



HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: HOW IT WAS ORGANIZED 110 YEARS AGO

Railway staffing 110 years ago: young professionals, internship, interaction with higher schools... Many solutions could be implemented now, and this compilation might be published within the chapter on education, training and staff.

What is needed to improve the staff of employees on the railways? — This question, which is the subject of a special questionnaire, undertaken recently on many railways, prompts me to express my own view on this subject.

The question touched mainly on employees of traffic control service. The prevailing opinion tends to see the reason for unsatisfactory service of these agents in the absence or lack of educational qualifications. In raising the educational level, they see a panacea for eradicating the disease. It seems to me that the root of evil must be sought much deeper, and that a whole range of other measures are needed both to improve the selection of employees, and to awaken in them self-activity and a conscious attitude to work.

I turn, in particular, to the proposal that has been put forward on some roads to replace the positions of station chiefs and their assistants only with persons having an educational qualification not lower than the course of secondary schools and, moreover, certified by educational institutions; I doubt, firstly, that these positions, under the existing conditions of service and remuneration, should have a sufficient contingent of such candidates; secondly, if it is intended to attract young people directly from school to the above-mentioned responsible positions, it is unlikely that the benefits of studying the school disciplines of the program would balance that risk and harm to the service, which, undoubtedly, will be present due to the absence with young men's of simply everyday experience, tact and balance for business relations with the public and for managerial actions, on which safety of train traffic often depends; thirdly, if an extensive contingent of junior office clerks, telegraph operators and

others, regardless of their abilities and business skills, will be deprived of prospects for promotion, giving way to academic diplomas and certificates, it may result in the fact that talented individuals, having their heads screwed on the right way, but without a certificate, who until now in the railway service are more common than in any other field, will all leave the railway to other areas of work where only business skills are valued, regardless of whether they have been achieved at school or through self-education and self-development. On each railway and now in the staff of the employees there is an adequate supply of people with educational qualifications, but if they are often left behind when promoting in the service, would it not be necessary to perceive only the law of free competition, which naturally brings forward people of labor and business ability. If we introduce patronage of educational certificates, then, of course, the roles will change, but it is unlikely that such an increase in educational qualifications will help to improve the quality of employees.

The evil not only of railways, but of all other enterprises and departments in our fatherland, lies not so much in the lack of educational qualifications as in the insufficient height of the moral level of the employees; lacking not diplomas, but much more important: honesty, hard work and initiative. And it is unlikely that the Board and the Office of Railways may envy in this regard other departments where the system of diplomas flourishes. It is enough to point out our privileged naval or military departments, to the entire highest bureaucratic world, everywhere we see a complete lack of initiative, carelessness, actual ignorance and a predatory attitude toward the interests of the treasury.





So, in my opinion, introduction of compulsory general educational school qualifications for the employees on the railways is unlikely to contribute to an increase in the quality selection of employees; it would be much more important for the interests of the service to set up special examination commissions at the Road Administration, for testing by interviewing of official, special and partly the general knowledge of those who are being promoted. Such examinations would enable the Road Administration to check skills certification of the nearest authorities and in a collegial way to evaluate not only the business skills of the employee, but also his overall development, in order to determine his degree of suitability for the most senior positions.

Then it would be very useful to introduce special secret annual certifications by the nearest authorities: Heads of the Department, Heads of the station — of each of the employees subordinated to them with regard to their morality, diligence, amateur performance, and so on. These certifications could consist of answers to questions developed by the Road Administration, on special certification sheets and, for convenience of comparisons, could

be expressed using a digital point system. These observation records, made periodically by different executive persons, in view of the employee's transfer from station to station or from one department to another (which should have been done as often as possible in the interests of the business and correct assessment of the employee), and entered into the employee's service records — would provide a clear idea of the comparative qualities of all employees and would serve as a criterion for selecting candidates for promotion, and, of course, education qualification would have to be taken into account along with other assessment factors.

The method of assessing an employee in relation to his business qualities is also very important. It is unjust and inappropriate, of course, to form an opinion about the employee by a favorable external impression and by dullness of answers to questions posed when the authorities are passing through along the line; it is important to judge not by appearance and words, but by deeds. To assess the activities of senior, responsible agents, the most rational, in my opinion, would be a statistical method, in the form of comprehensive records of the activities of each

station, each department, for example: about idle time of cars and trains, about the number of shortages and damage to cargo, about the number of incidents caused by the operating employees, the number of complaints from passengers and cargo owners, the number of refutation control checks, the number of comments made by inspectors of all kinds (traffic, station accounting) and other. All these records, digitized in accordance with the size of the technical and commercial work of a station or branch and expressed independently of the record of activity from all stations and all branches, would represent the best indicator of the degree of success of a given accounting unit (station, branch), and therefore would serve as an impartial description of the activities of responsible agents in charge of these units.

But, in addition to assessing the business qualities of employees, this method could serve to introduce a variety of premiums, with appropriate deductions when evading certain norms. Properly and rationally organized statistics and accounting in large enterprises replaces the master's eye, premiums and bonuses, being the type of employee's participation in profits that depend on a successful and economic attitude to business, turns an employee into a master. That is why neither the increase in salaries, nor the issuance of award money each time at the discretion of the authorities, often dependent on random causes, will never achieve the effect that is obtained from correctly and expediently assigned premium, when an employee in every extra hour of idle time or unproductive mileage of a car, in every missing load of cargo, in every damage to rolling stock or other property of the road – will see his personal damage with a purely master's pain in his heart. By transforming an employee into a master, the administration eliminates the need for reminders, compulsions and threats that require long, unpleasant and, in most cases, unmet goals of daily remote negotiations with the stations to speed up the loading, unloading and return of cars, shields, and so on. Personal material interest of station chiefs in the fastest turnover of cars, cargo, shields, and so on and the inexorable exact digital accounting of this turnover will undoubtedly be a much greater guarantee of business success, rather than degrading daily reminders to senior agents of

their duties, assuming that it will act and force them to do as much as possible.

The introduction of premiums requires, however, great deliberation, strict planning and prior careful study of all features of each station, contributing to or, conversely, unfavorable to the normal course of the business. Failure to comply with these conditions very often leads to failure of the premiums, forcing the administration to be disappointed in the principle of premiums itself, while this failure is due either to the inappropriate use of the meter of this function, or to the appointment of too high or prohibitively low standards that do not meet the conditions of the actual average work, or finally to the inexpedient distribution of bonuses among the participants, at the discretion of the authorities, instead of accurate accounting of individual work, which mathematically determines each participant's share.

Long-term service practice is, in my opinion, one of the most important guarantees of the employee's usefulness, his moral reliability and attachment to work. I think that the opinion, shared by many people, is deeply erroneous that an employee turns into a squeezed lemon over time, which then can only be thrown away. If, over the years, his energy actually decreases, then this decrease is more than compensated for by accumulation of administrative and everyday experience and tact that help him with the least expenditure of energy to achieve the greatest productivity and usefulness of his actions, avoiding those mistakes and blunders that are inevitable for a beginner, full of energy, often directed to completely useless breaking, to excessive friction, aggravating only relations with representatives of other services and departments and distracting attention towards a completely unproductive and even harmful work.

That is why I believe that senior employees are a very valuable element of railway service personnel and that it is in the interests of the road that the longest service of their agents should be encouraged worldwide, strengthening not only their personal, but also their hereditary ties with the road, for which it is important to extend care to their families, to raising their children and to the preferential provision of service on the road to the latter. For those purposes it would be very useful to



increase the number of railway secondary and lower schools and expand their program by introducing into such teaching special subjects of the railway business, in order to train children of employees with skills allowing to occupy not only technical positions, but also positions of telegraph operators, clerks, weighers and so on. It would also be very useful for every road to have some scholarships in higher technical educational institutions, for children of employees of the road, with the obligation for scholars to serve no less than a certain number of years (3–5) on the road after graduation, starting from the lowest technical positions: train driver or road master.

Raising self-initiative of employees can pass through developing their personal interest in improving the economic work of the road; the use of the best ways to evaluate their activities in order to achieve promotion of only really worthy agents; strengthening attachment of employees to the road by providing them and their children with jobs on the road after special schooling for that; contributing to improvement of educational qualification of employees, without violating the principle of free competition of school knowledge with business skills and merit.

This is the path that, in my opinion, can lead to an increase in the quality of personnel serving on the railways, both educationally and from moral and business points of view.

N. Melnikova

(Zheleznodorozhnoe delo [Railway Business], 1909, No. 33, pp. 184–186).

Education rights at railway service. — Minister of Railways S. V. Rukhlov proposed to the head of South-West railway to issue an order that the roads make special consideration of persons who have graduated from higher educational institutions and have entered the administration of roads at lower positions. It is prescribed to appoint these persons to such stations, where, under the guidance of senior agents, they could, in a shorter period, become familiar with the duties of the lower employees. In addition, it is necessary to provide them with promotion in the service out of turn and after a year from the date of admission, to enroll them to the civil service, regardless of their position (*«Kiev. Mysl»*, No. 138).

(Zheleznodorozhnoe delo [Railway Business], 1909, No. 33, p. 188).

Railway schools. — Several years ago, the head of Moscow–Kursk, Nizhny Novgorod and Murom railways, engineer Dobrovolsky invited employees to actively participate in development of schooling on the railways, by deducting for this purpose 1 % of their salaries. Now, interesting results have become clear.

From 1902 to 1907 the amount of deductions increased from 3470 rubles to 18 000 rubles, and appropriation of the treasury for the same item increased from 22 300 rubles up to 7 600 rubles, which made it possible to train 4 430 children of both sexes instead of 1 560 in railway schools. In addition, strengthening the monetary fund makes it possible to assist those employees for whom education of children in higher education schools becomes a heavy burden on their modest budget.

Each student during his stay in school is not only exempt from tuition fees, but also uses all kinds of educational equipment free of charge. But «the demand for education is far ahead of the possibility of meeting it». So, for example, in 1907, at the stations Kovrov, Nizhny, Orel the second school buildings with 10 classrooms each were built, and they were already overcrowded. The same is in Obiralovka, Selivanov and Zolotukhin.

G. Dobrovolsky reminds employees that «only with friendly solidarity in relation to such an important issue as education and upbringing of children, the educational needs on the roads entrusted to him can be satisfied more fully than it is observed at present» (*«Rannee Utro»*, No. 6, January 9, 1909).

(Zheleznodorozhnoe delo [Railway Business], 1909, No. 14–15, p. 88).

Do not wish. — Almost all private enterprises refused the request of the director of Petersburg Technological Institute, professor Voronov on provision of summer practices (internship) to students at factories, plants and railways. Only some railways responded in a favourable manner (*«Volga»*, No. 60, 1909).

(Zheleznodorozhnoe delo [Railway Business], 1909, No. 30, p. 176).

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