

Points of View

Geoffrey Moss

Dear G. L.:

As a foreigner, I should like to comment on agent qualifications and what we should look for when selecting an extension worker, because I believe principles in any field are the same in every country.

These are some of the characteristics I would look for in an extension worker:

1. An understanding and a deep feeling for people. I believe this comes more from experiences than from training.
2. Enthusiasm. How can he inspire or motivate other people if he is not enthusiastic about his cause.
3. Loyalty. This is essential if he is to work successfully in a team.
4. The power to communicate ideas to others.
5. The ability to become a leader in the community.
6. The ability to think logically and to make sound, crisp decisions.
7. A technical competency.
8. The ability to identify his weaknesses and to seek self-improvement.
9. Social acceptability in whatever field he is to work.

An extension worker must be a good listener, must have wide interests, and must have a sense of humor. I could go on and add such characteristics as sincerity, reliability, modesty, discretion, and diplomacy. Many of these can be classified as "good personality" and this is perhaps not the place to try to define this complex term.

I believe we put too much stress on formal academic training. Don't think I am opposed to it—it does put a few extra years on one and speeds up maturity to some extent. But I believe extra-curricular activities may be as important as formal lectures. I also think we put too much emphasis on academic grades. Formal training can teach tech-

nical skills and basic principles. It should teach logic and how to think clearly. But I believe we all learn better when training is relevant to our work situation, so I strongly advocate planned staff development and on-the-job training. Graduate training following work experiences is also more meaningful and should be encouraged. It allows one to step back from daily work pressures, think about the job in hand, and get things in perspective.

Has anyone ever investigated some of our most successful extension workers? Why are they successful? What was their background and formal training? Perhaps the answers to some of these questions will help us answer the question "What are the *best* qualifications for an extension agent?"

Geoffrey Moss

Wellington, New Zealand

G. L. Carter, Jr.

Dear Geff:

Your comments on agent qualifications are interesting. You identify characteristics for the extension worker which we may all agree are important. I'm not certain we would all agree on how to detect the presence of these characteristics, to appraise their relative merits, or to determine what would constitute a minimum acceptable level for each. How do you appraise them for extension workers in New Zealand?

Perhaps our inability to detect and appraise such characteristics has forced us to concern ourselves with non-measurable characteristics: the amount of formal study, grade-point averages, prior work and other experiences, etc. However, you suggest that preparation for functioning as an extension worker can better be accomplished on the job. I assume you are saying "you, a beginning worker who has the characteristics you identified on an acceptable level." As you put it, "I believe

we all learn better when training is relevant to our work situation, so I strongly advocate planned staff development and on-the-job training."

As you know, we do on-the-job training with Extension personnel in this country; but I would be interested in some more elaboration of what you mean by "training that is relevant to the work situation."

G. L. CARTER, JR.
Editor

Geoffrey Moss

Dear G. L.:

In the previous discussion about the best training and qualifications for an extension agent, I pointed out that history has shown that many factors besides subjects and high grades should be considered.

You ask how we appraise extension workers in New Zealand for these desirable characteristics. We have no secret formula. I am not sure that it is desirable to try to appraise relative merits or to work out minimum acceptable levels. I believe it may be enough to identify desirable characteristics and if necessary develop them further by training and experience.

Perhaps the most important quality to look for in a new extension worker is a feeling for people, especially the people with whom he will be working. It is not very difficult to find out whether someone possesses this quality. It is really the desire to serve and help one's fellow man, and in some cases this amounts almost to "missionary zeal."

Of course the best way to identify a person's characteristics is to get to know him well by working with him. You can employ him for a trial period on probation or, better still, employ him during the long university vacation. In this way, you have a chance to observe his reactions on the job. If this is impossible, you can often get helpful comments from a competent observer, perhaps someone who has known him during his time at the university.

Then there is the final face-to-face interview. This should not be underestimated, if it is carried out by an experienced interviewer. It does not

take very long to find out what his interests are, why he wants to take up extension work, his extra-curricular activities, and his potential leadership qualities based on his previous experiences.

Because agriculture and social science research is changing so rapidly, we must be prepared to refresh, train, and develop our staff continually. I feel that what we learn at the university is basically past history. It is founded on previous research, much of which we may not be able to repeat in a dynamic environment. As far as social science research is concerned, we have only to look at our internal and external situations to realize just how much we do not know.

You ask for an elaboration of what I mean by "training that is relevant to the work situation." I feel that training is most successful when a person is doing a job, rather than just learning how to do it. Involvement and a sense of achievement in a worthwhile exercise are key factors in staff development.

Of course professional development depends not only on the inherent ability of the extension worker but also on his senior colleagues and the atmosphere they create for his development. It is the responsibility of the training officer to create a favorable atmosphere for the development of a junior colleague and to help him identify and strengthen his weaknesses. There are other factors which affect the young extension worker and these include his home and his social environments.

We have found that initiative tests and meaningful training activities are very important in retaining enthusiasm, especially in the early stages of training. We find that by giving new extension workers challenging tasks in fields that contribute to their knowledge and experience, they respond and develop faster than ones serving an apprenticeship. This is not surprising; is there any better way to learn a job than by doing it?

We should try to cash in on the vigor and enthusiasm that youth brings to a new job. After all, the new extension worker is trying to get established and prove his worth. He is used to

long hours of hard mental work prior to graduation and we must keep him very active mentally. It is our responsibility to help him develop and not kill his enthusiasm with mundane tasks.

GEOFFREY MOSS

Wellington, New Zealand

Robert Stodola

Dear G. L.:

There are a couple of points I would like to bring out regarding 4-H youth agent qualifications which have not been brought out in letters of the last three *Journal* issues. Grace Wright talked about the clientele of the 4-H agent. She said our responsibility is youth development. Does this mean that our clientele is all the youth of the county? I don't believe that it does. I believe our clientele is adult leaders. My responsibility is to educate and inform adults so that they in turn will be able to work with youth.

This brings up the point of subject matter. Eugene Ross indicated that he would agree that courses such as educational psychology, adult education, etc., do not represent a field of study. I cannot agree with this statement. Educational psychology, sociology, teaching methods, human development, etc., are indeed fields of study. Much research and study has gone into the development of these subjects and much more needs to be done.

An agricultural agent or dairy specialist has farmers as his clientele. The subject matter may be dairy cattle. It is important that the agent know about dairy cattle and can teach the subject. In a similar way, the clientele of the 4-H agent is made up of adults and the subject is youth. It is important that the 4-H agent understand the subject of youth development. His job is to give adults an understanding of youth and also an understanding of ways to work with them and teach them.

We now need to take the discussion one step further. What is the situation of the local adult leader? The leader is now the teacher. Youth are the clientele and the subject matter is dairy or music or whatever interests the members have. Here it is necessary for the leader to have an understanding of edu-

cational psychology and also subject matter. I believe it is the 4-H agent's responsibility to teach educational psychology. He should also be able to help the leader get information on the particular subject matter he is going to teach. Notice that I said he should help him get it. This does not mean that he has to teach it himself. There are other avenues available: an agricultural agent who is knowledgeable on the subject, extension specialists, or other sources within the community (such as vocational schools).

In undergraduate work I majored in dairy science. As I look back on my first years as a 4-H agent, I realize that I had a poor understanding of my responsibility and of how to carry it out. It was not until recently when I did graduate work and took courses in educational psychology and sociology that I began to realize how much there is to know about understanding people and about how to work with them. I need still more background in human development and learning. But I do feel that if I had had at least some of these courses before coming to the job I would have had a much better understanding of my responsibilities and could have done better work as a 4-H agent. I should have been technically competent in human development instead of dairy science.

ROBERT A. STODOLA

4-H Agent

West Bend, Wisconsin

Extension Specialists

Dear G. L.:

In agricultural Extension work we are highly trained scientists. If we pay attention to our duties as scientists, we lose a lot of our ability to strike while the iron is hot. If our research specialties come too much to the fore, we are in a position of being hesitant to do anything until the premise has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt—a research project. If we shoot from the hip with our information, we stand a good chance of being wrong.

We have to draw a line down the middle and my philosophy is to work as hard as I can to give the best information available at that particular time.

That means as thorough research as possible but also means a decision-making process. It's the kind of decision making that any administrator who is worth his salt has to do. It means making the decision of what to advise, being able to back it up with the best information available, and then not worrying about it. In other words, go on to the next decision.

I am an Extension specialist in entomology. How do I feel? I feel that the county agent and the research man with whom I work are the sender and receiver in a two-way interchange in which I am the communicator and educator in between. As a communicator, my trunk lines have to be open and clear, not garbled or devious. My effectiveness is irrevocably aligned with an integrity of thought, an open unbiased view, an ability to maintain perspective and, above all, a forthright honesty. If as a communicator I become involved in pressure politics, self-seeking, and a leaning toward special interests, then I am in a position of unconsciously altering the message in favor of these devious influences—instead of presenting a direct, forthright, and sound Extension Service policy.

The county agent or home demonstration agent with whom I work has a unique relationship to me as an Extension specialist. Each of us has several bosses to whom we make an accounting. When we come together for consultation, it is a two-way street. I feel that agents sometimes have the approach that what a specialist says is the last word because he or she is an expert. Not exactly so. He or she is an expert, but only in a relatively narrow field. How that expertise applies to the clientele in the county is best evaluated by the agent. That is why I try to visit clientele as much as possible only when an agent is available to go with me.

The ongoing thrust and ultimate effectiveness of a recommendation by a specialist is dependent to a great extent on the capacity of the agent to follow through. Thereby, the effectiveness of the agent becomes of extreme and essential importance to the effectiveness of the Extension specialist.

The relationship to my research counterpart is also of prime importance. Extension involves the process of extending something beyond its previous limits. Without research backing I become an empty and hollow vessel.

I feel strongly that research personnel should spend some time in presenting their material directly to the public. It's a good way to keep in touch with reality and lower the height of the ivory tower when the tower shows signs of becoming Jack's beanstalk. Conversely, I feel that an Extension worker should undertake a limited amount of research to tighten up his reflexes and keep from becoming too much of a fast-answer man with the quick, but possibly inaccurate, reply.

I look upon myself and other Extension specialists as catalysts in a chemical reaction. I contribute to change and growth but stay far enough in back of the action so that I always have a good view of the woods and will not get lost just looking at individual trees. I believe this approach to any position of stature is a viable and essential one.

ALBERT A. LAPLANTE

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A New Clearinghouse

As adult educators, your readers may be interested in the new ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education (ERIC/AE), established by the Library of Continuing Education of Syracuse University in association with the Educational Resources Information Center of the U.S. Office of Education. The Clearinghouse indexes, abstracts, and disseminates information about research documents and other materials in all areas of adult education and training. These processed documents are then announced in a monthly bulletin, *Research in Education*, available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for \$11 per year. Many documents listed in this bulletin may be purchased in microfiche or hard copy.

Other services include publishing bibliographies and literature reviews, searching current files of ERIC/AE in response to information requests, and

assisting in developing adult education information services.

Any person or institution interested in adult education and training is invited to send to the Clearinghouse materials which might interest others, and to notify it of (1) existing collections of materials useful to adult education researchers and (2) research and bibliographic projects underway or being planned. Send comments, suggestions, or materials to Roger DeCrow, Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education, 107 Rodney Lane, Syracuse, New York 13210.

Currently we are compiling the annual report of research studies and investigations in adult education completed during the past year.

If you have completed a research study or data collecting investigation in the past year, or if you have one underway, a report of your work can be included. Request reporting forms from the above address.

STANLEY M. GRABOWSKI
Syracuse, New York

Thoughts on the Journal

I have been receiving the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* for several years, but it was only recently that I came to fully appreciate it.

It is so easy for us, with the volume of mail and publications that we receive, to hurriedly glance through a publication and set it aside for future use, then never get back to it. This is usually what happened when my copy of the *Journal* arrived.

While doing graduate work toward

an advanced degree in the spring of 1966, I had the opportunity to read and study a number of articles in the *Journal*. As a result, I came to appreciate it as a professional journal. It was necessary for me, in connection with an Extension course, to do a considerable amount of background reading. I selected articles in the *Journal* as well as in several other publications dealing with adult education. Consequently, I realized its value not only as our professional journal, but also in comparison with other publications in related fields.

One must not only read, but also study and evaluate to gain full value from professional papers. Herein, I think, lies the key. An occasional period away from the regular schedule of work can be most valuable for study and contemplation.

It is not necessary to agree with an author to benefit from his paper. If an article has caused the reader to think and has shed some light on a particular subject, it has been worthwhile for the reader.

I have found the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* to have some very thought-provoking papers. While I don't always agree with the author, I have found many of the articles quite stimulating. *Journal* authors have included some of the best minds in the adult education field. I consider the *Journal* an excellent reference for any professional extension worker.

DOUG WARNOCK
Walla Walla, Washington