

THE MEASURE OF THE KIND OF FOLKS WE ARE

Paragraphs from an informal talk given before a group of supervisory employees of the New York Telephone Company.

By Arthur W. Page

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The other day the following letter came in to a Bell System Company:

"The Telephone Company has always given me good service--but I should like to say a THANK YOU for a bit of 'Super service--free of charge and given with a smile.

"I had requested that my phone be removed from one room to another in order to make it more convenient for my new roomers. Sure enough the 'Telephone man' arrived--just after the roomers had left!

"Well--the bedroom door had been banged so hard that the cast iron lock was broken in two, a long screw had been literally torn from the wood, the other screw partially dislodged and only part of the lock still hung in place, but so badly twisted that I could not budge it in order to place it back together. The shades had been pulled below the window sills and stuck and just would not re-roll. The closet door was jammed shut and the little latch that held the kitchen cabinet doors in place had been bodily pulled out, and the telephone hung on the wall with its 'front' gaping wide open. My spirits were just as demoralized as the room.

"I said to the 'Telephone Man,' 'I hate to bring you into a place like this, but I have no choice. I'll try to prop these shades open so that you can see.' He said, 'What seems to be wrong, lady?' and asked me for a fork. While talking and explaining that if the phone wires were run in one manner he could put the phone where I preferred to have it--but if they were placed in another position he would have to place the box in another spot--he had the shades up and rolling, the cast iron door lock pushed back into position and held firmly with a long screw that he produced magically from some mysterious spot, the closet door working again--and as he passed through the kitchen on his way under the house--with a flip of his wrist he had the cabinet latch back in place--and all in less time than it has taken me to write this. The whole time he was doing all these wonderful things he was explaining about the placing of the telephone in the other room. Then that was done, too. I asked him his name in order to thank him--Mr. Long.

"So when he left I said a little prayer of thankfulness to the Telephone Company and to their most efficient employees and especially to Mr. Long for his courtesy and kindness in helping out a lone woman whose men folks are all gone.

"Most sincerely,

In her last paragraph the writer emphasized the fact that the telephone man was efficient, courteous and kindly.

She put her finger on the main points.

The result is that they have a good reputation, both on and off the job. Telephone people can and do have a pride in their job. The neighbors think well of what they do and strangers they meet speak well of them and the service they render. This makes life pleasanter for all concerned.

But we are facing a somewhat new situation. For more than a year we have been asking the public to be patient because we could no longer give the standard of long distance service we used to give. And the public has been most patient and tolerant. In fact, there have been fewer complaints about the long distance service in the past two years than there used to be when the service was technically better.

We have told the public why the service isn't so good. We have told them about the shortages of materials and that what we used to get to serve them has been going to the war.

The public in effect has answered--

"We have always found that you people are efficient, courteous, and kindly. If you say you are doing all that can be done it is all right with us. We won't complain."

And they haven't!

But now we have to explain something else. There are a lot of people now who can't get any telephone service when they ask for it, but must wait to get a telephone installed. That is a whole lot harder to bear than having a toll call delayed.

It is true that the reasons for shortages in instruments, exchange cable, drop wires, and switchboards are just as good, in fact, just the same as the reasons for shortages in long distance circuits. But the lack of facilities will be a harder strain on the public patience than the delayed toll calls. And after a while if we don't take care, the public may begin to wonder whether our excuses



are as good as they sound and whether we are as efficient as they used to think us. People are like that.

They may begin to wonder if we are not slipping a little. Where the neighbors used to speak in complimentary fashion of telephone people and their work, there may come a note of criticism instead of compliment. One of the best things about a telephone job may get a little tarnished, even though we are working harder for the public than ever before. That is what happens under the strain of war. We may see some dents appear in the reputation which Bell System people have built up during the past many years.

What do we do about it?

The first thing we do about it is to prove that the reputation we had wasn't just a fair weather reputation. We go on doing everything we can to render service with competence and good nature. We don't complain or cry about people blaming us for what the war has done to their telephone service--or the lack of it. We don't get irritated. We do everything that the circumstances allow as to facilities. And we add to the measure of patient explanation, courtesy and kindness that has built up our reputation. Materials may be scarce, for we have to buy them. But reasonableness, courtesy and kindness we can provide in full quantity, for we make that ourselves on the spot.

The next thing we do is to get all possible material and make facilities as quickly as they can be made. I do not mean the Bell System shall ask for materials that are needed for war just to make our life easier. What I mean is that just as soon as materials not needed for war are available we go to work with them with our utmost speed and ingenuity. The object is to get service to all who want it at the earliest moment. If that means temporary plant or unorthodox methods, that is all right. We can raise the service up to standard later. But speed in getting it in is the first thing.

But as the situation looks now, at the best we can do we shall have a held order list for quite a long time.

While that is with us the maintenance of our reputation will depend more than ever on the actions of the people in the Bell System. In peacetimes the material of the plant is good and adequate as well as the men and women who operate it. For some time to come the plant won't be adequate. The burden will fall on the efficiency, the reasonableness, courtesy and kindness of the men and women.

It will be an interesting test. I have no fear of the result. But I think it worth while to take a look at what is coming, for the way we go through a tough period is the measure of the kind of folks we are and the basis of what our neighbors will think of us in the future.