

"HUMAN FREEDOM"

ASPEN INSTITUTE, ASPEN, COLORADO

THE ASPEN PROGRAM FOR BUSINESS
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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I should like to try an experiment and I would like your help in it.

The background is this:

Many business leaders have come increasingly to recognize that the most plaguing and persistent problems of business are not the technical problems-- engineering, selling, accounting, and the rest. They are what Clarence Randall calls "human problems"; not merely industrial relations, but the whole galaxy of perplexities of man to man, man to society, and man and society to government. Scarcely one of our decisions, major or minor, is not premised upon some aspect of these problems and our view of it.

Yet we don't do much about it. We send our brighter men to special professional and technical meetings and sometimes to special schools or courses. And in the case of Container at least, I think we get something from it. But these things, valuable as they are, don't get at our most serious perplexities.

For our younger men, those we expect to assume leadership roles five or ten years hence, we ought to try to do a little more than this. These are men who will be guiding business; and since business still has a dominant role in America, these men are bound to have a vital impact on our country.

In preparation for such responsibilities our younger men ought to have a wider exposure than business alone gives them. They ought to know more about our American tradition. They ought to be exposed in a noncontroversial atmosphere to other powerful currents of thought -- to labor leaders, for example, to academic figures, and to men engaged in important government service.

This brings me to the experiment, which could be very important.

When I first started with Aspen in 1945, I was not sure just what I wanted to do. Gradually the idea came to me that here might be a place for quite a different vacation spot, one not dedicated to fishing alone, or riding, or skiing -- but where these things might be done along with some mental and cultural exercise as well.

This just seemed to me a good idea. Its significance and impact did not fully occur to me at the beginning. But now, sensing the importance of continuity of the activity, I have given my financial interest in The Aspen Company to the non-profit Aspen Institute.

Since 1949, when Aspen celebrated the Goethe Bicentennial with Albert Schweitzer as its principal guest, a general kind of program has evolved.

It is informal, but it is serious. The atmosphere is relaxed, but work goes on.

A number of leading business men who have attended one or more of these programs have told me that they got so much out of it (sometimes to their own surprise) that I am encouraged to think that this may be something worth trying on a larger scale. This is where I want your help.

I would like your firm to join with a good many others in sending one or more of your brighter men who have substantial responsibility, or who are on the road to having it, to Aspen this summer for one or preferably two weeks some time during the first five weeks of the program. For whomever you select, an over-all rate of \$145.00 per week has been established.

Our general theme this summer is "Human Freedom." It is a theme of surpassing importance. Yet how little many of us understand it! The attached summary sheet indicates our program for the business group. (The other folder shows accommodations, rates, etc., for those who may combine their vacation plans with this program).

What will these business men get out of it? First, I think they will be better business men.

But of this I am sure: the complications of business in society have never been greater; the need for leadership in business has never been more demanding; the opportunity for leadership from business has never been so open to us. These needs cannot be met without technical competence, but competence is not enough. Nor are the commonplace slogans. Leadership demands both vision and understanding.

Certainly this experience cannot guarantee vision or understanding but if one or two or six engineers, controllers, sales executives, or public relations men come away with a broader horizon -- perhaps even with greater wisdom -- I shall think the experiment a success. The nose to the grindstone is a traditional American posture -- and a mighty valuable one. But the posture would be improved if at the same time the eyes looked up and around.

The men who come will form friendships with other business men under the most favorable of auspices. More than this, they will meet men they would not meet in business. In later years this group, or some of them, will be assuming important tasks in leadership in business and in the nation. Their experience and acquaintance at Aspen will stand them in good stead.

I know that this is an experiment. Yet I know it has worked for some of the key business people who have participated in it last year.

I can't tell you all about it here, but if you're interested, I'll try to answer any questions you have.

Perhaps you would come yourself. Nothing could be better. But do let me hear from you!

Walter P. Paepcke
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