

CHANGE -- A CHALLENGE OF THE 70'S

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One of the inevitable processes of life is change. Ideas come from numerous sources, and efforts to implement some of them are being exerted continually. They are the means of taking a program from stagnation to meaningful activity. It has been said that time and tide wait for no man. A casual observation would convince one that this is a truism. Scanning the senior picture of one's high school graduating class will remove any doubt that change has been evolving.

Not only do people change, but their surroundings are in a continual state of modification. The circumstances in which one finds himself are also constantly evolving.

This is an age old phenomenon, however it is currently causing much uncertainty and lack of stability due to rapidity of change -- the pace is continuing to accelerate. The problem would be a relatively simple one if things and especially people changed at the same rate.

Agricultural educators to be effective, must comprehend change and be able to cope with it to a much greater extent than has been the case formerly. This means that those who are to exert substantial influence in updating the program must possess the ability to keep abreast with current situations. To a degree this means they must be able not only to adjust to their surroundings, but they must also have the ability to bring about change and shape it so that it most effectively accomplishes their major goals.

One should be cognizant that he will be shaped by change to some degree. This is inevitable. Even so, stability should be maintained and leadership should be exerted to give appropriate direction to change.

All worthwhile endeavors require physical and mental effort. Inducing and directing change are not exceptions. First there must be some objectives or goals so that efforts may be applied intelligently. If there is no purpose for change one would be foolish to induce modifications just for the sake of revising the past. Unless there is a reasonable prospect for progress and improvement, one would do well to retain the present practices.

Each decade has presented the vocational educator with challenges and a multitude of problems. In the main, they are a continuation of the problems of the past with some modification and a change of emphasis which is largely dictated by the current sociological situation, a factor which is in the process of continual adjustment.

It seems that there probably has not been such a massive effort to reshape agricultural education by those in the field since its inception. There are always some who desire to conduct business as usual. However, many are convinced that updating is a necessity.

The course charted for the next decade should be one that is forward-looking. Opinions should be solicited from many groups and used when feasible. Insights and wisdom are not restricted to any one segment of society. Consideration should be given to the various alternatives prior to the selection of one approach to the problem.

Regardless of the program outlined, there will be only a minimum of success if those affected by the policies are not involved in their establishment and fulfillment. The educator may be fully convinced that the goals set are desirable, but it is folly to assume that the general public holds a similar view. Two levels of acceptance and active support are needed -- lay leadership and the community in general.

To make intelligent decisions, each of these groups need insights into the present situation and the reasons for change. Projected modifications should be examined in light of what they will mean to the total educational program, what they will mean to vocational agriculture, and what they will mean to various groups affected by the program.

Although the advisory council recommends changes and the educational administration endorses the action, there is no assurance that the general public will participate in the changes or that they will even look upon them favorably. They should be fully apprised of the situation and plans for change. Reasons for modification of current programs should be explained clearly. Otherwise, there is a probability of a general resistance to projected alterations.

The question then is how may the agricultural leaders and the general public be informed and kept current so that they may give considered judgment to the problems involved.

Vocational agriculture should be so designed and carried out that it will put its imprint indelibly upon the history of this period. With the passage of the basic Vocational Education Act of 1917, it was designed to be different and to make a difference in the lives of Americans.

At this stage of the game, it would be easy to become discouraged and quit the game. But, this is not the way to progress. What is needed is a spirit of concern, of dedication, and of enthusiasm. These should be expressed in every undertaking, be they large and complicated or small and simple. Attention must be focused upon the positive.

The instructor should be aware of what he is attempting to do to people. His approach to a problem or group of problems should be guided by this awareness. It is highly possible that a primary aim of the teacher will be one of influencing the attitudes of persons along with their relationships and actions. Utilization of persons is a major role of the leader. It is not practical for him to be more capable than his associates in all areas. It would be folly for him to even feel that he were. Rather, wisdom indicates that leadership includes the stimulation of thinking and action by others. Directing and managing should be utilized so that the best is secured from others. It would be foolish for one to stop leading and try to do the entire job by himself or to build the entire program around himself.

Instruction must be geared to the student in his current situation. If this is not done, the teaching is irrelevant as far as the individual is concerned. A unit of material can be related to the needs of individual students only to the degree that the teacher knows the various class members, their local situation, and their unique needs. It is essential that abstract facts be related to concrete situations, the meaning that these have for today's real-life situations.

Making teaching relevant is no mere accident. It requires that we know each student as a person. The instructor must be aware of the environment of the individual, his home situation, his likes and aversions, his ideals, his hopes and goals, his abilities and his limitations, his strengths and weaknesses. One may acquire this information from numerous sources; one of the most effective being home visitation and personal contact.

In order to be able to help direct change and at times even foster it, one has to exert some leadership in fact and not just occupy the slot because of election, although this is an essential part of it. This includes a willingness to serve, involvement and practice. An airline pilot becomes proficient not by study alone but through the actual operation of a plane, evaluation of deficiencies and constant effort for improvement. Likewise, the leader does not acquire proficiency through study alone. Nothing can entirely replace constructive on-the-job training.

It seems that the educators in conjunction with the community should ascertain what changes are desirable, which are practical and then outline a program with a timetable designed to accomplish the ends sought.

Many adults will expect careful and detailed planning for the educational venture. They have been accustomed to such in their daily employment. Sloppy planning and ill prepared leadership can lead only to frustration and meager accomplishment.

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