

PSYCHOLOGY

Uncle Sam Becomes Vocational Counselor

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

THE NATIONAL Government is providing a new approach to the unemployment problem. With specially devised psychological tests, the U. S. Civil Service Commission will guide high school students into work for which they have most talent—in which they will have a better chance of being happy and successful.

Dear Sir:

I saw your advertisement in today's paper, and should like to apply for the position.

I have taken the U. S. Standard Test for Typists, and have a certificate to show that I can type better than 60% of the typists now employed in your industry. You can therefore trust me from the start on important work. May I have the privilege of an interview?

Very truly yours,

Mary Martin.

THIS IS the kind of letter that you will probably receive from those applying to you for a job ten years from now if the plans of the United States Civil Service Commission and several of our largest industrial organizations are carried to successful completion. The Civil Service Commission is now working on a series of vocational tests which will be made available to all Uncle Sam's young nephews and nieces in public high schools. The scores made by any boy or girl on these examinations will indicate to the youngster and to the parents or vocational advisers, particular aptitude for a variety of jobs.

The first series is designed to show the student's fitness for a position as stenographer. Several other series are being planned for other occupations.

When the tests have been given widely, as is planned, in high schools all over the country, anyone taking them can know exactly how he compares with thousands of his fellow students. He can estimate his own comparative chances of success in a wide choice of occupations.

But the Government research workers who are developing the plan have devised another and better basis of comparison. The same tests prepared for use in the schools will also be given to great numbers of people who are already being paid dollars and cents for their

skill in industry. Almost fifty industrial concerns, employing thousands of office workers, have offered to help the Government officials by giving these tests to their employees.

When all these test papers are assembled and tabulated, a score of 70 will mean much more than just "passing." It will give the person attaining it a measure of his ability on a standard scale. The employer's question, "How well can you type?" can then be answered with a definite meaningful figure as "I can do better than three-fourths of your employees."

Employers will be able to set definite standards for employment, and employees will be able to know just what proficiency they must attain in order to give satisfaction.

Card to Show Boy's Worth

It is planned to provide for each student in the public schools, a vocational guidance card listing the requirements, in terms of test scores, for a great variety of positions. When the boy compares his own scores with those given on the card, he can see for himself what his abilities will be worth to industry and can even roughly estimate his chances for employment and making good in his chosen vocation.

Thus the chances will be reduced that the round peg person will try to pound himself into the square hole, and the great problem of labor turnover may be somewhat alleviated.

This interesting approach to the unemployment problem has been worked out in the research division of the United States Civil Service Commission, of which Dr. L. J. O'Rourke is the director.

Dr. O'Rourke, aside from his position in the country's greatest employing

agency, has devoted years of study to the problem of vocational guidance and the testing of special aptitudes. During the World War, he was one of the psychologists called into the Government service to study the problem of the proper placing of the mass of carpenters, lawyers, bakers, scientists, clerks and day laborers, all gathered for the common purpose of winning the war. He is the author of a series of vocational guidance tests.

In the Civil Service Commission, he has been in charge of the gradual revision of the examinations given to men and women applying for positions in the Government Service. The old types of examination, which tested the applicant in a stereotyped way on his knowledge of "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic" and penmanship, and inquired into his knowledge of political boundaries of the states, are giving way before the newly developed psychological examinations. These psychological examinations are designed to test not so much what the applicant has learned by rote, but more his native ability and his aptitude for the position applied for.

The new examination for stenographer and typist in the Government service, for example, represents a revolution in test procedure. It is this examination, or a modification of it, that will be given in the schools.

It is now possible for an applicant to complete the entire examination and make a good score without writing more than a half-dozen words in long hand, besides those filled in on the preliminary sheets giving references, etc.

If the stenographer has learned to use a shorthand-writing machine for taking notes, she need only be able to write numbers and to write or print a few words in the spelling test.

Handwriting, once thought vitally important for anyone in a secretarial position, has in this machine age become so disused that it is not tested at all.

The ability to read, understand, and correctly interpret directions, letters, and other written matter, was on the contrary, found to play a large part in the work of the stenographer. This

ability is therefore tested by short questions based on a given paragraph of quotation. The questions may be answered merely by reading over several given possible answers and then writing the number of the correct answer.

That "most uncommon sense, common sense," is another quality demanded today of the stenographer. Yet the employer's admonition to, "Use your head," is futile, unless he has had the forethought to select a girl or boy with a native supply of good judgment. The Civil Service Commission has developed questions which test judgment. Here is a sample:

"Which of the following is the *chief* value of a good mimeographing machine in an office? (1) It affords a quick way of getting out form letters (2) It gives the "personal touch" to each letter. (3) It is not so large as the multigraph. (4) It gives the office a business-like appearance. (5) Mimeographed matter is more effective than typed or printed matter."

The correct answer is "1."

The stenographer's ability to use words correctly is indicated by her answers to questions of this type:

"FEASIBLE means most nearly (1) capable, (2) practicable, (3) justifiable, (4) beneficial, (5) reliable."

The Test of Grammar

One of the most interesting additions to the new type of examination is the test of grammar. Formerly, ability in grammar was usually tested only through a letter-writing or composition test. In this the applicant was required to write a letter or composition of a certain length on some given subject. Since no two persons taking the examination would try to use the same construction or even try to express the same thought, the difficulty of the grammatical problems confronted by the different individuals varied extremely.

The new type of question presents exactly the same problem to each person taking the test. Test yourself on this sample:

"Only one of the five sentences in the next item is grammatically correct. Write the number of the correct sentence on the line at the right.

(1) Our process not only insures a better but also a cheaper finish. (2) A better finish, as well as a cheaper one, are insured by our process. (3) Our process insures an inexpensive finish that can't hardly be marred. (4) Our process insures a finish that is as good, as well as cheaper than any other. (5) Our process insures not only a better finish but also a cheaper one."

Your memory of grammatical rules may be rusty, but if you have formed the habit of correct speech you would probably select "5" as the best sentence. The Government experts now consider that knowing what is right is much more important for the stenographer than being able to quote rules.

First wide use of the psychological type of examination for determining the fitness of individuals for different types of work was during the World War. At that time in one huge testing program nearly two million men were given psychological tests, these men ranging in intelligence all the way from genius to feeble-mindedness.

Now the results of the pioneer work of these men is to find wide application in industry. The Army's first two tests, though now superseded by greatly improved instruments for group testing, were found to be an invaluable aid in

the classifying of men according to their relative abilities.

Suppose a high school boy takes the new general ability tests now being devised by the U. S. Civil Service Commission. And let us suppose that he makes a score equivalent to the average for drug clerk or telegraph operator. His father or teacher can then advise him definitely that he should not seek employment as teamster, painter, or blacksmith, for he can do much better than that and would, as a matter of fact, never be contented and happy in those occupations. On the other hand, he would find it very difficult to "make the grade" as civil engineer, dentist, or chemist. He would be well qualified to become a photographer or telegraph operator provided he has any inclination and aptitude for these occupations.

Science News Letter, November 29, 1930

Classification by Ability

The figures show the average ability of people already engaged in the occupations listed. Your own score would indicate the type of work

You are Best Fitted For.

This table was compiled from results of the U. S. Army psychological tests made during the World War and is similar to the guidance card the government is now planning to furnish high school pupils.

OCCUPATION	AVERAGE SCORE	OCCUPATION	AVERAGE SCORE
Civil Engineer.....	274	Hospital orderly	122
Lawyer and teacher.....	252	Musicians	119
Student	239	Policeman	119
Dentist and mechanic dentist.....	229	Butcher	118
Draftsman	206	Plumber	117
Chemist	205	Miscellaneous	117
Postal employee	200	Pipe fitter	116
Artist	198	Structural steel worker.....	109
Mechanical engineer	195	Blacksmith	109
Druggist	192	Gunsmith	109
Traffic engineer and transportation	189	Machinist	107
Clerks	175	Bakers and cooks.....	106
Salesman	170	Railroad workers	106
Surveyor	165	Chauffeurs	104
Telegraph and wireless operator	165	Painter	103
Photographer	159	Printer	99
Farrier	155	Lumberman	96
Drug clerk	149	Carpenter	91
Builder and constructor.....	149	Millwright	89
Engineers	147	Sheet-metal worker	88
Airplane builder	140	Leather worker	88
Rigger	139	Welder	85
Merchants	138	Horseman	75
Gas-engine mechanic	129	Canvas worker	75
Telephone operator	127	Farmers	73
Auto mechanics	122	Teamster	72
Electrician	122	Barber	65
		Laborer	63