

**"THE WORD FOR CO-OPS" - NEEDED INTERPRETATIONS
AND APPLICATIONS IN MEMBER EDUCATION**

by Professor Scott M. Cutlip
University of Wisconsin

I would like your permission, first, to give you a quick background of the genesis of the "Word for Co-ops" by outlining the thinking of the consultants who took a sharp, critical, candid look at cooperative public relations and educational efforts. And, second, to put before you what I regard as the basic principles of effective communication.

For the past several years, as you know better than I, there has been a growing uneasiness among cooperative leaders because co-op growth has not kept pace with our expanding population and expanding economy. There has been an uneasy feeling, at least among the leaders of cooperatives I've talked to, that the drive, the verve, has been trickling or draining out of the cooperative movement. Some years ago as a result of this concern about the co-op story and its effectiveness, The Cooperative League brought in Dr. Ernest Dichter, the motivational research expert who took a look at the cooperatives and their image with the public. He turned in a report which I am told was not too favorably received and was somewhat disturbing and jarring. Later a public relations committee was set up to examine the public relations efforts of the co-ops under the leadership of the very able Calvin Kyle of Nationwide Insurance. This committee brought in a panel of four consultants--myself, Pierre Martineau, research director of the Chicago Tribune, Professor Raymond Mack, Chairman of the Sociology Department of Northwestern University, and James Proebsting, Chairman of the Board of Roche, Richert and Cleary Advertising, Chicago who formerly was associated with National Cooperatives. We examined over a period of several days and weeks, the output of cooperative educational and public relations material. We did a complete inventory of The Cooperative League materials and of various other cooperative materials. Then, each one of us wrote a lengthy memorandum telling our impressions of the materials. We came together for a day long session with the committee and with Jerry Voorhis and others in Chicago. Out of this one of the concrete results of all this deliberation was the "Word for Co-ops," and we'll come back to it later.

First of all, Pierre Martineau, who is a very distinguished researcher, says, "I should make it perfectly clear that there is a definite separation here between the services themselves which have been proved to be efficient and extremely helpful, as opposed to the image projected by this literature. In no sense am I talking about the services. I am trying to confine myself in a constructive sense to the negative image which I think is projected by the literature.

"In my life experience, I have continuously encountered groups of people who in a sociological sense make a religion out of some worthwhile idea. It becomes their way of life. In this context, I think the consumer co-op management activity should be thought of almost as a religion, rather than an economic program insofar as the elite group behind the movement are concerned. Throughout this printed literature and the movies runs the same theme--'dedicated'--'one vote'--'democracy in action'--'international peace.'

Sharing
Cooperation
Competition

Progressive
Community responsibility
Customer's interest

Image creation is a function of symbols--it is what we do as well as what we say--verbal as well as non-verbal.

"The co-op movement is in various kinds of business which should make the consuming public feel very kindly about them. They furnish loans to those badly in need. In the grocery and the other fields, they take care of such sticky problems as buying and bargaining. They bring electric power where it didn't exist before, right into the home. Even if they weren't co-ops, they perform friendly tasks. In their real relationships with people they create very warm relationships because of the character of their business.

"But contrariwise, the publications dwell to such a large extent on moral principles, rather than about the consumer's primary interests.

"As to the image this literature projects when it is written from the management viewpoint, it conveys that the people behind the co-ops are self-centered, sanctimonious, cold, unyielding and aloof to the ordinary person. As one of the consultants expressed it, the tone of much of this is as preaching in a stern Cotton Matherish manner as anything he has encountered. It is not warm and human, it does not really care for the customer. It is merely trying to convert and trying to get people to respect the theorists. Why should the consumer respect the manager of the Jewel Food Store for his political views? He is a good store manager, but his ideology is entirely apart from the services he renders as a store manager.

"The publications about the grocery field really state you buy groceries from us and then study group dynamics and how to raise children.

"My point is that this way of life which apparently is very important to the management people is entirely irrelevant to the consuming public. The person who buys groceries wants low prices and a friendly atmosphere, and sees no connection with all of the demanding situations created by the literature. The literature constantly says people are important, but nowhere does it clearly state the individual's importance. The service activities of the co-ops does imply the members do like the operators who are good, honest people. But the publication program contradicts this relationship and is actually irrational. For the most part the publications are not warm and human, but rather are like the Inquisition which in effect says, 'get down on your knees and listen.'

"The businesses the co-ops are in give them much chance to have warm friendly relationships with the world at large and the businesses are growing. But the publications are demanding. The demands largely insist that the ordinary members and non co-op population change their minds on child-rearing, international peace, politics, unions, economics, and thereby these demands generate hostility.

"Too much of the literature projects these demands on the member rather than what the consumer will get out of the co-op. In the news letter on R.E.A., not once is it explained that the lower interest rate makes possible electricity at low cost for farmers.

"In the broadest sense, everything that is written is a projection of one-self. By and large these publications project the moral viewpoint of the elite group who want to start more co-ops and convert people to their point of view. Most of the literature reflects the viewpoint of the philosophers of the movement. It does not project the image of the people running the operations who are trying to give better service, better meat, better fertilizer, etc. The litera-

ture by and large is argumentative, implying either that there must be cooperation or the law of the jungle will apply as the alternative.

In a nutshell, one derives the notion from this literature that co-ops do not fit in various ways with present U.S. culture. Apart from the professional touch which is needed, the literature does a very poor job of communicating to any potential membership for the most part.

Now let's see what Raymond Mack, a sociologist, had to say in his very critical, searching look. He said, "You're not saying what you want to say nearly as well as you could."

Too often, I feel that you are talking to yourselves instead of to potential cooperative founders and members. While I thought it (The Goolibah Tree) the least effective in the small group of unhidden non-persuaders, I feel that too many of the publications are like political house organs. They may be reassuring to those who already believe, but they are unlikely to convert many heathen. There is a tendency to applaud the glorious past instead of stressing an inspiring, exciting future. Another movie boasts that, because of cooperatives, "Our money is not drained away to the big cities." Maybe not, but most of the potential members of cooperatives are; the big cities are where we are going to have to find and organize them.

"We should talk to middle class people. Cooperatives appeal to conservative (by which I mean saving), plan-for-tomorrow, Protestant Ethic oriented citizens. For this reason the film 'As Consumers We're Owners' is worth the other five put together. Edith Norton's kitchen is a middle class kitchen. Her arguments are middle class arguments. In the preceding film, 'What is a Co-op?' sweaty people are holding clods of dirt in their hands and needing help. Edith Norton is clean, brisk, competent, and offering to give help. I think potential middle class cooperative members are more likely to be people who can see themselves brightly giving help than grubbily needing it. We should talk to educated people."

"In summary, we should not talk about the chance for people living on the rim of the dust bowl to survive; we should talk about the opportunity for educated city dwellers to exploit their intelligence and conform to their own values: planning ahead to live as securely and smartly as possible."

Professor Mack in his conclusion, gives two rules to live by. "First, personalize what you are saying. Only intellectuals are interested in abstractions and they prefer that the abstractions apply to other people. Arguments about the social structure are not as effective as arguments about Joe. Second, stress share values. Whatever the cooperative movement has in common with the core of American culture should be underlined."

Now I should want to make it clear that all of us were analysing and criticizing the image of cooperatives as that image is being projected by movies, by booklets, by pamphlets, by news releases, by literature and by newspapers. We did not examine the image of cooperatives as it is held by the people. This would require a long and expensive opinion research project. So we are looking at the literature, the product, the concrete, tangible products of your educational efforts. Now here is what I had to say, and this makes plain something of the genesis of this "Word for Co-ops."

This array of exhibits made it clear that the Cooperative League and its cooperative components are producing tremendous amounts of publicity pamphlets and motion pictures. The output is high, some of it is effective. I came away from these materials with the overall impression that your publicity output, like your philosophy, is democratically diverse, almost to the point of aimlessness. Perhaps in a movement so democratic in nature and diverse in operation it is not possible to enforce a common symbol, a common theme, a common identification. In other words, this is one of our basic findings that your whole efforts are too diffuse, too disorganized, too unrelated to achieve in effect a cumulative impact on public thinking. The matter of symbols--I'm fully aware of the twin pines symbol and found it used on much of the material, but certainly not used or prominently used on all the pamphlets or in the motion pictures. Many of you don't use the twin pines symbol and those who do, I think it is a rather meaningless symbol. If you say the twin pines symbol has been used too long, I ask you to take a look at Standard Oil Company and its multi-million dollar investment in the ESSO symbol which it is now throwing out the window in order to have a new national brand name--ENCO. And the same is true of Standard Oil of Indiana which is throwing out the Standard name for American. It's an expensive matter to change symbols but I think you do need an effective symbol and all of you need to agree upon and use it.

There are many basic themes in the Cooperative message which have been reduced to sloganizing phrases. Many of them tend to be vague, vaporous abstractions, akin to the NAM's "free enterprise," "The American Way" et.al. nothing phrases, e.g. "Co-ops are people." Wonderful -- but what does it mean? Banks are people and I don't like banks. So are corporations, hospitals, universities, even monasteries. Most institutions in our society are peopled by people so when you proudly proclaim "Co-ops are people" it doesn't send me.

Or take "cooperatives provide a balance wheel in a just and free economy." To understand this high-flown abstraction requires considerable knowledge of our economic system. I doubt that the phrase comes alive for the average person unless he has read Adolf Berle's last two books or heard Murray Lincoln explain what it means. These are all nice warm comfortable words -- cooperatives -- balance wheel -- free and just economy -- but what do they mean?

Repeatedly we are told "your co-op is not just a business." What is it then? We are told the co-op is not operated for a profit but for the benefit of its member-owners. A T & T tells us it is operated for the benefit of its customers and for its million shareowners. What's the difference? We are told that cooperatives represent "economic democracy in action." Again warm wonderful words --but do such phrases convey a sure common meaning to any large number of the unchurched? I'm doubtful. I don't recall seeing once in all this co-op literature TVA's very effective phrase of "providing a yardstick for fair power prices" used. You need more concrete, specific slogans to replace these more abstract and thus less meaningful ones. I have reached the pessimistic conclusion that abstractions can't be effectively communicated to large groups.

Another frequently used theme is that "you co-op is locally owned" and that its money and its benefits stay in the local community. In this day and age I'm doubtful that locally owned has any meaning or pull. Or take "in accordance with Rochdale principles." Would any but a confirmed, dedicated cooperator know what Rochdale principles meant? And I gather your problem is more to reach the uninformed, the unconvinced than to communicate with the dedicated co-op member.

Another oft-used theme is that "I, am not only a customer/ or a policyholder/, I am a part-owner of this business." Or "I am just a small guy who owns part of this great big business." Or as one cooperative put it, "our policyholders are people who want to have a say in how their insurance company is run, and what it does with their money." How valid is this appeal in 1961 when it pertains to a large Mutual Service or to a Nationwide insurance cooperative? Does a Nationwide or Mutual Service policyholder really feel he can exert control over the conduct of this giant concern? I'm not sure. The bond of identification here is pretty thin.

This "I am a small guy but I own a share in a big company" may have meaning and impact for the member of a fuel co-op in a small-town rural Minnesota or Wisconsin, but does it really swell the pride of a Nationwide policyholder where he is but one of two million or so persons? I'm skeptical.

I found a paucity of "how to" information in these materials. For example in the film showing a cooperative housing project getting under construction I wasn't told how I, a prospective home owner, might go about organizing or getting in such a joint housing project. Your materials tell a great deal about the principles of organization and control of a cooperative but not much about what I could do to start organizing a cooperative or how I might join one already going.

I think that the public relations output of the co-ops projects the image of a rural -- small-town institution, not the image of a modern urban enterprise. There are more country stores than modern urban supermarkets in the cooperative image. Unless this emphasis, unless this image is changed surely co-ops will fail to move to the urban centers of central city -- suburbia -- exurbia and there grow with our booming population. The farmer -- country-feed store image was potent in a day when nearly half our people lived on farms or in rural areas, as was the case at the turn of the century. We sometimes forget how rapidly America has become urbanized. When FDR came to power nearly a third of our people lived on farms and in rural areas. Today the figure is rapidly approaching the 10% mark. To most of us the New Deal seems only yesterday but as our society moves, it was a battle fought a long time ago. Identification with co-ops comes hard for most urban people. We forget just how rapidly the world moves. I just returned from a trip to Europe and I spent part of that time in Germany talking to young people, teenagers, and they are asking plaintively, why should we be blamed for Hitler, we weren't alive when all that happened. That's how rapidly the world moves.

With the widespread success of the food supermarket and the intense national competition of the chain store giants -- A & P, Red Owl, Kroger, Safeway, Piggly Wiggly, National Tea, etc. -- we have tremendous volumes of foodstuffs moving through these chains at a relatively small margin of profit. Unless the cooperative supermarket moves back to organize the producer can it compete and give sufficient savings to the grocery buyer to make the bother and effort of organizing and participating in a co-op seem worthwhile? Small rebates hardly seem worth the effort required.

And surely the bias against the chain store "which takes its money out of town to the large financial centers" which was so potent in the Depression 30s has lost its steam in 1961. "Old Man" Henderson is long since dead.

These worlds in which the cooperatives have ranged and railed for so long may not be conquered as I seem to think. But enough people think that they have been conquered to make it difficult to raise new armies to fight the battles of feed and fertilizer, of rural electrification, of small loan extortion, of high cost of insurance with any genuine fervor. I can't see these issues, problems and needs stirring people to organize cooperatives on any large scale today. On the other hand there are new worlds crying for the equity and economic fair-dealings cooperatives can and do bring to the areas of economic exploitation. Thus, I suggest a revision of the cooperative movement's basic target areas and the revamping of the public relations program to fit these new challenges. In short, then, we found that your message was somewhat diffuse, somewhat out of date, somewhat preachy and some certainly to us seemed to be ineffective.

Some recommendations to improve the Cooperative League's promotional program as outlined by James L. Proebsting are as follows:

1. Create a clear picture of what cooperatives are and how they should be characterized.
 - a. A friendly organization set up to serve people's needs.
 - b. An organization controlled democratically by people.
 - c. An organization of integrity and high principles that supports equity and fairness to all.
 - d. An organization that is efficient, up-to-date, and performs needed and worthwhile services at cost.
 - e. How much importance is to be given the visual emblem of the League and the League's name in the materials and literature that are printed.
2. Determine the public you wish to reach with your promotional materials.
3. Allocate funds available to each of these in the amounts considered necessary to do the best job.
4. Insist that all promotional materials conform to the organizational image that has been agreed upon even if they have to be re-edited or re-written (of course with the author's permission obtained.)
5. Encourage the development of more imaginative materials to increase attention to the message and to obtain wider readership.
6. Whenever possible appeal for action. (Provide machinery and channels for action.)
7. On the assumption that the Cooperative League is always attempting to do more than the promotional budget allows, it would be well to study the possibility of putting more materials on a self-paying basis. When action is suggested and a response follows, the materials could be sold without detriment to the promotional budget.

The opportunity to go to the American people with a large scale promotional program is an intriguing one. If and when cooperatives could unite on such a program much could be done to erase the negative reactions many good Americans have regarding them."

FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Now I would like to put before you what I consider some of the fundamentals of effective communication. This is what we are engaged in, whether our title is public relations director, educational director, etc. We are in the business of persuasively communicating information and ideas. I want to set before you what I consider the hub, the basis, the fundamentals of communication. First, I find it very helpful to recall that the word communication is derived from the Latin word communis, meaning common. The purpose of communication is to establish commonness. There are three basic elements in communication. The source, or the sender, the method and the receiver. A breakdown can stem from any one of the three or any combination of these three basic elements. Effective communication requires efficiency on the part of all three elements. Now, where there has been no common experience on which to establish commonness, then communication becomes almost impossible. After all, the sender or the source can code his message only in terms of his knowledge and his experience. A receiver can decode the message only in terms of his knowledge and his experience. So, unless there is common knowledge, common experience between the coder and the decoder you cannot effectively communicate. This explains the layman's inability -- your inability and mine -- to understand Einstein and his theories. Common knowledge, common language, common cultures, common experience provide a connecting link. So, unless we have this connecting link, this chain of common experience, we find communication difficult. We need always to remember that no chain of communication can be stronger than its weakest point. The communicator must have adequate information, fully understand it, be able to code it in a way so that the message will mean something to the intended audience.

The signal -- be it word, symbol, or picture -- must mean the same thing to the intended receiver as it does to the sender. The signal must be clear, not confusing. We have to compress. We have to rely on symbols and stereotypes. We should always keep in mind that words are but symbols. And we have two kinds of words, thing words and no-thing words. A thing word is a lectern, table, chair. When we use these thing words they have a reference that we all know and understand. Therefore, the more thing words we can use, the more effective our communication.

Then we have what I call the abstract words or the no-thing words, like freedom, justice, equality, etc. and the more abstract words you use the more difficult it is to get your message across. Even thing words mean different things to different people. Take the word dog. We happen to have a dog and I am very fond of dogs. I have a colleague in the School of Journalism who was bitten at the age of four by a collie and hates them and when he comes to visit us we have to put our harmless, pleasant little Pogo down in the basement or he won't come in the house. So when I use the word dog I mean we are talking about a friendly pup, etc., using dog as man's best friend. To most of us this communicates. But to my colleague, it brings up quite a different picture. A picture of revulsion, and fear, mostly fear.

So, we've got to keep in mind that words, the same words mean different things to different people. If you run into this trouble with a simple word like dog think what you'd do when you talk about enterprise or freedom, or equality or justice. And here again this underscores one of the things I want to emphasize. It is the importance of knowing your audience, knowing its values, its language, its hopes, its aspirations, its needs. If you are going to effectively educate

and communicate, you've got to know the language of your audience, know what words it uses and what those words mean. Then use them to communicate with your intended audience. In any case, never forget there is no one to one ratio between a word and its decoded meaning. More likely the ratio is sixteen or thirty-two to one.

We will all agree, I am sure, that words at best are imperfect vehicles for the communication of ideas. The receiver must have the capacity to comprehend the message. He must have the predisposition to believe and a readily available means of action to respond to the message sent. In other words, if your message is to be effective, first of all the reader must have the ability to comprehend. Unless he has the knowledge, the background information, he will not have the ability to comprehend. Unless he has a predisposition to believe he is not likely to accept the message and is likely to shrug it off. Also, if he does receive and does accept the message, you've got to provide him with some channel of action, of expression.

Now in this seemingly straight line process of sender sending a signal to a receiver, there are a number of variables that intervene to slow, sidetrack, distort or block the communication. As a result of our experience in World War I, when we were first introduced to large scale propaganda by the George Creel committee--which sold the American war and its aims and ideals not only to the American people but to the world around--and then led us to further disillusionment, out of that we constructed a model of communication, an old Model T vehicle to transport information that has long out-lived its day. We got the idea that if we could just get the message into the media and beam it down on this newly isolated, insulated urban individual who was caught up in the impersonality of the city, after having been moved in from the friendly village life of the rural area, if we could beam the right message to this individual, we could get him to jump through our particular hoop. This was in the 1900's on the way to World War I when we had this tremendous demonstration of the power of organized propaganda. Also, they were developing the movies and the radio in the early 1920's and also this was when we were first realizing that we were becoming not an agricultural society, but an urbanized society with modern cliff dwellers living in cliffs in these large urban centers and not knowing the people in the apartment on either side of us.

So this was the beginning of sociology and we developed this notion that we could phrase the message just right and get the individual to jump. That was when advertising was in its big boom period. By using these new mass media--national newspapers, national magazines, radio networks, the motion pictures--we could get people to respond to our commands, as though they were soldiers in an army. Early in the 20's we started making feeble efforts at research and this accelerated in the 30's and gained rapidly in the 40's and 50's. The first thing we learned was exposure--access to the message intervened in this seemingly simple process. I remember this well. I was working on a newspaper in the early 30's when the newspaper reader interest studies first came into play and I remember our newspaper reader interest study and the shock of our editor when he found out that people were only reading about 1/5 of the editorial content of the paper. He had assumed, and all the newspaper men of his period blithely assumed, that every reader read everything in the paper. We found out that they don't and even today the average reader reads about 1/5 of the editorial content of the newspaper. It varies depending on the size of the newspaper. People give about

the same amount of time to a newspaper whether they are reading the New York Times or the LaCrosse Tribune. Ever remember that your audience is in a narrow social order and has but a meager amount of time to give to affairs outside their own lives. They have very little time to give to exposing themselves to your message.

Next thing we learned was that radio and motion pictures are different media and have different effects. The same message transmitted in the warm emotional voice on the radio creates a different impact than the same words in cold, logical print.

Third, we found that the content of the message played an important part. Here we have gradually learned that if we are going to get the reader to read, or the listener to listen or the viewer to view, our message must be relevant, significant to him. We must talk to him in terms of his interests, his values in his language. Management in American corporations continues to waste thousands of dollars talking to their employees about management's problems, about what management is worried about. Employees have their own problems, their own worries, they are not interested in management's worries and problems. If you are going to get through to your audience your content must be shaped in terms of his interests and his values. The content must be significant to the intended receiver or he will tune out by a flick of a dial or a flip of a page. The form must be impelling, easy to read or view. The reader will not work to understand your message. The psychological appeal must meet a felt need to satisfy hunger, sex, social security, personal recognition.

Fourth, we found that the receiver's disposition plays an important part in our communication. We accumulated a set of predispositions. Predispositions to be republican or democratic, conservative or liberal. By predisposition, we see what we choose to see through glasses ground and polished by our birth, our culture, our family, our school, our church, our social status, our economic state, our peer group. As we indicated in some of our earlier comments, we think a lot of your literature is that of the evangelist. This is understandable. But, remember when you become moralistic and evangelistic, people see what they choose to see.

And fifth, we found that this individual down here was not isolated. We did not communicate to him in a vacuum; he was involved in a whole network of interpersonal relationships. He was a member of a group; and that group plays a very important role in the communications process. If you are going to reach a member of the group, you reach him most effectively through the group leader. This research has been developed particularly in the 50's and 60's. Now either one of two things has happened. - Either through increased urbanization and increasing the personalization of our society as we move to larger and larger units, economic, social, religious, political, and urban areas, the individual becomes more and more insecure and retreats more and more into the comforting arms of the group or else through improved research techniques we have found out more about the role of the group and the group's influence.

We know that the role of the group and the group leader is most influential in the two-step from mass media, to group leader, to members of the group. To communicate more effectively we have to pay more attention to the group and its grapevine. Be it in the industrial community, the workshop or in the co-

operative movement. We get most of our communication as members of groups, we interpret most of our communication as members of groups and we form our opinions in groups. In other words, the communications--opinion process takes place within the matrix of the group. Now we have different groups and different areas and aspects of our lives. A mistake many people make is to assume that a group leader in one aspect of society is a group leader in all aspects of society. You take the strong labor leader who is an effective leader of men in the economic arena and you assume he is also a strong leader in the political arena. I was puzzled about this a long time ago because of the contradiction of the devotion of United Mine Workers to John L. Lewis and their willingness to follow him on strike but they never followed his political leadership. John L. Lewis was never able to influence an appreciable number of coal miners politically. He was a union leader but he was not a political leader. So, when we start liberally tagging leaders let us not oversimplify it. Americans are the greatest suckers in the world for the shortcut.

When you talk about community leaders you immediately mention the editor, the banker, the lawyer, the doctor, the clergyman. Now, these all are people of influence and what the sociologists call influentials. But remember they are influential in different aspects of people's lives. The two things that a leader must have to influence members of his group is honesty and integrity. They must respect his honesty and integrity. Too, they must respect his confidence. So a man who has confidence and who has integrity in a particular aspect of community life is generally looked to as a leader in that area. There have been a number of studies to validate this.

One of the studies on which the two-step theory of communication was based was carried out in Decatur, Illinois some years ago to determine who were the influential women in Decatur. What did they find? In the area of marketing she was a woman well past middle age who had raised a large family on a very strict budget. In fashion who was it? Not thematron with the large family but the younger woman of the higher social status. Social status didn't have any effect in determining who the influential was in the area of marketing, but it did in the area of fashion. In political affairs, who was the leader? It was the woman who had lots of time to give to political activity, either to a political party or the League of Women Voters. She was well above average in education, well above average in income which enabled her to have this leisure time. The woman who participated actively in politics was looked to by her neighbors who didn't have time for such activities. So we must pay more attention to determine who the influentials are in the area of our activities.

We have now outmoded the vertical theory of mass communication that held that the message in the mass media would reach out to every eye and ear in society, reaching out to a mass of disconnected individuals hooked up to the media but not to each other.

Mature public relations practitioners and cooperative educators should prefer a model which takes into account the relay and reinforcement role played by the individual, by the group leader. This means less reliance on mass publicity and more on reaching leaders, or influentials, as our sociologists call them. It means fewer releases ground through the mimeograph and more calculated use of what we frequently term contacts. Communication is both a vertical and a horizontal program. This is important for us to remember. Our U.S. Department of Agriculture has been working at this task at transmitting meaningful, persuasive

communication over long distances longer than any other organization I know in the United States. The Department of Agriculture's Office of Information actually dates back to the time of Andy Jackson in the 1830's. The extension system dates from 1862 which means it is just one year short of being a century old. Our U.S.D.A. as you all well know, has a network radiating out from Washington to each of our fifty states and from them to the state agricultural colleges down to the county agent, farm agents, home agents, and some three thousand captains. Despite its century of experience and its far-flung communication network, our Department of Agriculture has learned that the job of getting new ideas accepted is not a simple, straightline process of discovering a new grain and publicizing it. As some of you perhaps know, it took this tremendous communication network 14 years to get Iowa growers to use hybrid seed corn who could profitably do so. This is something to tell your bosses when they expect you to perform miracles overnight.

The diffusion process goes through five stages--awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, adoption. We know that the mass media plays an important role in creating awareness, in spreading new ideas, new practices, stimulating interest in them. But when it comes down to trying them out, people turn to their friends and neighbors, influentials, the people in whom they have confidence. These media and agencies have a varying impact at various stages of the process. In all stages the complexity of the idea is related to the choice of sources. The more complex the idea the greater the tendency is to rely on government agencies, on personal contacts. It is also clear that as people move from the awareness and interest stages they rely more and more on sources that they regard as objective, as competent--neighbors, friends, government agencies. Again, this is to emphasize that education is important.

First of all, there are obstacles. There is the artificial censorship that impedes, blocks and distorts communication in our society. There are censorships imposed at the source, imposed by the government, by corporations, by social organizations, even universities. It's hard, often, to get the complete, the true, the candid story. This you know as well as I.

Second, an important thing to keep in mind is the limitation of social contacts. This is hard for us to remember in real life, but each one of us moves in a very narrow social orbit and we move with people of like views and like interests and like status. Take your corporation executive. What's his orbit? At the office he is waited upon by subordinates and assistants that tell him largely what he wants to hear. At the country club or the athletic club he associates with other industrialists who wail about creeping socialism, talk about things he likes to hear and they reassure each other. At a social gathering where he meets other important, influential, wealthy people in the community with like views and like interests. He reads the Wall Street Journal, maybe the New York Times, Fortune, Business Week, Nation's Business, and such publications and the Chicago Tribune. These all serve to make him feel comfortable with his views and his philosophy. And the same is true of his employee who belongs to United Automobile Workers. He reads union newspapers, etc. He goes to a workingman's tavern. There they talk about the evil, potbellied employers.

Third, the meager time available for paying attention to public affairs is a factor. When you get discouraged in your evangelism and your moral fervor about saving the world with cooperatives, remember that the average guy, or the average gal--by the time he or she has done his day's work, met family

responsibilities, and etc.--doesn't have much time left over to worry about the state of cooperatives. When we get through earning the day's living, helping in a church canvas, serving at a church supper, taking our son to Boy Scout Camp, fixing a leaking faucet, putting up the clothes line, mowing the lawn, meeting with our bowling league, or our bridge club, etc. we come to the end of the day tired and weary. We don't have much time to worry about the state of things in Laos or the impending crisis in Germany. Also, these things cause us anxiety and we tend to shield ourselves from them for that reason. But, by and large, the average person does not have much time to pay attention to public affairs.

Some of you may have seen Elmo Roper's concentric circle theory of the public opinion process. Out of his some thirty years of measuring and analysing public opinion, he has come to what he calls the Roper Hypothesis about the way public opinion is formed. He said, first of all, an idea starts with a great thinker. Gandhi, John Dewey, or Adam Smith or someone comes up with a new idea. He attracts disciples. Say ten disciples, and these disciples become dedicated conveyors of the message. They in turn influence the some thousand of great disseminators in our society. The Roper inventory of the great disseminators in our society apart from the thousand are John Kennedys, the Henry Luces, the Walter Ruthers, the Richard Nixons, the George Meanys, Murray Lincolns. These are the great disseminators of ideas in our society. They in turn influence what Roper roughly calls the thousand lessor disseminators. These are the state and local levels--the newspaper editors, the outstanding clergymen, the Gaylord Nelsons, etc. These in turn, influence the some ten million people who pay their civic rent in this country. These are the people who ring doorbells, contribute to political parties, who make cooperatives go, who make the League of Women Voters go, the people that run our unions. Roper says that a conservative estimate is that some ten million people contribute actively and meaningfully to our social and political life. And we reach out to the 80 or 90 million in earnest. The number of people who contribute to political parties, for example, is roughly five million. These are active citizens, meaningful citizens. But the great bulk of our population is politically and socially inert. Most people have little time to pay attention to public affairs, that is, affairs outside of their own immediate lives.

Fourth, we have the problem of the built-in barrier of distortion--events that must be compressed into short messages. This is one of our great problems. People don't have time to sit still and listen to long detailed, complex explanations of complex problems. They want it in a capsule. We explain a century old story of why China went communistic simply by saying somebody in Washington sold us out. We look for and insist upon simple, quick explanations for large, complex long-time events. It varies with the interest, with the motivation, with the education of the individual. With the highly influential person, he will of course read explanations of why China went communistic and try to understand it. He will be preparing himself for the impending crisis in Berlin. The problem we have in reaching any group is that we do have to compress. This adds relevance to what I said earlier about your cooperative material, namely, your message was too diffuse, too varied. It was not compressed. It did not set forth clearcut basic impressions. When you are communicating with large groups of people over long distances the message has to be clear and simple.

Fifth is the difficulty in making a small vocabulary express a big complicated idea. As President Kennedy pointed out in his report on the Vienna meeting, "This

is one of the problems we face with Russia. We are both using the same words but meaning entirely different things. They define their words and their interest quite differently and diametrically opposed to the way we define our interests and our words."

Sixth is the fear of facing those facts which threaten our status quo. We all shield ourselves from that which is disquieting, discomforting, which threatens our security and our status.

In skimming through these complex ideas borne of long research and experience, I have perhaps made only one point, knowing how difficult communication is. But this is an important one: Communication of a new idea or persuasive information is a long, tedious complicated task. It is not the easy thing our bosses often think it is. We know now that different media are effective at different points and in different ways. We know now, too, that each stratum of our community generates its own opinion leaders and groups generate their own leaders for different areas of their lives. It is important for the communicator to know what media techniques to use in the different stages in this multiple stage process and know how to mobilize these influences effectively. Taken together, the two-step theory and the Department of Agriculture's five step diffusion process, provide a much surer approach than many American practitioners and educators are using today. Effective communication is expensive in time, in understanding and in emotional control. The cost and complexity of communication is much higher than is commonly supposed.

All that I have said serves to underscore the importance of free flowing, meaningful two-way communication as a requisite for co-ordination of effort and for the cooperation of men that is so essential in today's complex world. Now let me underscore with equal force that communications are not a panacea for all the frustrations, failures and frictions which beset us in the cooperative movement. This is what I was alluding to when I suggested that perhaps one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the cooperative message was that it was talking about issues now remote from the needs, lives and aspirations of the people in the urban communities of today. No effective education and public relations efforts for the cooperative movement can be effective if that cooperative movement has failed to meet real needs of people in our society. We all know that there are certain basic conflicts of interests in any society which cannot be communicated away, no matter how artful the communicator. We need to realize too, that performance, more than publicity, shapes people's attitudes over the long pull.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote "I cannot hear what you say because of the thunder of what you are." We must put away our beliefs that there is magic in words alone. There are no simple shortcuts in the difficult task of communication, either from management to employees, within professions or from the cooperative to its member or to its potential members. Communication, then, must tell a clear-cut, consistent story that is relevant and significant to the intended audience. The message must be tailored for a specific audience on a specific subject--not shot into the air to land, you know not where.