

## A CRYING NEED - TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Fred E. Furnish, General Electric Cablevision, Decatur, Illinois

### General Electric Cablevision Corporation

As our industry expands and the state of the art changes radically in so many areas we will find it extremely difficult to keep abreast of resultant technical and administration advances. Our industry is at a crossroads, we have kept up in the past but rapidly changing technology will make us as obsolete as the vacuum tube if we do not respond now. It is hoped that a sharper awareness of the need for training and further education will be recognized by the reader of this paper. The time for our industry to react in a positive manner to insure that we stay on top of technical advances and administrative expertise is now.

The theme of this convention, "Thirty Years of Innovation and Service", indicates that the cable industry has experienced many years of seasoning, however, we are still a relatively "young" industry. Our status as a young industry is further complicated by the rapidly changing technology and new innovations. The early technical changes from tube equipment to solid state now seem insignificant when we consider transitions to Local Origination to Pay TV and to Earth Stations. While the most in-depth changes have been recognized as technically oriented it has been necessary for everyone from the newest installer, to the office clerk, to the system manager to adjust to these changes.

We have remained flexible and subject to changes but we could have benefited from a strong nucleus of long time experienced people within our systems to help us weather the storm of growing pains. In many industries, such as utilities, it is not unusual to have employees with 30 and 40 years of experience who may impart their knowledge and training to new employees. The absorption of new employees may be accomplished with a minimum of disruption of normal day-to-day activities with such a nucleus of experienced long-term people. However, since most of our cable systems employ a relatively small number of people and usually do not have the backing of long-

term employees, it appears that we are continually training new people.

We assign many varied responsibilities to our Service and Engineering sections. The major areas of responsibility are as follows:

- \* Head end and distribution installation and maintenance
- \* Safety and OSHA regulations
- \* Local Origination equipment
- \* Home installations
- \* CARS Band microwave
- \* Pay TV traps and scrambler and descramblers
- \* Earth Station installation and maintenance
- \* Fibre Optics (near future)
- \* Customer service and satisfaction
- \* Direct supervision and training of installers, servicemen and technicians

In the past we have relied upon vendor training, isolated seminars and courses, on the job training, and a lot of good common horse sense to keep up from both a technical and administration standpoint. Under the circumstances our industry has fared remarkably well because many good people have put forth a lot of time and effort to assure our success.

Along with the day-to-day pressures of keeping abreast technically we must also take care of the numerous installations, reconnects, disconnects, plant maintenance and customer service calls. Our training and continuing education must be sandwiched in along with many other necessary functions. While we recognize the need for more training we must also keep the store open for business. In most cases our key technical people are also key people from an administration standpoint, so it is vital that their presence be felt on a day-to-day basis in their respective system by the people reporting to them in order to keep effective communications and employee discipline intact. We must hit a happy medium between necessary training time spent away from the system and keeping their respective responsibilities intact.

While continued technical training is a high priority area, especially in light of rapidly changing technology, there are many

associated areas of concern that have become equally as important. Some of those non-technical areas of concern are as follows:

Supervision techniques - when an employee quits it may very well be the fault of a supervisor. It is a continual effort to make certain that all employees are treated fairly and equally. Employee attitudes and reliability have been proven to be lacking because of poor supervision in many cases.

Employee motivation - is one of our biggest problem areas or opportunities. Techniques for keeping interest high and competition among employees flourishing is a very challenging situation especially when we consider, once again, that with a relatively small number of employees in each system the opportunities for advancement may be somewhat limited.

Equal Employment Opportunities and new consumer credit laws - are two areas that may seem far removed from the technical area, but yet the administration of the technical area is very much concerned with these two items.

Grass roots politics - is more important every day and we just cannot get by with letting "George" do it. We must all get involved. This represents another change in the day-to-day operation of our systems which has come about in recent years. We cannot wait until we need something from our legislators to get acquainted. It is necessary to establish and maintain effective political relationships on a continuing basis.

All of the aforementioned problem areas are further compounded by the fact that a large majority of our employees are young people looking for their niche in life. Many of these people will stay with us and become very valuable employees, while others are looking only for a stepping stone in this game of life. We must accept the fact that after spending time and money to train a person to become productive, the person may then move on.

Despite all of the problems against us we continue to survive and grow and prosper. With all our shortcomings and areas of need our industry has not suffered loss of growth or prestige. Now after 30 years of innovation and service we are at a crossroad or a threshold point. All of the aforementioned areas of concern now have an accumulative effect. It's almost as if we have a tiger by the tail today--with a crying need for training and continuing education.

Training and education sources which have been at our disposal must be utilized, as in the past, to keep us alerted to technical changes and improvements. We must encourage local educational institutions to incorporate cable related courses while taking advantage of those established courses that may be of value to us, such as supervision and employee motivation. Basic safety

and Red Cross instruction is readily available from local facilities. Intercompany training must be refined and expanded. Our state and national organizations may contribute heavily toward our needs.

At this point our industry must bite the bullet and move toward the sophistication of training and further education for all of our people, and certainly for the backbone of our industry--our technical people.