

TRAINING WITHIN INDUSTRY BULLETIN SERIES

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UPGRADING

This bulletin outlines a practice which is probably more widely used throughout American industry than any other form of industrial training, and which is most important from the standpoint of both production and employees. Many companies have long pursued excellent programs of “upgrading” without ever having given the practice a name. Now is the time for every company to review its upgrading practice.

Jobs are not static—they are lines of flow through the shop. One job leads to a better one, and, step by step, the employee receives his training and advances in skill. The job is a rung on the ladder of progress—this is the efficient way as well as the American way. Upgrading is a method that leads workers upward in the pyramid of organization. Rapid and efficient training can be made to meet unusual needs through such a definite step-by-step program.

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WHAT UPGRADING IS

Upgrading refers to the natural and logical movement of employees within an organization for the purpose of developing and using each to the maximum of his abilities. Specifically, upgrading means:

1. Definite lines of progression -

planned promotion from within, both in departments and between departments

transfer to work for which a worker is best fitted, or to other lines of work where greater opportunity lies

having qualified employees “trade jobs” to develop experience and versatility—
“job rotation”

2. Job Instruction –

instructing employees rather than “letting them learn” when promoted or transferred

3. Rate adjustments –

prompt adjustments in individual rates, according to performance on the job and movement to other jobs—periodic rate review to assure equity

4. Supplementary instruction –

encouraging employees to pursue related outside instruction to increase usefulness

WHY UPGRADING IS SO IMPORTANT

From the company's standpoint, the development of each employee to his highest level of usefulness is requisite to company success. Building competent manpower is considered one of management's primary functions in many companies.

From the employee's standpoint, growth and advancement through his work should represent the central core of his life.

Nothing is so destructive to employee efficiency, loyalty, and morale as to have a man hired from the outside and given a higher rated job for which someone already employed feels he could qualify. Telling the worker that the pressure of war production is so great that there is no time to give him the opportunity to learn another job is not a satisfactory answer. This is especially true in the case of a man who has his eye on a better job.

Furthermore, when an employee understands that upgrading is an established policy, he will do a better job of "breaking in" a new worker assigned to him.

When pressure for production eases and retrenchment becomes imminent, worker efficiency and loyalty will perhaps be even more necessary. It is essential, therefore, that the foundations for good future industrial relations be laid now.

HOW UPGRADING IS DONE

A well-rounded program of upgrading includes the following practices:

Determine Policy

Top management issues a written policy or letter clearly stating that vacancies are to be filled by upgrading, promoting, transferring, or rotating present workers before new workers are hired. All new workers are thus hired for certain definite beginners' jobs in the low-pay brackets.

Plan the Program

One individual who is familiar with jobs and workers in the plant is assigned the task of collaborating with superintendents and foremen in preparing a plan by which the upgrading is to be done. In a small plant the program may be both planned and carried out by the superintendent—but the important feature is that one person must draw up a schedule of orderly movement from job to job. There are certain steps which fit the operation, whether the scale is large or small:

1. Determine lines of progression (from what job to what job)—Usually it is found that there are many groups of operations for which there already are natural lines of promotion. There are others, however, that do not fit into the normal promotional sequence and which should be fitted into the sequence to provide normal promotional opportunity and to prevent them from becoming "blind alley" jobs.

All production jobs in the shop are listed in the order which indicates the lines of promotion from the lowest rated to the highest rated. This is done by departments, occupations, or any logical grouping of jobs. In many cases this means movement from one department to another; for example, machine operators to apprentice toolmaker, toolmaker to tool design engineer.

Of course “lines of progression” does not mean that movement from each job to the next is an immediate promotion. Obviously, before a promotion to many jobs is possible, workers may be transferred to two or more jobs on the present level to prepare them for promotion. Perhaps two, three, or more workers are asked to trade jobs to give them necessary background and work experience. (Occasionally this means that a worker must temporarily move to a lower rated job in order to get into a different line of work where eventually he can move up the line and into higher earnings.)

The line of promotion indicates the order in which jobs must be learned, so that, if this learning order is followed over a period of time, each worker will be using his best skill to the maximum of his individual ability.

2. Indicate experience necessary to qualify the employee for each job—For each job, the operations that a qualified operator must be able to perform should be indicated. Such descriptions provide a ready reference for busy superintendents and foremen when promotions are considered, and are particularly helpful when transfers or rotations are planned for workers who need additional experience and “rounding out” before qualifying for promotion.

This work can be completed in a short time and requires only brief attention from time to time to keep up-to-date as jobs change. Descriptions should be charted and distributed to all shop supervisors as changes are made.

3. Determine where job rotation is applicable—In those departments where all the employees perform work substantially of like difficulty, and where there are no “lines of promotion,” about the only upgrading that can be done is job rotation. The benefits of this practice to employees, and to the company, will vary according to kind of operation.

Job rotation is particularly useful in companies having frequent rush orders, emergencies, rapid expansions or seasonal fluctuations, engineering, and model changes. To meet these problems promptly and efficiently, a flexible and versatile workforce is highly desirable. The more jobs each employee can perform, the more useful he is under a wide variety of conditions.

Some workers do not want to move, do not want to be “upgraded”; others are anxious to master new skills. A program of job rotation is a good way to discover those employees who can learn several jobs, do so quickly, and who show enterprising characteristics and initiative.

Assign Responsibility

Line superintendents and foremen, of course, are held responsible for carrying out the program.

The responsibility for helping them carry out the upgrading program is delegated to the individual who has done most of the work in planning it. This is a full-time job in large plants and part-time in small ones. He is given authority to suggest, to foremen and others, advantageous moves of workers, and he must be consulted and be in agreement with any promotions or transfers to be made. Any disagreement between the upgrading planning man and the superintendents or foremen moves up the line for review and final decision by a top executive.

See That the Plan Is Carried Out

A top executive keeps in personal touch with a control of the upgrading program during the early weeks. He approves employment of new workers only after shop superintendents and others have shown him in detail that every present worker who is qualified for a better job has been promoted and that all other logical and reasonable transfers to round out experience have been made.

This personal control is maintained only for such time as is necessary to assure that the policy is definitely understood and consistently carried out throughout the organization.

Select Qualified Employees for Upgrading

When better jobs are open, they should be filled by the best qualified employees. An inventory of the working force will classify the employee's potential ability, previous experience, education, his job preference, and length of service. No matter what form this inventory takes, whether through interviews or personnel records or any other means, such information is essential to upgrading.

Such a centrally controlled plan makes available, for quick reference, information about qualifications of individual workers, job requirements, and paths of upgrading in order that the better jobs may be given to the best-qualified employees. Management must specify that those who operate this central service be consulted on all upgrading opportunities and that final action be approved by them. Any disagreement between the line organization and the central service moves up the line for review and final decision by top management. Such a plan can be set up quickly by assigning the responsibility to a man who has wide knowledge of jobs and workers in the plant. Increased experience with upgrading constantly raises the level of results.

See That Employees Are Instructed On the Job

Experienced employees, as well as "green" workers, should be given careful instruction when moved to new jobs. Correct work procedures should be taught from the start. Typical instruction procedures are outlined in other Training Within Industry bulletins.

Make Practical Use of Supplementary Instruction

Appropriate encouragement should be given to employees to pursue outside study in preparation for greater usefulness. Local schools and colleges offer a wide variety of courses. Special courses can readily be organized in the plant and be taught by foremen, engineers, inspectors, or others. Some Unions also conduct such courses. Completion of supplementary courses should be shown on personnel records. (See Training Within Industry Bulletin, "Supplementary Training for Upgrading.")

Make Prompt Adjustments in Pay

Pay adjustments should be made simultaneously with promotion to the jobs of higher rating. Prompt recognition in compensation and status are the means for stimulating and maintaining interest in the earning process. Morale will be high under this policy of advancement, based on the fair and unprejudiced consideration of merit. Where merit and other factors are equal, preference should be given to length of service. Periodic review of rates by the appropriate supervisor is essential to see that deserving employees aren't "forgotten" and that equity and fairness are maintained.

Such a policy of upgrading, coordinated by a central placement service, results in rapid and efficient training of a working force with greater flexibility and effectiveness. This is an important practice.

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