

By PETER F. DRUCKER

To the young man or woman who wants to be a lawyer, an engineer, an accountant, or a physician, schools have specific lessons and ideas to give. But according to Peter Drucker, an American social scientist, they do not seem to know what is best for a *future employee* to learn. The one thing of most value to him is "the ability to organize and express ideas in writing and in speaking."

As an employee has to deal with people, his success depends very much on his ability to present his own thoughts and ideas to them so they will really know what you want to tell them and be persuaded. The letter, the report, the memorandum, the ten-minute conference are basic tools of the employee.

Of course, if one's work is largely manual and menial, the ability to use pen or

tongue will not be of great importance. But as one rises to a higher position away from just manual work and when he finds himself in a larger organization or a progressive office, whether it is a government or a large private corporation, this ability to express oneself, Mr. Drucker assures us, is perhaps the most important of all skills a man can possess.

Of course, one must have something to say which should be of value and relevance. He needs to study and understand what he should write or speak about. Mere skill in expression is not enough.

Expressing one's thoughts is one skill that the school can really teach, especially to people born without natural writing or speaking talent. While other skills can be learned later, "the foundations for skill in expression have to be laid early:

an interest in and an ear for language; experience in organizing ideas and data, in brushing aside the irrelevant, in wedding outward form and inner content into one structure; and above all, the habit of verbal expression. If you do not lay these foundations during your school years, you may never have an opportunity again."

Drucker believes that one of the best ways a school should have for training skill in expression is the rule of writing a "theme a day" which has virtually disappeared. His advice now is the writing of poetry and the writing of short stories. This work is not necessarily going to make poets or short-story writers out of the students. But he says "these two courses offer the easiest way to obtain some skill in expression. They force one to be economical with language. They force one to organize thought. They demand of one that he give meanings to every word. They train the ear for language, its meaning, its precision, its overtones — and its pitfalls. Above all they force one to write."

The typical employer may

not know this as yet; but sooner or later he is going to see that the young college graduate who has done much short-story writing is the one who can turn out a good, simple, and readable report.

There are two types that are not effective employees. One is he who is good only at painstaking detail work and has no imagination. His usefulness is limited. The other is the self-styled "genius" who has big and high-sounding ideas but is incapable of intensive application to detail. Most of our young graduates have a decided leaning one way or the other. This fact may be explained in terms of basic personality. One's experiences do not change very much his personality, which he acquires from birth. "The need for economic security is often as not an outgrowth of a need for psychological security rather than a phenomenon of its own. But precisely because the difference is one of basic temperament, the analysis of what kind of temperament you possess is so vital. A man might be happy in work for which he has little *aptitude*; he might

be quite successful in a job for which he is *temperamentally unfitted.*"

There are two groups of activities where qualities of aptitude and temperament are in demand in different degrees. There is greater emphasis on conscientious performances of well-organized duties rather than on imagination — especially for the beginner — for instance, in the inside jobs in banking or insurance which normally offer great job security but not rapid promotion or large pay. The same is true of most government work, particularly in the clerical and engineering branches, and of most public utilities.

But in such areas as buying, selling, and advertising, the emphasis is on adaptability, on imagination, and on an eagerness to do something novel and different. "In those areas, by and large, there is little security, either personal or economic. The rewards, however, are high and come more rapidly. Major premium on imagination — though of a different kind and coupled with dogged persistence on details — prevails in most research and

engineering work. Jobs in production, as supervisor or executive, also demand much adaptability and imagination."

In small business close attention to daily routine is needed. But here, there is also room for quite a few people of imagination and with a desire for introducing new things. If successful, a man of this type could transform the tiny company into a big success. Our country is surely in need of this type of personality. In the small business personal contacts spell effectiveness. In large ones, ability to form policies is essential; and those within the organization are practically cogs of a big wheel.

In every organization, even the smallest, there are positions that, while subordinate, modestly paid, and usually filled with young and beginning employees, nonetheless are not at the bottom. The private secretary, the cost accountant, the man in charge of personnel, and a few others have some view of the whole rather than of only one small area. Their jobs are near the top, as it were.

Drucker warns the near-the-top employee that his job is in a way insecure. He is exposed to public view. To this employee, he addresses these words: "Your position is ambiguous; by yourself you are a nobody — but you reflect the boss's status; in a relatively short time you may even speak for the boss. You may have real power and influence. In today's business and government organization the hand that writes the memo rules the committee; and the young staff man usually writes the memos, or at least the first draft. But for that very reason everybody is jealous of you. You are a youngster who has been admitted to the company of his betters, and is therefore expected to show unusual ability and above all unusual discretion and judgment. Good performance in such a position is often the key to rapid advancement. But to fall down may mean the end of all hopes of ever getting anywhere within the organization."

Specialization is emphasized in engineering and in accounting, in production, in

statistical work, and in teaching. But there is an increasing demand for people who are able to take in a great area at a glance, people who perhaps do not know too much about any one field — though one should always have an area of real competence. They are classified as "generalists."

The specialist deals with technique, tools, media. His educational background is properly technical or professional. He is strictly what is called a *trained man*. The generalist, especially the administrator, deals with people. His field is leadership, planning, direction-giving, and coordination. He is strictly what is called an *educated man*. The study of the humanities is his source of strength. The specialist seldom qualifies as an administrator. We rarely find a good generalist who is also a good specialist in a particular field. An effective organization needs both kinds.

One should not change jobs constantly. People become suspicious of the character or ability of a person who flits from one job to another. But at the same time,

one must not look upon the first job as the final job. Rather he should take it as a training job, an opportunity to discover yourself, to find out what you are good for as an employee. "To know when to quit is therefore one of the most important things — particularly for the beginner. For on the whole young people have a tendency to hang on to the first job long beyond the time when they should have quit for their own good.

The advice of Drucker to the young employee is as follows: "One should quit when self-analysis shows that the job is the wrong job — that, say, it does not give the security and routine one requires, that it is a small-company rather than a big-organization job, that it is at the bottom rather than near the top, a specialist's rather than a generalist's job, etc. One should quit if the job demands behavior one considers morally indefensible, or if the whole atmosphere of the place is morally corrupting — if, for instance, only yes men and flatterers are tolerated."

A young man should not spend much time in a job which does not offer the training one needs either in a specialty or in administration and the view of the whole. This does not mean formal training but a chance to develop into a more useful work that gives one a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction.

The chance of promotion should be deemed as the essence of a job. A young employee is likely to end in failure if he considers his present job "as but one rung in the promotional ladder rather than as a job itself that deserves serious effort and will return satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and pride. And one can be an important and respected member of an organization without ever having received a promotion; there are such people in practically every office." Of course, a progressive organization should offer fair promotional opportunities. Otherwise it becomes stagnant and corrupted; it is bound to cause demoralization of its employees. One should not waste his time in such a place.

There are three situations which Drucker suggests should be carefully watched: "The entire group may be so young that for years there will be no vacancies. If you find yourself caught in such a situation, get out fast. If you wait it will defeat you.

"Another situation without promotional opportunities is one in which the group ahead of you is uniformly old — so old that it will have to be replaced long before you will be considered ready to move up. Stay away from organizations that have a uniform age structure throughout their executive group — old or young. The only organization that offers fair promotional opportunities is one in which there is a balance of ages.

"And finally there is the situation in which all promotions go to members of a particular group — to which you do not belong. Some chemical companies, for instance, require a master's degree in chemistry for just about any job above sweeper. Some companies promote only engineering graduates, some government agencies only people who majored in

economics, some railroads only male stenographers, some British insurance companies only members of the actuaries' association. Or all the good jobs may be reserved for members of the family. There may be adequate promotional opportunities in such an organization — but not for you.

"I have only one more thing to say: to be an employee it is not enough that the job be right and that you be right for the job. It is also necessary that you have a meaningful life outside the job.

I am talking of having a genuine interest in something in which you, on your own, can be, if not a master, at least an amateur expert. This something may be botany, or the history of your county, or chamber music, cabinetmaking, Christmas-tree growing, or a thousand other things. But it is important in this "employee society" of ours to have a genuine interest outside of the job and to be serious about it.

I am not, as you might suspect, thinking of something that will keep you alive and interested during your retire-

ment. I am speaking of keeping yourself alive, interested, and happy during your working life, and of a permanent source of self-respect and standing in the community outside and beyond your job. The man who will make the greatest contribution to his company is the mature person — and you cannot have maturity if you have no life for interest outside the job.

“Being an employee means

working with people; it means living and working in a society. Intelligence, in the last analysis, is therefore not the most important quality. What is decisive is character and integrity. If you work on your own, intelligence and ability may be sufficient. If you work with people you are going to fail unless you also have basic integrity. And integrity — character — is the one thing most, if not all, employers consider first.”

THE NEED FOR RE-THINKING

The great German poet, Goethe, who also lived through a crisis of freedom, said to his generation: “What you have inherited from your fathers, earn over again for yourselves or it will not be yours.” We inherited freedom. We seem unaware that freedom has to be remade and re-earned in each generation of man. One reason for this failure is, I believe, passing at last. Our foolish languor has been shaken, if not shattered. We are more ready to examine ourselves and our record. And it is a privilege of our society that every citizen should make his own inquiry. The urgent thing is to feel the need for re-thinking and to set to work the ultimate energies of free society — which cannot be done by the fiat of government but only by the troubled conscience of responsible men and women. x x x And if we cannot — by a certain discipline, by readiness for reflection and quiet, by determination to do the difficult and aim at a lasting good — rediscover the real purpose and direction of our existence, we shall not be free. Our society will not be free.
— *Adlai Stevenson.*