

# PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource—The Human Resource

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## THE WORLD OF WORK 1920-2020

Today we are working in a revolutionary period of time in our workforce. We have for years referred to this period as the forthcoming "Workforce 2000." That incredible time when the issues of women, minorities, immigrants, migration and the cities, modern communication, high technology, fast, stressful pace, high incomes, new values, federal labor laws, etc., would all be at our door.

Has there ever been a time in our history when such revolutionary issues and so many of them had to be faced? Yes! The first and only time prior to today was in 1920. There are definite correlations between the 1920s and today. We are not reinventing the world, we've been here before. In fact, some of us in today's workforce were there!

In this excerpt from his book in progress, the author, William J. Cook, shares this view.

We are all workers, whether we hire workers or get hired, we are still workers. Even those of us with no job have work to do. The world of work. Is it the curse of Adam or a religious drive? Is it the inspirational, higher ideal that is part of our human element, or is work just the rock-hard, nitty gritty process we use to pay the rent? As St. Paul says, "He that work not, nor shall he eat."

Whatever it is, we're going to take a look at it here. We may not discover the answers to these questions, but if we can just ask the right questions we'll at least be chasing the right answers. But one thing is guaranteed, as we turn over all these half

buried rocks, we are going to see a lot of things coming out that may surprise us.

The kinds of things we work at have certainly changed. As hunter/gatherers for millions of years, our genes were developing instincts that would drive us for longer than we needed. We didn't like the hard life of chasing and killing animals, of searching and digging for plants, nuts and berries and staking our lives against the challenges. So about 10,000 years ago we advanced to the knowledge level of agriculture, the livestock/planter harvester stage. We could raise animals just for ourselves and grow our own plants and foods. Soon, when we began to seek ways to protect these precious commodities from predators and competitors, we also learned to form groups and tribes not only to protect ours, but to acquire theirs.

Then about 300 years we discovered steam powered energy and the Industrial Revolution got underway. Among the many things that changed at this time was the concept of the job. During the hunter/gatherer and the agricultural economies, our concept of a job was pretty much any kind of work that needed to get done. Whether we had to hunt a caribou, pick a basket of berries, plant the seeds, or feed the stock, we could almost always refer to it as "doing a job." With the Industrial Revolution, we now began the universal concept of "having a job." Now you went to work for an organization that paid you to surrender control of your time in return for wages. At that point the term "at work" meant a location more so than an activity. The work we did "at work" became more

of a process of productive "busy-ness" than the completion of "a job."

Up until this point the primary form of job training or career development was not the school system. Schools were for the rich upper classes and concentrated on the arts with little concentration and great suspicions over anything mechanical, chemical, or productive. The primary system of training and development was the apprenticeship system. The indentured servant/slave apprentice was usually a young man eight to 16 years of age who was "indentured" by signed contract to be a full-time servant to a master craftsman (i.e., a carpenter, baker, silversmith, blacksmith, tailor, etc.). The boy would leave his home, live in the stable or shop of the craftsman. He would live, eat, and be clothed under the largesse of the "master" for anywhere from five years to 25 years. In return, the "master" would guide the apprentice and pass on "the arts and mysteries" of the craft. Like the slave, the apprentice was considered a unit of production, but more so as property. A runaway apprentice was a criminal to be hunted down and returned to his master. Unlike the slave, apprentices were cheap and easily acquired and therefore not as well protected or fed. And, unlike the slave, at the end of the indentureship, he became a "journeyman" capable of traveling from town to town "doing jobs" (not having a job). Ultimately he may become a master, set up his own shop and acquire an apprentice. The pride of the journeyman craftsman was well expressed in their credo, "A laborer is one who works with his hands, a worker is one who works with his hands and his head. A craftsman is one who works with his hands, his head, and his heart."

Then about 40 years ago, one more person hung up his blue-collar work shirt and put on a white-collar dress shirt and the Industrial Revolution ended. Overnight we converted to the Information Technology economy (which started off as the service economy).

Do you feel the pace? The increasing speed of the changes?

- From hunter/gatherer to planter/livestock, harvester millions of years
- From planter/livestock, harvester to the Industrial Revolution 10,000 years
- From the Industrial Revolution to the Information Technology economy 300 years

Is the pace continuing? You bet it is and it's increasing even more rapidly than ever! If you've been in the workforce for 25 years, you have already seen at least as much change as the human worker saw during the entire Industrial Revolution! Certainly over the last 100 years it has changed almost totally.

So, why did we pick 1920 as our starting date and not 1900? Because there is little relevance in the 1900's worker to today's worker. There were still far more U.S. workers on the farm than in the factory. In fact, the average American worker was a farm worker living a life in which Jesus or even Moses might have been comfortable. Sowing seed, minding crops, tending herds, hand or animal force for power and harvesting. And there is no measurable number of workers in today's workforce who were born in 1900.

On the other hand, let's look at the relevance of the 1920s to today.

With the end of WWI, the "war to end all wars," we had left the farms for the battlefield, had our eyes opened and then we came home and we shifted into high gear speeding further into the 20th century with the prophetic song, "How ya going to keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paris?"

Some of those born into the 1920's generation are still in today's workforce. They have a value system that still affects today's workplace. We'll look at those value systems later. But let's continue to examine the similar ties between the 1920s and today. The youth of the day felt that their parents had screwed up the world so badly

that they didn't want to join it. They rebelled against it. Good jobs, good times and good money were abundant and allowed them to do so. Morals, standards, manners, traditions and ideals were discarded, while America, according to author F. Scott Fitzgerald, "was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history."

The decade of Lucky Lindberg flying the Atlantic, Babe Ruth, George Gershwin, the Scopes Monkey trial, talking pictures and the 19th Amendment--women's right to vote--are all familiar areas and relevant to us today.

The influence of the women's movement had been advanced considerably by them working in the war plants during WWI and it solidified in the first major social legislation of the '20s-Prohibition.

People began flowing into the cities for jobs; anarchists were throwing bombs on Wall Street decrying the growth of wealthy tycoons. Young people were entering the stock market in growing waves. The manufacturers were plowing their new riches into plant expansion and new jobs while analysts warned against the job market and the stock market "overheating."

The steel industry was still operating on a 12-hour, 2-shift day but workers were so efficient and productive that they lowered the workday to an 8-hour, 3-shift day in order to attract the additional 17,000 workers they needed.

President Wilson returned the control of the railroads back to private owners after nationalizing them for the war. The unions fought this as they were beginning to like government control.

The emergence of company-provided insurance benefits and paid vacations started. Women, whose war time jobs were mostly as railroad workers, left those jobs; and they began to dominate the secretarial jobs on those same railroads. During the first major growth period of the railroads, the 1850s to 1900, all secretarial jobs on the railroads were held by men. In the '20s, that changed completely.

Immigration was a major issue in 1920. "Too many immigrants, close the borders" was the cry of the American voter. Too many Italians, Greeks, Polish, and Russians was the issue.

A new form of electronic communication, information, and marketing captured the attention of American youth and was spreading across the country with arguments over who really invented it. It promised to revolutionize sales and the economy. It was the Internet of the '20s-Radio.

Education was in a shambles, a growing institution called "high school" was emerging and people who could afford the time wanted it. At a time (1899 to 1920) when the U.S. population increased by 68%, high school attendance increased by 711%. America wanted a better education, but unqualified teachers, low standards, and poor immigrant schooling dominated. The National Education Association (NEA) demanded higher pay for teachers and lower class size.

The issue of race came to the national forefront as blacks moved North into the cities as the nation's white workforce was already doing. The racial issue had a credo however. Quoting Granz Bons, a leading anthropologist and reformer of the '20s, "people should be viewed and to view themselves as individuals of individual merit. But the more we see ourselves as classes or groups, the less we will be able to see ourselves as individuals." "The more we see our kind as 'us,' the more we see all other kinds as 'them.'"

"A chicken in every pot, a car in every garage" was the Republican National Committee promise while the country demanded employment regulations protecting workers' rights. The central focus was on child labor laws, there weren't any! Churches, schools, educators, and the Supreme Court wanted to ban or place controls on child labor. They were opposed by the women's movement, which wanted no such action. As voiced by the League of Women Voters, "To eliminate children from the workforce would create idlers in brain and body." "It would destroy the initiative, self reliance and manhood and

womanhood of all the coming generations." "It would tend to nationalize American children and make them wards of the state." The two major legislative fronts of the women's movement for prohibition and the prevention of any child labor laws were accomplished. It would be the Roosevelt Administration more than 10 years later that would reverse both of those with the repeal of the Prohibition Act and the initiation of the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Andrew Mellon, the guru economist for three presidents, was the Secretary of the Treasury. His primary philosophy was the lowering of the excessive tax burden on Americans. He wanted to reduce the 4% income tax down to 2% and to issue tax refunds. "I have never viewed taxation as a means of rewarding one class of taxpayer or punishing another," he said. "If such a view ever controls public policy, the traditions of freedoms, justice and equality of opportunity must disappear. Prejudice and class hatred will result."

The Irish Republican Party (IRA) attacks on the constabulary were dramatized when the IRA's Sean Fienners tried and executed their first woman informer. Fifty percent of all women in the workforce were teachers, 37% were secretaries, and 24% of all women workers were married. Five percent of the country's medical students were women; but 92% of the nation's hospitals refused to accept female interns. In every occupation at every level held by women, they made less than men doing the exact same job.

Drugs were becoming a national issue as the "cocaine king" of the drug world was arrested in Brooklyn after a three-year federal investigation.

The Royal Institute in London demonstrated a Scottish invention called television.

Does any of this sound like déjà vu? The comparisons between 1920 and today are surprising. Relevancy for our 100-year purpose starts here. What kind of values would this kind of worker have? How would you motivate or reward such a worker? Would any of those values and answers also affect today's workers?

The foregoing is an advance excerpt from his soon to be published book, "Our American Workforce, 100 Years: 1920-2020," by William Cook.

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