Training For The Future

BOSTON — In the late 1970's, reports management consultant Peter F. Drucker, said every other dollar earned and spent in the American economy will be earned by producing and distributing ideas and information, and will be spent on procuring ideas and information.

This prediction comes as no surprise. The age of the "knowledge worker" is upon us.

Already the acquisition and application of information, rather than science or technology, has emerged as the new foundation for work.

Largest Category

Teachers of all kinds now constitute our largest single occupational group. And professional, managerial and technical people are fast becoming the largest category of workers in the American labor force.

The conclusion — for Liberty Mutual Insurance Co., at least — is obvious. Making knowledge work productive has become the great management task of this century. Fortunately, it is a task that this particular national organization has recognized and begun meeting in earnest, especially as it relates to young, minority-group people — the college student as well as the disadvantaged.

ONE VENTURE

Cooperative education is one such venture.

"Co-op" education, as most of you know, is a work-study plan operated by colleges and employers that enables students to alternate between work and school.

The students are placed in jobs related to their chosen field, usually for a period of three-to-six months, then return to school to resume their studies.

Received Much

"When Liberty Mutual set up its first co-op program with Northeastern University many years ago," says Warren E. Marshall, manager of the company's personnel development department, "only a few colleges and universities in country had co-op programs.

"There are now more than 100 schools and 5,000 employers involved. Today Liberty's participation is so well known that I receive about three letters a week from schools inquiring into the co-op opportunities with our company."

To date, Liberty has given and received much from these programs.

EDCO-SPACE PROGRAM

Students from Hampton Institute, Virginia State College, North Carolina A and T State University, Fisk University, Tuskegee Institute, Central State University and other institutions have been placed in positions in the company's 200 offices around the country.

Many of these men and women later joined the company as full-time employees.

Another area of Liberty Mutual concern is the Edco-Space Program, a state-and-federal-funded venture designed to solve some acute vocational training programs.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Chief among these is the student who is alienated from traditional high school arrangements because of the lack of adequate training in or emphasis on non-college career opportunities.

Today Liberty Mutual and several other Boston companies are providing these students with both academic and career training at industrial job sites.

At the firm's home office in Boston, for example, 15 students — composed of an ethnic and color mix from metropolitan schools — are now learning and working full-time.

UNIQUE TRAINING

The students receive four hours of academic instruction daily from professional teachers, then four hours of on-the-job work experience under the guidance of company training supervisors.

Each is paid for his work time and receives academic credits for his school time. Hopefully, this unique training program will salvage many young people who otherwise would "drop out" of society for good.

A third Liberty training adventure began in 1968 in the Roxbury section of Boston.

TRAINING CENTER

Working with the black community, the company rented 9,000 square feet of office space, modernized it and set up a unique key-punch training center.

The project called for the hiring and training of former high school and grade school students who were unemployed or underemployed.

During a 12-week training course at the company's Roxbury Keypunch Center, successive groups improve their skills in reading and arithmetic through the use of self-learning teaching equipment.

FULL-TIME POSITIONS

They also learn how to operate an IBM Key Punch machine. Each person is paid the regular starting salary of a full-time key punch operator and, following training, is provided a job as key punch operator with promotional opportunities to verifier, group leader and supervisor.

Today several dozen people have completed this program and assumed full time positions with the company.

And the Roxbury Keypunch Center is now self-supporting, producing some 5,000,000 cards a year in this location.

A fourth educational program in which Liberty participates is the Summer Program for College Insurance Instructors, in which insurance instructors from various colleges are invited to Liberty to study the company and its operations.

This year Liberty's guest was an accounting instructor from Grambling College, who used his four-weeks experience with the company to prepare to teach a principles of insurance course at Grambling.

These are just a few of the programs that Liberty Mutual is conducting to improve the educational and training opportunities of young, minority-group people.

Sharply Defined

Although there is much more that must be done, the road ahead is sharply defined.

"All young people must be given an opportunity to help build the new foundation for work: the acquisition and application of information," says James R. Brannon, Liberty's coordinator of equal employment.

"The human mind — raw and untrained — is a completely useless resource. It needs education and discipline to become a finished product," he concluded.

NTA Aid Fund In New Phase

The big need for most minority youths interested in technical and scientific careers is money and a National Technical Association program aimed at meeting the need is entering its second five years.

The National Technical Association Educational Fund was established during the 1965 NTA convention in Nassau, Bahamas.

The objectives of the foundation are as follows:

- To solicit and to utilize gifts for compiling and disseminating information to black youths concerning opportunities in scientific and technical fields.
- To provide guidance and scholarships to needy students who demonstrate interest in science or engineering.
- To seek out meritorious accomplishments among blacks and to recognize such achievements through awards, medals, and prizes.

Prejudice works both ways!

In our college recruiting we encounter a lot of students who have a poor image of the insurance business. They think of insurance as a selling game — the man who rings your doorbell once a month to collect a premium on a policy.

This kind of prejudice hurts. It hurts us because a lot of capable, young people look elsewhere for a career. It hurts them because they never take the time to investigate our industry and its many career opportunities. And that's too bad.

At Liberty Mutual, minority-group people hold positions in Marketing, Claims Adjusting, Risk Selection, Data Processing, Loss Prevention Engineering, Medical Rehabilitation, Accounting, Legal and other interesting areas. Many have advanced since joining our company.

Like Larry Pocknett, Assistant Chief Underwriter in Boston, who is responsible for $12.5 million in premium. Or Bill Taylor, a Senior Loss Prevention Representative in St. Louis, who directs our safety services to Trans World Airlines, Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Continental Can Company and other national accounts. Or Vince Burton, a Claims Supervisor in Fort Worth, Texas, who annually controls $1.1 million in claims payments. Or Thelma Fern, Manager of our Roxbury Keypunch Center in Boston, who supervises a staff of 25 keypunch operators.

Larry and Bill and Vince and Thelma weren't prejudiced when they joined Liberty Mutual. Today, all of us are glad of it. Think about that.

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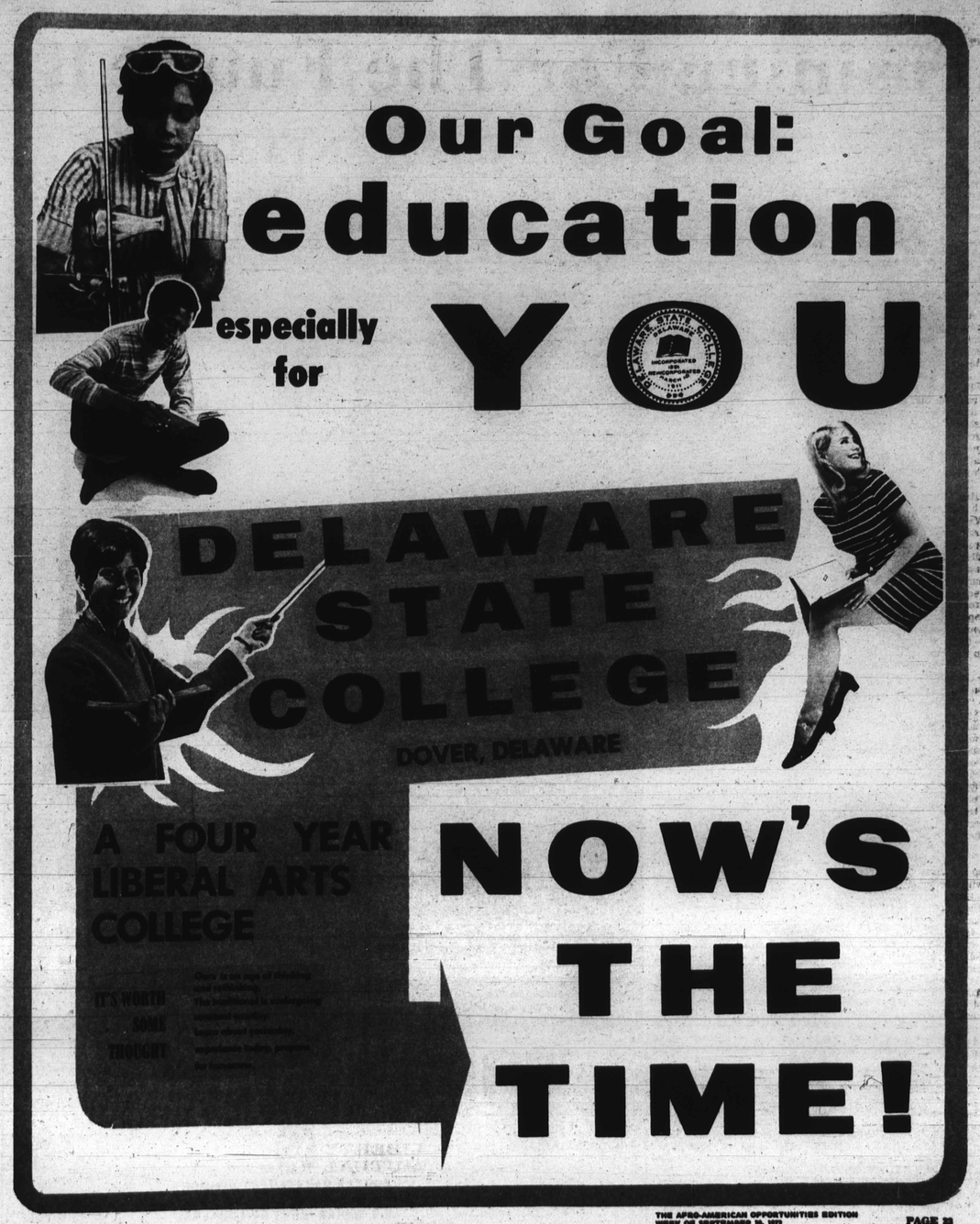
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