

VOCATIONAL
GUIDANCEINSTITUTE
FOR WOMEN

SLOGAN: DO SOME ONE THING WELL

THE "HIRING AND FIRING" EXPERT

By KATHLEEN ELIZABETH STEACY

ANY one who has made a study of industrial conditions knows something of the many employees who are "hired and fired" by every large business during a year, and something also of the reasons for this repeated "hiring and firing."

The ordinary employer hires for one of three reasons: good references, the applicant's own assurance, the appearance that "looks as if he would do." None of these reasons is reliable.

In five years I examined the references of seven thousand girls and women, and my conclusions with regard to the value of references must be that of any one who has had to do with large numbers of employees and who has given serious thought to the subject. References cannot be other than unreliable, insufficient, and inadequate. They are written by persons saving no knowledge whatever of the particular requirements of any one firm, of the particular position to be filled, and the particular work to be done. The applicant's own assurance is worse than useless; usually the greatest assurance is shown by those most ignorant of what is required, and for that very reason—they do not know. Appearances are never so deceptive as when taken as a guide to a person's fitness for this or that position.

How, then, does the average employer judge? He doesn't. He "makes a hit at it" and trusts to luck. And "trusting to luck" costs him money, time, efficiency.

The Employer

How many do you need in your business?
How many were on your pay roll during 1916?
Have you calculated the time, money, and efficiency, lost in firing one employee?
Have you made a success of hiring?
Have you made a success of firing?
Do you know that a man works better if he have an intelligent idea of the business as a whole?
Do you know that the man who fails in one position may make a big success in another?

The Employee

How many times have you moved in the last five years?
How much more are you worth to-day than when you started to work?
Do you know why you have not done better?
Do you think you have not had a fair chance?
Do you know that you can do some one thing well?
Have you ever tried to find out what that some one thing is?
Are you happy in your work?
Do you make the interest of your employer your interest?

Every employer knows that he pays out money, in wages, for which he receives little or no return. Here are some actual figures and facts: A large manufacturing concern that needs, on an average, 2,400 men, found that in one year 7,200 men had been entered on their pay roll, and that meant that an employee's average length of service was twenty days! Another business found that in order to keep up the 800 men needed, 2,660 had been on the pay roll in twelve months.

This "hiring and firing" represents a huge loss to the large employer; it represents a heavy loss to the small employer; it represents an economic loss that cannot be calculated, to the country. The large amount of "firing" that has been done, that is being done, proves that the employer cannot and does not hire intelligently. He hasn't the time; he hasn't the knowledge; he is not an expert.

In many large firms the head of each department does his own hiring and firing; but it does not follow that because a man is an experienced buyer, an expert in cut glass, leather, or reaping machines, that he is an expert judge of the services offered him every time he advertises for help. He may know very well what he wants, or he may not, but he does not recognise what he wants when he sees it. He hasn't the knowledge. He is not an expert.

The woman in a small business who employs but one or two assistants may think that hiring and firing has nothing to do with her, since her help stays with her fairly well; but if she make a bare living with no prospects of anything better—how does she know but that she should fire herself? Isn't she a round peg in a square hole, if her business does not grow?

The loss to the employee is even greater than to the employer. To the employer it means a loss of money, less profit, and a slower rate of expansion; but to the employee it means the best years of his life spent in trying—consciously or unconsciously—to find the thing he can do well; and finally, with a mind cluttered up with odds and ends of knowledge and a smattering of many lines of work, he settles down to a tenth-rate job in a tenth-rate concern. If he marry young, this happens earlier than it otherwise would, as he can't "risk his family" by trying another job in the hope of doing better. To an employee who changed frequently, I said, "You did not stay long with Blank and Blank—six months, I think; and you were only three months with Jones and Jones."

"Yes, I know," he answered glibly, "but I learned to run an envelope machine at Blank and Blank's, and Jones and Jones taught me how to do routine office work—filing letters and things like that; and all knowledge comes in handy, you know."

"Then you are feeding an envelope machine and filing letters now with Brown and Brown?" I asked, being somewhat in the dark.

"Oh, no! Brown and Brown don't run an envelope machine; I'm keeping time cards there."

Knowledge is good; every scrap of knowledge may be useful sometime, but indiscriminate and miscellaneous knowledge should be gathered as a side line and not as a life job.

Every single day, every hour a boy or girl spends in any business is an investment of the best time of life, the most impressionable period, the greatest receptive years, when to learn is easy, to adapt is no effort, to receive instruction is natural. But if this time be spent in changing from one thing to another, he gets no return on his investment of time, of youth, of enthusiasm. This is why the elderly man looking for a job is turned down so frequently—he invested himself and his talents a little here, a little there, a little in this business, a little in that. Can he hope for an adequate return from any one business when his investments have been scattered over a dozen or two different lines?

Experience counts? Yes, experience does count and count largely; but I have yet to learn that the experience gathered in one field of work may be successfully applied in another. The development of the mind, which is the result of that experience, may be applied, but not the experience. And that development of mind should be applied in the same line of work as that in which the experience was gained. If experience is obtained in boiler-making, and the development of mind thus acquired is carried over to book-keeping, the experience certainly cannot count, although the development of mind is an aid in learning book-keeping with more ease; but if book-keeping is the some one thing that can be done well, then the time spent in learning to make boilers is wasted.

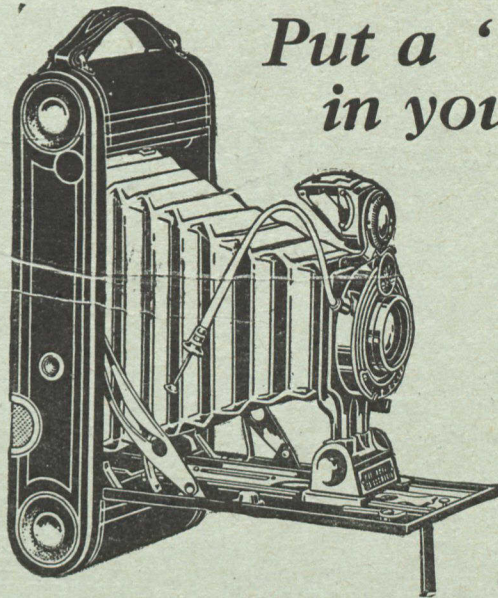
THERE is something fundamentally wrong when an employee keeps on changing from one thing to another. Every one can do some one thing well, and that some one thing is easier than anything else, and one is happier in the doing of it. If a man does not love his work, he is in the wrong place, and he keeps on changing trying to find the thing he should do; practically wasting his time, even though he is being paid for it. The amount paid to the employee in the wrong place is very, very small compared to the amount that same employee would receive doing the work for which Nature fitted him.

True, some employees are so careless, thoughtless, untidy, and generally inefficient that it is doubtful if they would make a success of anything. It is in them to succeed, but they are too lazy, mentally and physically, to exert themselves. The poor we have always with us and also the lazy-inefficient.

True, also, that some firms never keep their employees; they follow the very short-sighted policy of getting in raw hands, keeping them until they are worth fair wages and then letting them go. They call this "keeping down expenses," failing to realise how much they lose each time they "hire and fire." These businesses are nothing more than a training school where any and all who can get on the pay roll receive a certain amount of training in return for working for low wages.

"Every one who leaves here" declared the clever head of an important department in one of these businesses, with a note of pride in his voice, "is worth fifty per cent. more than when he came." In my (Continued on next page)

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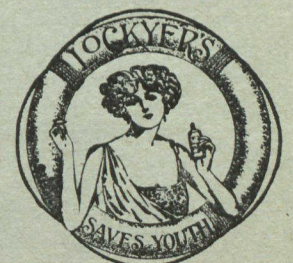
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