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OUR COMMON CHALLENGE

by
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President, SOPHE

Mr. Chairman, Honored Guests, Fellows of the Society, Visitors, and Friends:

Almost eleven months ago, I accepted with tremendous humility the challenge of the Office of the President of this our national organization. And as many of you recall, perhaps, I did so with one promise and the one promise only--to serve you to the best of my ability, with the assurance that in so doing your interests would be my interests, and your concerns my concerns.

Rather than attempting to give an account of my stewardship at this time, I have chosen to limit my remarks to a brief discussion of two or three things which I feel are of mutual concern to all of us. I propose to discuss them under some subject as: Our Common Challenge.

Before doing this, however, I want to express my sincere appreciation to all of you for having provided me with the opportunity of learning first hand more, much more to be sure, about the internal workings of our Society--an experience I shall forever cherish.

I want to thank you, too, for having provided me with so dedicated a corps of workers -- Officers, Board of Trustees, and Committee Chairmen, who always stood ready to assume full responsibility for that which they felt to be theirs in helping to move the profession and the Society forward.

Needless to say, I had much to learn during these past eleven months and I learned much. Among other things, I truly learned that in the Office of the President of this organization, at least, there is always much to be done--too much at times, perhaps--with almost never enough time in which to do it.

*Presidential address delivered at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Society of Public Health Educators held at the New York Hilton Hotel, New York, New York, October 4, 1964.

I learned, too, that health educators are human, and like other human beings, they are most likely to move forward when they see the need to do so, when it is clear to them where they are to go, and when they are truly motivated to get there. Short of these, one can be assured that things are not always going to happen when and how one would like them to.

Because of experiences such as these, I must admit that I am almost at the point now, but not quite, where I should like to have been almost eleven months ago when I accepted the challenge. Am I complaining? No! Am I seeking another term of office? Certainly not, to be sure! I guess all I am saying really is that one never knows, and that this has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my lifetime. Because of it, I want to assure you that there has been "lighted in my heart a candle of understanding and it shall not be put out."

Again, I want to thank the Officers, Board of Trustees, the many Standing and Ad Hoc Committees, and the Fellowship--yes, all of you--for having contributed so greatly to a better understanding on my part of the importance of individual and group interest, motivation, and goals within an organizational setting in trying to get things done.

I want to take this occasion, too, to thank the Chairman and members of this Fifteenth Annual Meeting Program Committee, our guest speaker, and panelists for the excellent program planned for this meeting. I trust each of you has benefitted as much as I have from it, with the end results being a better understanding of and appreciation for the theory and process of program planning.

And now, back to the subject, Our Common Challenge. During the past year I had the good pleasure of meeting, either on an individual basis or in a group, with some 241 Fellows of the Society. In each instance, I always tried to create a climate wherein persons would express voluntarily and freely their feelings and opinions regarding the future of their professional organization. And they did!

As one might and should have expected, I found among these 241 Fellows a feeling of dedication and loyalty to both the health education profession and the Society; also a real desire to see both increase in size and in stature. I found among them, too, four basic professional needs and desires which they want so very much to have satisfied:

1. A feeling of need for a greater reason for being--being a member of the profession and of the Society.
2. A desire to be involved in the workings of the Society, thereby becoming more of a contributing member.
3. The need of an objective appraisal of where the Society now stands in terms of its 1960 commitments.
4. The need to be kept as fully informed as possible of the how and why of things within the Society.

The last three, I believe, relate to the first--a feeling of need for a greater reason for being. And to the extent that we can somehow find a way to satisfy this need, to this extent will the others in time take care of themselves.

The importance of this feeling of need for a greater reason for being cannot be overemphasized. It is best described, perhaps, by Dr. H. A. Morgan, in his book, "The Common Mooring."¹

"Man has a need for a reason for being--a purpose in life beyond that of immediate existence, gain, and satisfaction--a mooring as it were to help him understand his place, feel his responsibilities, and know his importance in the eternal plan."

Also commenting on the same subject was Robert Hutchins² who said:

"The longer we live the more we need mooring to something that is

as lasting as the years, something that gives us a sense of place in the world, of stability of purpose and significance in life. We face all through the years the threat of the sense of futility--the feeling that life doesn't mean anything; that it is all motion, that there is no progress toward something better. If you ever have a chance to tie up to something lasting, something representing the effort of mankind to ennoble human experience, you had better get a firm hold on it without delay. You will need something of that sort before you are through with life."

Paraphrasing these statements to apply to the needs of man for becoming a member of an organization, what do we have? And as a professional organization, what do we still need to do in order to satisfy this basic need among our members?

As you probably know, the Adult Education Association, during the year 1957-58, embarked upon a project to find out how its members felt about their professional organization. They were asked to respond to the inquiry: Why I Belong to the AEA. More gratifying, even, than the number of replies received was the nature of the responses. I have selected three to illustrate further my point:³

1. Secretary of the Wisconsin Library Commission said: Why do I have a membership in the Adult Education Association of the USA?. If one also asked me why I eat an egg for breakfast, my simple answer to both questions would be the same -- I like it, and it's good for me. I like the feeling of satisfaction I have in supporting a strong, positive, national effort to help people everywhere improve the quality of their living through continuous learning. I like this feeling. I like the experience of sharing common interests with adult educators in other

fields of public service. This, and all the many tangible benefits of the AEA membership are good for me. They help me do a better job as librarian.

2. Dean of Donnelly College, Kansas City, Kansas said: "Adult education seems to me to be of primary importance in this cold-war atomic age, because its goal is to assist people to become better men and women, psychologically mature, and better citizens who will appreciate and perpetuate our free society and American ideals..."
3. Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University said: "Today's pressures of human civility and standards of taste and conduct demand the literacy of Americans in the wisdom of the past and the morality of our future. This is the undiminished and the unfinished task found in the arena of adult education. I am proud to be in that arena in helping to build the profession and the mission of adult education. For these purposes, and with the sentiment that no profession nor mission thrives without the loyalty of the participants, it becomes a privilege and a necessity to cast my lot with the Adult Education Association."

I am sure we can find anytime and anywhere three members of the Society who would express their feelings of satisfaction and loyalty in a similar manner. At the same time, however, I believe you will agree with me when I say the sooner we can have more members of our Society truly feeling and expressing themselves this way, the sooner we will be on our way toward satisfying among our Fellows the "need of a greater reason for being." To what extent, then is not this a common challenge for each of us here today?

A second need, as I see it, and one about which I should like to comment only briefly is: The Need for Change. As we all know, we live today in a world of rapid change. The decade 1950-1960, when measured in terms of industrial productivity, an expanding economy, and scientific and technological advance, is seen as a period of rapid national progress; a period when the material wants of the American people were met to a greater extent than during any prior decade. And the present decade, 1960-1970, is viewed as a time of decision in all fields related to American education and health.

In light of this, to what extent is our profession and our national organization keeping abreast of change? To what extent are we still trying to do today's tasks with yesterday's tools? To what extent is there indicated a need for change?

Speaking of the importance of change, it was Oppenheimer⁴ who said recently:

"In an importance sense, our world today is a new world, a world in which the unity of knowledge, the nature of human communities, the order of ideas, the very notion of society and culture have changed and will not return to what they have been in the past. What is new is new not because it has never been there before, but because it has changed in quality. The one thing that is new, however, is the prevalence of newness, the changing scale and scope of change itself, so that the world now alters as we walk in it, so that the years of man's life measures not some small growth or rearrangement of moderation in childhood, but a great upheaval. To assail the changes that have unmoored us from the past is futile, and in a deep sense, I think, is wicked. But what we need to do and must do is learn to live with it."

Certainly, we live at a time when change is inevitable; when a profession and an organization must be ever mindful of change and ready to make changes when the need is indicated. The need for change in terms of the things we do,

educating for health, is beautifully described by Gardner⁵ in his book, "Renewal in Societies and Men." Here Mr. Gardner presents all educators, and may I add, including health educators with this great challenge:

"If we only indoctrinate people in an elaborate set of fixed beliefs, we are insuring their early obsolescence. The alternative is to develop skills, attitudes, habits of mind, and the kinds of knowledge and understanding that will be the instruments of continuous change and growth on the part of people. In so doing, we shall then have fashioned a system that provides for its own renewal. This suggests (he added) the need of a standard for judging the effectiveness of all education, and so judged, much of our education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants. Too often, we are busy stuffing their heads with products of earlier innovations, rather than teaching them how to innovate. And too often, we think of the mind as a storehouse to be filled, rather than an instrument to be used."

What, then, are some of the overall objectives or goals of American education that are of utmost importance to us today and to which we must fully subscribe if we are to be truly effective. Three, as seen by Sheats⁶ and others, come to mind at this time:

1. To develop within people the ready ability to analyze issues of any nature, to study their facts intelligently, and come to clear valid, and unbiased conclusions.
2. To produce people who live healthier, richer, and broader lives, and who will contribute to the different societies to which they belong by clear thought and fearless action.

3. To enable people to deal intelligently, democratically, and peacefully with the ever-increasing political, economic, and social problems posed for individuals, our communities, our nation, and the world by the pervasive fiat of chance.

To what extent are the overall aims or goals of our Society compatible with these objectives or goals of American education, and to what extent do we as practicing health educators keep them forever in mind in our day to day operations?

As we all know, American education, yes all American education, is based on the worth of the individual. The most important of all of its aspects is people, for here in America it is people who matter most. Its primary focus, therefore, is on developing individuals who will fulfill themselves, and who, in turn, will freely serve a society which also values the worth of the individual; on aiding people to achieve a condition of living, of learning, and of loving which makes them worthy, as people, to matter most.

And as we assume our responsibilities both as members of a profession and a society dedicated to a life of service to people, to what extent do we think of others--of those millions of people of other lands whose way of life may be somewhat different from ours, but whose basic human needs are the same?

We live today in a world in which one-third of the human race has an obligation, an obligation for its own comfort and for its own survival, to the other two thirds. We live at a time when our world is filled with extraordinary unrest; when its madness is reflected in the daily actions of people through such things as bigotry, hate, crime, and immorality despite the efforts of law enforcing agencies--international, national, state, and local--to provide protection and maintain peace and order.

We live at a time when mankind is passing through the most pervasive revolution it has ever known; when the revolt of no less than two-thirds of the world's peoples is against the object of misery and degradation of their present conditions of life. Yes, two thirds of the world's population are looking to us--to you and to me--for help in finding a way to a more satisfying and useful life, the greatest challenge of all times.

All this I see as Our Common Challenge of the day, and to the extent we can and do accept this challenge within the philosophy and framework of our profession and our organization, to this extent can health education, too, begin dreaming of a "time when there shall be enough for all, and every man shall bear his share of labor in accordance with his ability, and every man shall possess enough for the needs of his body and demands of health. These things he shall have as a matter of justice and not of charity. And it (health education) will dream of these, not with the hope that we, individually, may participate in them, but with the joy that we may aid in their coming to those who shall live after us; when young men have visions and the dreams of old men come true." These things I do believe, and these I present to you today as Our Common Challenge!

References

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6. Sheats, Clarence D., and Spence, Ralph B., Adult Education, Dryden Press, New York, New York 1953.