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Some Guideposts for Public Policy Educational Work

By P. V. Kepner

I shall confine my observations to a few general criteria, or guideposts, which seem essential to insure success in extension educational work in the field of public policy.

1. **HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTION AND AGGRESSIVE SUPPORT.** This applies not only to extension administrators, but also, at the state level, to the entire college or university administration. The potentialities for productive service in public affairs educational work are sufficiently great to warrant the best thinking and support that can be brought to bear upon it. At the same time through such educational work, conducted in a statesmanlike and truly educational way, the sponsoring college or university stands to gain significantly in prestige and understanding among its "off-the-campus" clientele.

2. **HAVE A DEFINITE ASSIGNMENT WITHIN EXTENSION FOR LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY.** Mere expressions of intent and sporadic efforts will not suffice. Qualified personnel with adequate time must be assigned to the job, must be given responsibility for moving ahead with a well-planned and well-organized effort, and must be held accountable for results. The very nature of educational work in this field is such that it cannot be done adequately through attempting to weave it incidentally into other full programs of work.

3. **HAVE LEADERSHIP WITH CLEARLY DEFINED OBJECTIVES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN MIND.** These same objectives and responsibilities should be clearly understood by all co-workers in extension. Among these objectives and responsibilities the following may be worthy of note.

The function of extension educational work in the field of public policy is education and not indoctrination. The objective should be to help those with whom we work develop the ability to identify significant issues, to analyze such issues, to evaluate possible alternative solutions, and to determine for themselves, on the basis of sound reasoning, the best choice of alternatives.

Effective leadership involves a responsibility to draw into the process all the competence available, from whatever source, to aid in the effort. Competent leadership may lead by example, but it does not walk alone. The challenge is too great for any small central staff to handle exclusively.

A major function of extension leaders in this field is, and should be, to train others and inspire them to put that training to use. By others, in this instance, we mean other state staff members, county extension workers, and non-extension personnel who can and will contribute materially to the cause in many ways if given the opportunity.

There is a need, greater than in many other lines of extension educational work, to provide simplified, objective, and thought-provoking background and explanatory materials in connection with any public issue under consideration. Hence, there is a responsibility to plan for the preparation of such materials and to provide enough time on an organized basis to insure that they are available.

4. CONSIDER THE "TIMELINESS" FACTOR IN UNDERTAKING EDUCATIONAL WORK ON ANY PUBLIC POLICY QUESTION. It has been wisely observed that little educational accomplishment can be attained after a person or group has reached the emotional stage. Likewise, many issues can be anticipated and objective consideration developed a considerable period before group action of any kind is required. For example, the growing interest in agricultural use of surface and ground water in the humid area of this country is likely to become a lively public issue in the next decade. Extension has a responsibility and an opportunity to lay the groundwork for constructive consideration of this problem.

5. RECOGNIZE THAT EXTENSION HAS A RESPONSIBILITY IN ITS OWN RIGHT TO PROSECUTE AN AGGRESSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN THIS FIELD. Extension should not assume the attitude that it will merely service or assist other groups as requested. At the same time it should stand ready to cooperate with any appropriate group interested in promoting public consideration of a significant public issue and should capitalize on this interest by rendering all the assistance practicable.

6. RECOGNIZE THAT ALL PUBLIC AFFAIRS ISSUES ARE NOT DRAMATIC NATIONAL ISSUES. Although such issues have become increasingly important in recent years, state and local public issues are also important. Many county agents, men and women alike, are rendering yeomanly service on many public affairs issues, and many times without labeling it as such. However, to capitalize on this potential, it should be re-emphasized that aggressive administrative support, sympathetic and inspirational guidance, and direct assistance are needed.

7. RECOGNIZE THAT PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATIONAL WORK BY EXTENSION IS NOT AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE. It should not be regarded as education for education's sake, or just a challenge to the ingenuity of the extension worker or to the parent institution. Such educational

effort is justified only on the basis that it is dedicated to enabling people to do a better job of charting those courses of action which must be determined collectively rather than individually.

8. **RECOGNIZE THAT PUBLIC AFFAIRS ARE NOT THE SOLE INTEREST OF ANY PARTICULAR SEGMENT OF OUR SOCIETY.** Although extension has a primary responsibility to rural people, its assistance is not restricted to them. Urban interests need to understand better many of the public issues of major importance to rural people for which urban and rural people alike will have the responsibility of determining the courses of action taken. Although good judgment and discretion dictate reasonable caution in expanding extension's audience, urban interests should not be completely ignored.

These constitute merely some of the major guideposts we should keep in mind as we move forward with public policy educational work.

It is recognized that there are many problems which will have to be overcome in order to insure a smoothly functioning and effective extension program in this relatively new field of extension endeavor. Techniques and procedures for conducting such educational work need to be perfected. Competition from other demands for the time of extension workers and extension resources are real and not imaginary. Only a relatively small hard core of professional extension workers have had sufficient experience in this field of endeavor to have full confidence that they can do the job adequately and successfully.

But these are not new problems to extension. We should not let them lead us into a feeling of discouragement or frustration. The tempo of extension work in this field is picking up rapidly. With the continued strong backing of many forward looking individuals and groups, both public and private, of which the Farm Foundation is one of the most prominent and directly helpful, I am sure extension can and will move forward rapidly in meeting this challenging responsibility.