

Your Professionalism Shows

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PAUL B. BARGER

MAN'S MIND is a resource that operates at top efficiency and effectiveness only when it is nurtured and used regularly. Man's knowledge, like machines and buildings, can rapidly become obsolete. Some reputable scientists, for example, have stated recently that there will be a hundred per cent increase in the body of knowledge possessed by man in the next 8-12 years, with another hundred per cent increase in the following 6-10 years. Another statement being heard is that many young people just launching a career will have to learn or be trained for three occupations or professions in the span of their active lives of work. This will be necessary because many new developments will render much of today's knowledge obsolete.

Even if these estimates are exaggerated, they are probably true enough to hold many obvious implications for the future development of human resources. Anyone, and especially a professional person, who fails to pursue a plan for keeping up is likely soon to be producing far below his potential. And eventually he will be unable to produce what society demands. In addition, we see the effect of constantly increasing demands by society on the development of man's mind; the minimum level for entering the world of work in a productive way is increasing regularly.

Because of this, it seems there must be substantial improvement in the professional competence of Extension workers. Our present reputation was earned in large part by early Extension workers who were dedicated, highly trained, and highly capable by standards of their day. The same situation must prevail by today's standards if

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Extension is to continue as a highly significant unit of our society.

The keys to building a more competent staff are several:

1. Assigning demanding and rewarding responsibilities.
2. Recruiting only highly trained personnel to add to the staff.
3. Demanding and helping present staff secure more training.
4. Assigning staff to specialized fields of work.
5. Using regular and systematic personnel evaluation.
6. Establishing salary policies which reward superior performance.

Not many debate the need for better training of Extension workers, but there are many differences of opinion regarding the field of study in which Extension workers should be trained. There is really no question that training in depth is needed (1) in one or more specific technical subject-matter (content) fields and (2) in the fundamentals of education and communications.

Extension can make a unique contribution to higher education by developing graduate programs which provide for solid training in a technical content (subject-matter) field, in educational methods and processes, and in integrating the two areas. If we can agree that the above ideas are valid, what about the people we are training? How does our training show up?

Some years ago Helen Turner of the Federal Extension Service spoke of some of the earmarks of a professional. She quoted G. B. Leighbody of the University of the State of New York who has identified some of the earmarks of a professional person.¹ Some of these ideas are incorporated in this discussion.

EARMARKS OF A PROFESSIONAL

As an application of the test of being professional and whether our professionalism really shows through, we should ask ourselves some questions that may indicate a professional stance:

1. DO WE REQUIRE CLOSE SUPERVISION OR DIRECTION? A professional worker does not require close supervision or direction; he directs himself. He plans his own activities. He works independently, but at the same time realizes the need for cooperating with others. The opportunity to do so constitutes one of the real satisfactions of the job.

2. DO WE CONSIDER OURSELF AN EMPLOYEE? The professional worker does not regard himself as an employee—he does not con-

¹ Helen D. Turner, "On Being a Professional," talk given at the National Home Demonstration Agents' Association meeting in Chicago, October 22, 1956 (Washington: Federal Extension Service, HEP-137 11-56).

sider himself to be working for a boss. He regards his supervisors as his fellow professional workers and they regard him the same way. Supervision of the non-professional may require bossing, but certainly that is not true in the realm of the professional worker. Extension people need to realize that supervision is an opportunity for assistance, not as orders from a boss.

3. DO WE WORK BY THE HOUR? I almost hesitate to put that one in since there is no such thing as a minimum time schedule in Extension work. However, recently we talk much about the amount of overtime we have put in. I'm wondering if we are truly professional in our attitude when we let the amount of well-planned time we put into the job bother us. The professional worker does not work by the hour. He does not expect to adhere to a minimum time schedule. He adjusts his working hours to meet the necessities and responsibilities of his duties without a thought to overtime or to a standard week.

If we are professionals we must work to accomplish a job which we feel needs to be done. Most of us would not be happy in a routine clock-punching situation. We would not be in Extension work or happy in it if we were that kind of individuals. Perhaps when we talk to others of what we do, we need to stress the satisfactions which come from a job well done, not the number of night meetings, the amount of extra time we put in, or the number of weekends we work. A professional worker does not expect to be paid by the hour. He expects an overall sum for which he has agreed to perform his duties. This sum is based upon responsibilities involved and professional service rendered.

4. DO WE TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESULTS OF OUR EFFORTS AND ACTIONS? A professional person makes his own decisions. If the job is not done he does not attempt to transfer blame to others. Perhaps you have heard an Extension person say a program failed because the home agent or the county agent or the 4-H Club agent or the specialist didn't do his or her part. Such statements do not characterize a professional person.

5. DO WE SEEK SELF-IMPROVEMENT? The professional worker continues to seek self-improvement. He takes advantage of every opportunity to improve his knowledge and understanding in connection with professional duty.

6. DO WE CONTRIBUTE TO THE KNOWLEDGE BANK OF EXTENSION? The professional worker contributes to the skill and knowledge of the profession. He develops new ideas, plans, and materials, and gladly shares them with fellow workers. This is being done in many states. Some Extension personnel exchange materials either

through their organizations or by keeping supervisors and specialists alert to new methods tried so they can carry the ideas to others. If you depend on others for all your materials, ideas, and plans, then you are not truly a professional worker.

7. DO WE RESPECT CONFIDENCE? The professional worker respects the confidence of others. This hardly needs mentioning. Extension people are constantly in a position of respecting the confidence of the people. Families discuss, privately, relationship problems, financial, and other problems with the agent and, of course, the information goes no further.

8. ARE WE LOYAL? The professional is loyal to his fellow workers. He never gossips about them or about those he serves. There's real temptation to do so when things don't go right. If we are professionals we have an obligation to discuss interpersonal problems which arise with those concerned, but not with other professionals or outsiders. A professional worker avoids rumors and hearsay; he does not repeat the information he receives through the grapevine. He secures information which is important to him directly from those authorized to release it.

9. DO WE WORK THROUGH PROPER CHANNELS? A professional worker discusses his grievances through proper channels. He discusses them directly and privately with those authorized to make adjustments. He refrains from complaining and grumbling to others. The professional worker meets his professional obligations. He fulfills completely all agreements and obligations entered into with fellow workers, whether they are legal or moral obligations.

10. DO WE REALIZE THE PROBLEMS OF OTHER PEOPLE? The professional worker is sensitive to the problems of his fellow workers; he always considers the effect of his actions on their welfare. In the case of Extension, we probably should consider both the professional staff and our lay leaders in this regard. A professional does not advance himself at the expense of others. He strives for promotion and advancement in the profession, only on the basis of superior preparation and worthy professional performance.

11. ARE WE PROUD OF OUR PROFESSION? Pride in profession is very important. A professional always reflects, to those outside the profession, a pride and satisfaction in the work in which he is engaged. All of us are well aware of the need for additional Extension personnel. But I wonder how many young people are discouraged or kept from becoming Extension workers because of the attitude or observable lack of pride we manifest in our profession. How many times have 4-H Club boys said, "Well, yes, I might like to take agriculture but I don't want to be an Extension worker, you

work too hard." Or you have heard mothers who have college-age girls say, "I don't want my daughter to be a home demonstration agent. I wouldn't want her driving around all over the county or working as many nights as you work."

We do work too hard, our schedules are too full, and we constantly add programs without taking anything away. But we rarely lose Extension people to other professions because they work too hard at productive, rewarding work.² As professional people we should be talking about the satisfactions rather than things we dislike about the job. I don't mean that we should present an unrealistic picture to those who are interested in becoming Extension workers. On the other hand, freedom from routine, the opportunities for personal growth, and for service to the people make our profession a special one—to say nothing of the joy of getting in the car on a lovely spring day for a drive to the far end of the county. There is even beauty in a snowstorm, although we may not appreciate it while we're trying to keep our car out of the ditch. A professional worker's chief desire is to render service, to improve man's welfare. This is the ultimate end to which the professional worker devotes his career.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps appearance should be considered here. I have seen Extension people who have been accepted in the county, who have made advancement, but who certainly fail to inspire young people to follow their footsteps because of their appearance. We do have a professional obligation to look the part. We don't need to be models but we should be well groomed, within normal weight, and appropriately dressed. The people want to point to us with pride: "She is our home demonstration agent." Women want an example perhaps not always to achieve but something to aim for. We must remember that they are constantly exposed to what's right and more than a little glamour on television and in women's magazines—and they know what is correct.

It hustles most men to even keep up with the well dressed women we are working with, much less to be their example, but the effort is worthwhile. This remark was once made of a man who was a new county agent: "Well at least he dresses like a gentleman, not like a bum as our former county agent did."

² In a study of what motivates county agents, Clegg found that satisfactions identified were more likely to be related to the actual job—to accomplishing meaningful and worthwhile undertakings. See Denzil O. Clegg, "Work as a Motivator," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Fall, 1963), 141-48.

As we think over our profession and whether we like the work we're doing, this statement by John Luther may help. He says that "anyone can tell at a glance that I'm not the hustling type. A streak of chronic laziness runs from my head to the balls of my feet. I love comfort and leisure with a deep and disgraceful passion; perhaps that is why it has taken me so long to recognize the curious fact, *I like work.*"

Explaining what he means, the author goes on to say: "I've learned that I have to work in order to be happy. People need work almost as bad as they need food, without it they are devoured by restlessness and discontent." He further adds that "realizing you actually enjoy working is a part of growing up. But many people never learn. They never achieve peace of mind and contentment the knowledge brings. They spend their lives in a prison where work is the eternal punishment." Luther concludes with this advice: "Don't wait until you retire to realize you like to work. Start enjoying your job today. This admonition I will pass on to you. Start enjoying your job today, let others know you enjoy it. By your inspiration others may be encouraged to choose a profession of which we are so proud."

This thought by Phillips Brooks is a fitting conclusion:

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your task. Then the doing of your work will be no miracle, but you will be the miracle. And everyday you will wonder at yourselves and the richness of life which has come to you.³

³ Phillips Brooks, *Twenty Sermons. 18, Going Up to Jerusalem*, quoted in *Familiar Quotations by John Bartlett*, (eds.) Christopher Morley and Louella D. Everett (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), p. 613.

EACH ONE of us has an obligation—as a matter of his own security, the security of the enterprise in which he is engaged, and the security of the nation which is ours—not merely to acquire a competence, but to develop a variety of competencies and to strive for excellence in each of them, so that he may thus enjoy the satisfying, inborn human need to be useful and productive.

—from ROGER M. BLOUGH as quoted in *Forbes*, XCIII (March 15, 1964), 64.

I AM only one, but still I am one; I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.—EDWARD E. HALE.