inclined to by-pass the woman supervisor and take their problems to the man who they feel is "the boss."

SELECTION AND PLACEMENT OF WOMEN WORKERS

All women will not, of course, make productive factory employees. The selection procedure should include particular attention to the background brought to the job—education, training, and aptitude. The housewife who is untrained and perhaps free for only part-time work may move into civilian production and service operations, releasing for full-time war production employment, women who have regular work experience.

Even in the comparatively short time of current war production, there are a number of instances of the value of certain backgrounds of work requiring deft hands—girls who were needle-workers or hair dressers have proved specially adaptable for precision metal work. With good training, they work to tolerances measured in ten-thousandths of an inch. Jobs requiring “feel,” such as minute assembly and adjustment, are examples of jobs where placement of women has produced particularly good results, in many instances better than men.

A common opinion is, “Women have no mechanical ability.” It is more accurate to say that they have little “mechanical familiarity.” Women are not accustomed to working with wrenches and drills, but the lowered level at which training begins also means an opportunity to begin training with correct procedures—they do not bring “picked-up” bad habits to the job.

TRAINING FOR WOMEN THE SAME AS FOR MEN

Well-planned training for women who have been selected and placed according to good standards will provide a large, productive new force and give perfectly satisfactory results in every respect.

Get ready for the job. What is the work? Should it be broken up into several jobs, to be taught separately?

Consider the work place, the tools. Are changes needed?

Find out what the new workers already know. Is some preliminary instruction needed in shop arithmetic or blueprint reading? Would advance familiarity with small tools help? Will “shop terms and procedures” need special explanation? What pre-employment training is available?

Train on the job. Does instruction given on the job include supervised tryout and follow-up? Does the new employee know where to go for help?

Provide supplementary instructions. Does the plant provide training to round-out background and increase skills? Are there public vocational courses available?

Upgrade to higher skills. Are women being moved on to more difficult jobs as they show ability, in order to make maximum use of the best skills?

JOBS FOR WOMEN IN WAR INDUSTRY

To turn again to British experience, women are working successfully on these jobs:

Assembly	Optical grinding and polishing
Band-sawing	Press operating
Boring	Riveting
Crane operation	Turning
Drilling	Welding
Grinding	
Inspecting	
Lathe work (including the use of calipers and micrometers)	

To summarize the overall problem, the contractor must:

1. Consider the employment of women with an open mind.
2. Recognize that there is, as always, a training job to do.

Washington, D.C.
March, 1942