PRINCIPLES OF CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP

20 September 1955

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DR. REICHLEY: General Calhoun, Gentlemen: This afternoon we are going to briefly explore another technique which we think and believe will be of value to you as individuals. I am sure that, through your own experience, you all realize how much work is accomplished, and I might add parenthetically, delayed, because of the committee approach to the solving of problems. I know from my own experience that in this Federal Government, particularly in Washington, whenever a problem comes up, it results in conferences, conferences, and conferences.

To illustrate what I mean by that, I have here a book. In the early part of 1946 the Secretary of War asked the College to do a little researching job for him to determine all the Boards, Commissions, and Committees that had personnel and part of their membership from the military establishment, which at that time was the War Department and the Navy Department. In thirty days' work, three of us came up with this list, which includes a little over 1500. I must add something about that. I know the list was not complete, and later on we found out that we had left out about 500 to 700. I might also add that this resulted in the establishment of more boards and more committees and more conferences.

Well, in view of all this, we have asked Professor Edwin L. Stevens, who is one of our public-speaking professors, if he would not give us some tips on the basic principles of conference leadership. Professor Stevens, as you know, has been with us for nearly eight years, and it is a pleasure to introduce him to talk on this subject.

Ed, it's all yours.

PROFESSOR STEVENS: Thank you very much, Doc.

General Calhoun, Gentlemen: As I have walked through the hallways and have looked at the student body, once from down there and once from up here, I have seen a number of faces which I have seen in classes previously, and I want to take this opportunity to say hello to them, and also to say again how glad I am to be back at the Industrial College with my other friends of the faculty for another academic year.

Doc, as you went through that list of 1500, plus 700, plus however many more--I know that was 1946, which is a long way back, and there have been many added since then--I was reminded that, in a little bulletin put out by the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, in 1953, they had a definition of a conference. I liked it so much ever since I saw it that I added it to my treasures, and I give it to you today. Said the telephone bulletin: "A conference is a meeting where, after all is said and done, more is said than done."

I think it is in the light, Doc, of that little gem that we ought today to try to talk about Principles of Conference Leadership or tips or techniques, or whatever you want to call them. Because you have all been in conferences again and again, I don't think we need to motivate for you the importance of knowing how both to run a meeting or a conference and I think too, how to participate in one. If it is not already apparent, certainly nothing that I or anyone else could say in the course of 45 minutes would add too much to that motivation.

You all know how very important this method has become, not only in government, but in business and in industry, as well as in education. So, instead of spending any more time on background or motivation, I would like instead to go directly to three broad areas which I consider to be paramount in conducting a successful conference. In these three areas it has been my experience, both in hearing and in watching, that, if the leader of the group falls down on them, his conference is likely not to succeed.

These three broad areas are, simply stated, purpose, plan, and people. And I say to you that, to get a well run conference a good conference leader must always have in mind those three P's--purpose, plan, and people. For the balance of the time that I am here today, I would like to develop for you each of those three P's and try to show you how they fit into a well run meeting or conference.

Again and again, as I have sat through conferences--and I am sure you share this experience, too--the one thing that I saw above all others which results in failure in the conference is the lack of a definite, clear, well established purpose. When the chairman makes definitely clear what the meeting is for, and when the group well knows what is supposed to be done, then you have some chance of accomplishing a given goal or of solving a given problem. When, however, the meeting has been called simply because it happens to be the particular day of the month, or when the hands of a clock get into a proper geometric relation one

with the other, one straight up and the other pointed out on a right angle, and it is three o'clock on the 30th of the month, when we call together a conference and people get together simply because it is the fashion so to do, again and again I see these meetings break down and failures result.

I say it is not enough just for the chairman to know why he is there. A well run conference, a well run meeting, will have every individual in it informed as to what is to take place. I grant you there are times when, because of a last minute decision, or a decision that must be made quickly, you can't get out an elaborate agenda and you can't take the time to notify everybody and to rush ahead research and bibliographic material and be prepared to record everything.

But the more you can do in letting people in the conference know what it is for and what they are expected to do, the more likely you are to have a successfully run meeting.

That is one aspect of purpose. Another aspect is that far too frequently, meetings are called under the guise of a conference, whereas actually the intent is quite different. What the person wants to accomplish--the general, the admiral, the chairman, the president, the trustee--is to communicate a certain body of information. Just as Professor Roberts was talking with you here a week or so ago about a speech being a communication, so too, a number of meetings are called simply to communicate something from the person on the platform or in the chair out that way (indicating).

Yet again and again this kind of thing will be called a conference. The boss has already made up his mind what he wants done, yet he thinks it might be a slick trick if he can persuade the people that it is their wish. So he calls a "conference," and all the way through it is quite obvious what the decision is going to be. So the people in the meeting, if they have any sense about them at all, will quickly sense what is up and go along. There is no good reason for having called that kind of meeting a conference.

When you really want to get a group together to get their advice and their ideas, to share some know-how, to get the Navy, the Air Force, the Army, the Coast Guard, the Marine, or any civilian point of view, and to share thinking and try to come out with a common-denominator answer to the problem, you have a reason for a meeting which we might call a conference.

In a sense, as I have talked today, I have tried to lay out for you both what is a purpose and some of the ways in which a meeting will fail if that purpose is not clearly in mind by everyone connected with it, both the chairman and the members of the group itself. If you don't know your purpose, if you haven't an honest reason for having one, for goodness' sake, don't call a conference. If you want to talk to the group, make it a talk. If you want a gripe session, have a gripe session. Let people get things off their chests and get back to work. If you can come up with an honest reason for a conference, call the conference and go to work accordingly.

Once you have decided and the group has been informed what is the purpose of the meeting and you have a definite goal to accomplish, obviously your meeting is called, and it is a pretty good idea for you as chairman to have a plan in mind--which brings us to the second of the P's we are talking about this afternoon--a good plan for the running of the meeting.

There are two aspects to this P that I want to talk about. The first of them is familiar to all of you under many names. Clearly, if you desire success in solving problems, you approach them pretty much as we have historically from the time of Aristotle, or, more modernly, from the so-called Dewey method. The military application is what is called an "estimate of the situation." In technical conference language this simply becomes an agenda. You do first things first in terms of your plan. If you want your meeting to be well run your agenda will start by trying to locate and define the problem.

I was much impressed with what General Hollis said in his inaugural address to this class, how sometimes when a problem is well stated the problem solves itself. He quoted the experience of General McNair. Simply boiling down a problem into a clear statement of the problem when done by a man like General McNair, would often make obvious the answer to the problem.

This is the first phase of any well run conference. You find out what is the problem; you analyze it; you go into the background of it, just as you do in your estimate of a military situation. When you know what your problem is, when all of your group is talking the same kind of language, when the words which you are using in your discussion are used by all the people in the group to mean the same thing, then you are in a position to go ahead with the second step in the plan.

To illustrate some of the problems that grow out of this first phase, let me read off two or three terms we have had in other classes here at the Industrial College and in our faculty course in conference leadership. You would think some of these terms were apparent on their face; yet when we actually had the experience in class of trying to talk about these terms we found one person meant one thing by the term, another person meant another thing by the term, and it was impossible for anybody to get together until we had defined clearly what was meant. As I look I see some of the members of the faculty who may well recall having sat through the experience to which I refer. Here is a topic we discussed in class. "How can we increase the number of graduate engineers and scientists?"

Well, that sounds simple enough on the face of it, I suppose. And yet, Colonel Kearney, I think it was one of your groups--I am not positive--where, as I recall, it took 30 minutes to get some agreement on what was an engineer and what was a scientist, and I was afraid that before the end of that 30 minutes someone might take out a club and clobber someone else on the head. Ultimately the group had to agree for the balance of the afternoon and the purpose of the discussion, what was meant by "engineer" and "scientist." These are tough terms to define. But they could make no progress until they did define.

Another topic, "How can the military service contribute a plan on the early reconversion of industry to peacetime production?" Once a war is ended, if we have another one, how do we get out of military operations and into peacetime operations? Again--what do you mean by the end of hostilities? Where does peace begin and war leave off? Until you are in pretty solid agreement as to what is your problem, you are not going to have very much in the way of agreement as to how to solve the problem.

This, then, is the first step. Locate and define your problem in terms of the estimate of the situation. Then, when you know this, you go ahead to examine the solutions. You try all of them, and one or the other will be the one, the only one, in terms of what the problem was defined to be. Sometimes you can get agreement, if you are lucky, as to what is the answer to your problem.

Here's a very important step. When finally you do reach that point, make sure you take the trouble to summarize, preferably to write out verbatim what is the answer to that problem. Summarize it; get it in black and white; because, if you don't, the experience will occur that everybody will be perhaps in agreement as to what the answer to the

problem is, but nobody will take the trouble to put it down, and two weeks later when they get together to implement the decision nobody will know what it is. They will all disagree in remembering or in trying to recall what it was.

Summarization is the last step in the process of your plan of trying to put these things together in an orderly fashion.

Dr. Irving Lee, in his excellent little book "How to Talk With People," puts it this way. He says in substance, "Many of the difficulties in planning a conference come from trying to prescribe for a problem before you have described the problem." I like the way that is put. You can't put together a good answer until you know what is your problem.

Keep, then, these steps in order in terms of the agenda. If your group rushes ahead, try to pull them back. If they go off on tangents, remember to pull them back. This is the first aspect of planning, that you go at it in terms of a logical approach, just as you would in the estimate of a military situation. So much for the first aspect of plan.

The second aspect of plan is to have in mind various ways in which you as a chairman can actually run your meeting. There are two broad ways by which the chairman can help accomplish the business of a meeting. Now, one of them is called by Hannaford in his book, "Conference Leadership in Business and Industry," the "directed" method. The other is called the "overhead" conference method.

Let me explain briefly what he means by those terms and try to show you how you as chairman can use these two methods better to accomplish your purpose in getting that meeting on to the solution of the problem.

By the directed method he means simply that everything that transpires during the course of the conference goes through the chairman. He opens the meeting and he directs. That is to say he designates a particular individual to talk. It may be Thompson, it may be Kearney, it may be Robbins, it may be Brock. But everything that goes out goes out there and comes back here (indicating) in terms of direction by the chair for an individual to talk--one, two, three, four--not necessarily around the table, but in, out, in, out, and all the way through.

Now, the overhead type of meeting, on the other hand, is this. The individual chairman starts; he lays out the introductory comment,

stating what we are going to do, the thing we are going to take up today, what the agenda should be, roughly, how we propose to go about the solution of this in terms of step by step. Then he throws out an overhead type question and suggests that somebody start, and from there on through, everything goes in and around and about the table; and very infrequently does it ever come back to the chairman for any particular comment by him. Just as long as he possibly can, he lets the meeting run in and among the members of the group. They take it, they run with it, and it is their meeting.

Now, if you think of these two methods for a moment, you can see that there are advantages as well as disadvantages to each one. If, for example, you want to be sure that only so much time is consumed on a given phase of a discussion, arbitrarily you can direct that at the end of five minutes we move on to the next phase. Your group may not be particularly happy with that. They may feel you are railroading them, which is, of course, a disadvantage.

On the other hand, if your group gets a little bit off the track and you want to get them back, there's no way to do it except say: "Listen, we are supposed to talk about relevant matters. I suggest that we ought to get back on the track and continue discussing our points. They are getting away from us."

Therefore, wisely, a chairman will use neither one of these methods to exclusion. He will combine as well as he can both of them. When his meeting is going well in the hands of the group, he will let them alone. When they are keeping on the track, when they are succeeding in going ahead with the solution to the problem, he will let them run with the ball. If, however, it looks as if there is need for guidance, he comes in with the directed method and suggests that they follow the man he chooses. Thus he hopes that he can keep them on the track and expedite progress of the group.

Very quickly to summarize these two points: We have suggested to you that no conference, no meeting, can be well run unless the purpose is clear. No meeting can be successfully run unless also the chairman has a plan and unless he tries as best he can to curb the group during the course of the meeting to that plan, using both of the two methods of operating the meeting--the directed and the overhead methods.

This is theory and it is all very wonderful, and in all the textbooks and manuals put out by the various government services or by business

organizations you can read all this at length and get example after example. The cropper comes when you reach the third of the P's I am going to talk about now--people.

It is all well and good to have a purpose and to have a well knit and well conceived plan, but when you get into the meeting itself you come right smack up against people. Therein lies much of the trouble; and herein maybe I can give you some suggestions that will help you to run your meeting and, to handle your people more successfully.

Now, in terms of this third category, then, the first thing I want to discuss with you is the aspect of human relations. I don't mean at all to get Dale Carnegie-ish here. I do feel very strongly, however, and I am sure your course in Executive Management over the past few days and your experience in chairs of responsibility through the years will confirm for you, that much of what I am going to say about the importance of having always in mind good human relations techniques could be a whole lecture in and of itself. There are two basic fundamental things you ought to remember in your dealings with folks in a meeting. (1) Everybody likes to be recognized; and (2) everybody likes to be appreciated. They are simple; fundamental; as true as modern psychiatry; as true as age old religion. The fundamental tenet of every religion I know can be summed up in different words, perhaps, but in all, it is important to recognize and appreciate your fellow man. The same thing is true, as I understand it, of modern psychiatry.

As you have recognition and appreciation of individuals one for another, then you have some foundation to get on with success in personal relationships. How does that tie in with conferences, or with you in the chair? First, it ties in with the necessity for you to know your people. You can't, obviously, give them any recognition, or less can you give them any appreciation, unless you do know them.

I am not talking here simply of knowing their names. What I am talking about is this: The more information you can acquire about the various folks who may be in one of your student committees, or who may be on your faculties, on the background of the particular problems that may be current at any one time in their lives, the more likely you are to be working successfully with those individuals in the conference. If you know a man has a particularly heavy work schedule and has not had time to prepare for this meeting, it might be a good idea not to embarrass him by asking specific technical questions which will require his reading of any bibliographical material that you may have passed out. If a man is plagued by sickness in his family at any given time, this may

take his mind off the conference and on to something else much more personal. Your job as a good chairman is to take that situation and those facts into consideration.

The very nature of the process of a conference is having people share information and have them know what they share. That, too, is appreciation of itself. When you ask anybody for a contribution in words, you have shown appreciation of his worth as an individual and that you desire to have him participate with you in getting a solution to a given problem.

Personnel is the very nature of the conference process. I don't see that any of you can miss on this if you keep in mind that the more you know about your folks, the more likely you are to be able successfully to run that meeting or that conference.

Secondly, I would like to take up a word that I understand is in popular repute here--the "logistics" of the conference. What do we mean by that? Well, simply stated, the job of a good chairman is to see to it that all the necessary plans are made and carried out, to provide enough chairs for the people who are there, to provide a good room, to provide a table, or a blackboard, or an easel, or any other facility or graphic aid that may be needed. You can't trust someone else to do this job. It is your meeting. You are running the conference. It is your task to provide for these things.

It means preparing for them in advance. It means taking into account some of the psychological reactions of people. What time of day is your meeting going to be held? Is it going to be held in any half-hour between 8:30 and 10:30, when folks are just getting over the morning rush in Washington from their homes to their place of work? Is it going to be held in the unhappy period between 1:30 and 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon? Is it going to be in that period when, for example, this group has been, from the period 12:00 to 1:30, General Calhoun, out playing baseball, or golf, or tennis, or something else, so heartily indulging in a ball game that, as they come through the corridors, the only thing we hear is "We beat them one to nothing?" They were running in beautiful sunshine outside and want to be anywhere else in the world except in a chair at a conference meeting.

Maybe it is in that time between 1:00 to 3:00 o'clock, when your group will have indulged itself in what I like to call the businessman's lunch. This is the period when you go out and partake of steak sandwiches and milk shakes, or hamburgers, or many of those superiffic

martinis which are served not too far from here, and which I believe I can make reference to without fear of embarrassing questions.

After this businessman's lunch, your group comes in and plops down, sometimes in chairs just as comfortable as those in which you today are seated. What happens? Well, you all know what happens. I don't have to develop this point. One last observation on it, though: The Latin American gentlemen are much smarter than we in this regard. They have enough sense to go on home and take an official siesta from the 1:00 o'clock to the 4:00 o'clock hours, and then they come back, after the heat of the day and when the digestive process has taken care of itself, and do their work. We don't do it. We come and get into the conference, or get into the lecture hall, and officially we don't take any siesta hour. I say for the main part people don't. Occasionally they will begin to flop down, and heads will begin to roll and, in spite of warnings to the contrary, the meeting begins to fade. Instead of calling this a siesta, we take it, but don't so acknowledge it.

This may get a little far, or you may think it gets a little far, from the logistics of the conference. Actually, however, it is part and parcel of that very problem. Unless you have the attention of your group, unless you have it concentrated in such a way as to be devoted to the rational, you can't hope to come up with very much.

Now, it may be that a meeting properly scheduled would acknowledge this problem of the 1:30 to 3:00 o'clock time and put it in another hour. Or it may be we would arrange things in such a fashion as not to have an over abundance of comfortable chairs. Maybe the chairs ought to be a little less comfortable for this time, or we ought to have it in a building where the temperature conditions, too, will not conspire against us. If, in addition to the process of athletic indulgence that they have partaken of, you have also a temperature condition of 85 to 90 degrees, you are going to double your problem.

I think by now that extended illustration may have given you what I mean by the term logistics. Your job as a conference leader or as a meeting leader is to keep ever in mind the necessity to have the group attentive, to have them go along with you. When you begin to sense, perhaps after an hour, maybe a half-hour, that they have gone too far, it may be well to stimulate the group, to get their minds off the problem even with a one or two minute break. At the end of an hour and one-half, logistically, it is my judgment that practically any group needs a break. If you try to keep your group for two or three hours in session,

with no break of any kind, I think you will find the law of diminishing returns setting in very markedly during the latter portion of that time.

Gentlemen, logistics are important, not just in terms of tables, not just in terms of people, but in terms of psychological as well as physical factors. Good conference leaders will have logistics always in mind.

Under the third technique, a good conference leader wants to have in mind, in addition to human-relation factors, in addition to informal logistics, what I call the "use of the question." Some writers in this field go so far as to state categorically that, after the introductory comment by the chairman, the leader of the meeting, from then on, through the balance of the meeting, should never again make a declarative statement, or indulge himself in a declarative sentence. Always from that point on, after the introduction, he should indulge only in questions. Now, why?

Well, when a good chairman wants to be impartial, a "no-question" meeting--I don't care how you phrase it--can be anything except impartial. I grant you that some vocal inflections make a question a little bit less than impartial, but in the statement itself of a question you have the nature of impartiality. When I ask you something, I do not myself make a commitment. I may sound as if I am making one, but I can back off from that and have another group member answer.

This then leads us away from getting on one side of something, from favoring one group over another, in the conference meeting. The very nature of the question process itself will give you a stimulant.

Secondly, a good question automatically gets participation. I don't care whether it is thrown out to the whole group or whether it is thrown to an individual. Either way you have given an opportunity for some participation, and that, of course, is what you want in a conference. You are trying to get the group in, and a well run meeting will have question after question.

There are three or four things to keep in mind with regard to the kinds of questions you can employ, and a couple of devices--that a good chairman can use those questions for. I have already referred, in talking about the kinds of meetings, to overhead meetings and directed meetings. The same terminology applies to the question. You can throw out a question to the whole group; simply throw it out, as the saying would be, over their heads; or, at the same time, you can direct it to a particular individual, one person, and ask him to respond to your question.

Now, there are a couple of other techniques. There is one we call the relay question. If some one over on the right side of you around the table raises a question, if you don't want to answer it, simply throw that question over to someone else--relay it to another person. You can say: "Tom has raised a question, Bill. What do you think about it?" What is the result? You have two people in. Secondly, you keep yourself off a spot.

Next, you can use what we call a reverse question. Someone in the group raises a query, and again, instead of answering it yourself or throwing it to some one else, you turn it back. You say, "You have raised that point. What do you think about it?" Or say, "I know you yourself have had experience in this line. Won't you give us the benefit of that experience and answer your own question?"

There are two ways in which this particular one can be used. One way is to use it on the person who is coming in for the first time; someone who has shown a certain reluctance, or backwardness, or lack of communicative skill, or inarticulateness. He is in with a question. Perhaps in the way he speaks, from what you know about him, you sense that he knows something about the matter and would like to express himself. He is taking one long step. Give him the opportunity to go farther, by reversing the question to him.

Secondly, you can use this same technique on someone who is giving trouble, who is what I call the argumentative type, or the belligerent type. Occasionally in some conferences or meetings you will get that sort of fellow. If you reverse questions to such an individual you will frustrate him so quickly, gentlemen, he will hardly know what has happened to him. You say: "You have raised that point. What do you think about it yourself? What do you mean by that?" When he has answered that you ask: "What do you mean by what you say?"--and so on through, until ultimately he will take himself down--as some of us say--he will climb down, when he is talked out.

Here are some of the ways in which a question technique by the chairman can be employed. One of the devices of a good leader is to use this technique of throwing out questions.

One last suggestion on this question matter is this beautiful question which again and again I hear a smart conference chairman leading with: "Are we agreed that--?" "What is the agreement"? "Are we agreed that--?" "If we are, can we push on?" That kind of question put to the

group serves the two-fold purpose of reminding them that they have only so much time and of summarizing the thought; and the third purpose, of course, of getting on with your meeting. "Are we agreed that--?" "Can we push on to the next matter of business?"

Now, the last of the things I want to talk about with regard to people is the matter of the--what I call types of individuals, and a couple of situations, principally from extreme cases, to show how you can use your knowledge about various types of individuals to expedite the progress of your meeting. Now, I am fully aware, as I know you are, too, that it is impossible to categorize any individual as always being of a particular type. To say that this man is always argumentative, and this man is always shy, and this man is always quickly analytical or severely critical in his approach is too over-generalized.

But, during the course of a particular meeting, if you know your people, and respond to them, if you get the sense of listening and watching, you can begin to realize there are in your group individuals who have certain personality characteristics--or traits--and, if you are really on your toes as the chairman, what you ought to try to do is to make all these personality characteristics contribute to the success of the meeting. By that I mean that even the weakness of an individual can be turned to a successful purpose if you simply think of that weakness and proceed accordingly.

Let me try to illustrate this by taking two of the most widely separated types of individuals, the kinds you will find again and again, in military and in nonmilitary groups--on the one hand Mr. Shy and Reluctant, and on the other hand Mr. Argumentative and Forward--Mr. Over Articulate. Here's an individual with whom you have no trouble, except that he is in too much, and every time he comes in it may be in the form of an argument--no matter what somebody says, he will deliberately provoke some opposite point of view.

I am blessed, gentlemen, with a friend who is of that type. I am sure you all have had friends or acquaintances who are of that category. It does not make any difference what you say--it can be the kind of days we have had so far--sunny, pleasant, with a temperature of 70 or 80--the hurricane which was supposed to come never did come. You can say to this friend of mine: "Gilbert, isn't it a beautiful day?" and he will say "No it isn't" and give you four reasons why it is not a beautiful day. He is a chemist. If you say, "Isn't that rug green?", he will say, "No, it isn't; color is a matter of individual response. When you get nearer to it you will find it is not green." It's all a matter of light. He will argue the point with you.

Over here we have Mr. Nonparticipator, Mr. Quiet Fellow, Mr. Soft, Slow Spoken. Are there times when you want to get a particular kind of individual into your meeting? Let me suggest this: There are times when you want to get some light, some spark, some fight--on the principle that everybody likes controversy. I am sure you are all looking forward to the fight which is to take place tonight in New York City between Mr. Moore and Mr. Marciano. Let there be a radio or a TV program--the one which we respond to is the one in which we have controversy. If we can put Fulton J. Lewis on one side and Mr. Elliott Roosevelt on the other and they have a round which gets close to fisticuffs, it makes news all over the Nation.

I was amused at the beginning of this last Congress when the Democrats came into power in Congress and we had still a Republican Administration to hear and see and listen to the many complaints from the press and radio representatives in Washington. Those of you who were here will recognize the general line of the complaints during the first three or four months of that congressional session. "No controversy; no fight; all sweetness and light up there. When are they going to remember that the honeymoon is over and get down to brass tacks and have some good controversy?" This was written in column after column. You heard it in broadcast after broadcast. There was little news from those up on the Hill and down town, because there was so little controversy.

In your conference, if you come to that time which we have already described, when you are in the unofficial American siesta, if you are at one of those points where you just can't seem to get anything going, gentlemen, I suggest to you that a smart chairman will deliberately provoke a good controversy to get some interest stimulated and will start to get a couple of people going back and forth at each other, at least to the point where some adrenalin is pumped into blood streams and the group is more alert. Then, if you can turn it off, all well and good.

Conversely, if you are in one of these situations, when two or three people are head to head with each other and no longer at the point when they can think rationally about an idea, and they are pounding the table and almost throwing fists at each other, what you need, obviously, is a period of calm reflection and quiet. How do you get it?

May I suggest that one way is deliberately to direct successive questions to three people who will give you some deliberate calm, the kind of response which will provoke the kind of atmosphere you want.

By exaggeration, perhaps, I have tried to show how you can, by assessing the various responses of individuals in your group, sense the type of personal characteristics they have. If you are watching, observing, and knowing your people, and if you listen to them carefully, you can do a more effective job of keeping the group stimulated, keeping it responsive, keeping it on the way to the solution of a problem.

I know full well that I have not covered many of the points which you would like to have covered in a talk of this type. I have, however, in the 45 minutes that have been mine, tried to show you the importance of three main approaches to this matter of leading a conference or of participating in it. I suggest to you that a well run conference will emphasize purpose; it will emphasize plan, and an orderly one at that; and it will emphasize knowledge of people.

In terms of this last category, the human relations factors, and the logistic factors--tie right back into your appreciation of people--and your recognition of their need for rest breaks and for facilities, whether blackboards, or chalk, or whatever it may be.

A good chairman will keep himself impartial. One device he can use above everything else to be impartial is the question technique.

Lastly, he must also proceed in terms of the kinds of people he has in his meeting.

Quickly, then, to summarize all these things: If you can keep in mind your purpose, your plan, and your particular people, gentlemen, I think you will find that you will do a more successful job of running any conference or any kind of meeting.

DR. REICHLEY: We are going to give Colonel O'Neil a chance to talk on his project about Aberdeen Field a little and give him an opportunity to answer some questions on it. Before we let the Professor go, if you have any questions on conference leadership, he will be glad to answer them.

QUESTION: I notice you mentioned just about everything you thought of except the chap who might say: "Shall we break the two by four bat over his head?" Is there any possibility of using an approach like that, and is it effective?

PROFESSOR STEVENS: Yes, I think it sometimes is, if your particular position gives you the authority to get away with it. I don't think it creates the kind of democratic atmosphere that the word "conference" connotes, however. When you get to the point where you have to bludgeon anybody you need another technique than that of a conference.

General Calhoun during the intermission came up with something in the nature of a kind of query when he said he would like to have some sure way of going into a conference and coming out with your shirt. I said I was not suggesting today any device by which you could persuade someone to accept your point of view. That is not really part of the conference as such in terms of running a conference. Obviously it is in a large part trying to accomplish your goals, General Calhoun, which is the subject of a much longer talk than we can possibly make here during the question period, or during the main part of the lecture, either.

QUESTION: Mr. Stevens, your discussion of techniques is just as clear as crystal to me, but I think it presupposes that all conferees are free agents. Again and again I have participated in conferences with a dictated position or a safely delimited position, along with other conferees, and have deliberated by the hour until suddenly one or two conferees will pull a crop on the meeting and there's deadlock. By what device does a chairman adjust this thing and develop it and close it out?

PROFESSOR STEVENS: I think your question is again making the assumption that people are either coming to a meeting with instructions from top side that they cannot depart from--they are in a particular position of having no authority to make that departure--or they are themselves so stubborn--or perhaps the word is so loyal to their position--whichever it may be--that they will not depart.

As soon, in my judgment, at least, as it has been determined that you are at an impasse which results from the lack of authority to change a decision, then, it seems to me, it is time--Doc, I say it is--though, as you say, you can't do it tactfully, and I agree with you that you can't--it is time to break up the meeting and go back for new instructions, or designate to have come to the next meeting the people who do have the authority to make that change, if possible. Unless you do this, all you are doing is repeating the same arguments from one point of view to another point of view ad infinitum.

When we have an impasse, if there is no opportunity for us to depart from a previously prepared position, let us, for goodness' sake, have

the break, or have a couple of martinis, that may help us a little bit, or go back to where we came in, from a point of view of new instructions. This is another technique in itself. The chairman has used every technique he can, and asks for three or four minutes for reflecting, where nothing takes place. This one came from the Quakers' meetings, the experience of the Friends Society, where again and again this technique is used. If you particularly feel the need of religious inspiration, you might very well call on the Lord for help here, as they do, mighty successfully.

If you don't follow the religious philosophy, have the break for the kind of rational, reflective thinking that can be indulged in in any conference. There is no talking during that period. It is sometimes a way to reflect inwardly and possibly to change.

You can't undo in one meeting what has taken years to build up. For example--again this was brought to my attention--in the Joint Chiefs of Staff meetings you have the position of the Army, the position of the Navy, at the very top side, which grow out of not just these meetings. There's 150 years of experience and people, and training, and ingraining, and tradition. You are not going by any technique that I know of to change that kind of thing quickly--ultimately, maybe. One might say their heads must be knocked together, or it must be passed on to where it can go no further. It passes to the Commander-in-Chief for your solution.

I am sorry if this is a long-winded reply. It is the best I can give.

QUESTION: Does conference experience show that, when the conference gets beyond a certain size, it becomes inherently unmanageable?

PROFESSOR STEVENS: It becomes more unmanageable as it gets larger. This is in terms of the kind of time you have. If you are meeting for roughly an hour and one-half, it is my experience that more than about 15 or 16 people begin to complicate--by the geometric ratio, rather than by just the arithmetic ratio--the number of problems that grow out of the people themselves. When you get about 50 to 60, you have these great, formal statements made by everyone, and you really need three or four days or years for that type of meeting.

The more people you have, the more likely you are to have problems. If you have four or five people that you know have experience and know-how, you can designate them as spokesmen for groups of more people.

If you have 60 people you might have 15 spokesmen. Then the 60 will participate to see what can be done. The more you have, the more likely you are to have problems of keeping them on the track.

QUESTION: Do you have any suggestion on how to bring the conference back on the track if it gets off the track due to the action of a person who is senior to the conference chairman?

PROFESSOR STEVENS: Yes, sir, I do. One way is to try, if you can, to have the members of your group do it. If they are sensitive to the facts of the conference, they will know when you are off--not all of them, but some--and if you are, for example, using a blackboard or an easel or some other type of thing, it might be a good suggestion simply to ask one of the members of your group to summarize that point where there seems to be a broad discussion, to see what you have accomplished. Try to get the group to do it, in terms of some of them who sense the situation. Then the senior man who has taken it off the track maybe, when he sees the summary, will come to a realization that he has strayed. That is one technique that may work.

Another is to use the question technique, and suggest: "Sir, we fully appreciate your comments, but aren't we just a little bit ahead of ourselves here? Would you mind?" You are putting it in the form of a question. You can put your summary on the board or on a piece of paper and maybe he will sense that you will take care of that when you come to it. Or say to him, simply, "I am not sure all of us see the relevance of this, sir. I wonder if you would explain to us what exactly you mean by this. How does it tie in?" It may well be that there he will take exception to this. But he is a little less likely to than if you say: "You crazy old galoot; you are off the track. Let's get back on."

QUESTION: How does a conference leader really get along in any sense? To me he is playing ring leader to a three-ring circus; he is a supply officer; and so forth. That is called the press-a-button notion of solving a problem which he is personally interested in solving. He has to try to keep everybody happy, and so forth; be on his toes; see that Joe does not have a fight with Bill. He does not have a chance to pay attention to what is going on and get the things he wants unless he reads the minutes next week, if somebody has taken them down.

PROFESSOR STEVENS: He does that by another technique. I should have mentioned it in the lecture. He listens, not only for the digressions, but, obviously, for the substance. Second, so that he can achieve it, if

he does not want to bother himself with minutia or recording, he has to have a recorder appointed in the form of someone whose task is to put down on the easel, blackboard, or notebook, the things that they have accomplished. Every now and then he can call on that person for a summarization--I don't like that word--for a summary of what has taken place--he might have a summary every 15 or 20 minutes, or every half hour, again depending on how much time he has. That will tend to keep him well abreast of what is going on, and for the rest of the group re-emphasizes what has taken place and what yet remains to be done. He has to listen all the time.

QUESTION: Quite often, Professor Stevens, we come to the situation where there is an extremely strong personality at the conference in addition to the conference chairman. Quite often you will find that most people are turning to the strong personality for guidance rather than to the conference chairman. How do you curb that kind of situation?

PROFESSOR STEVENS: First you want to be sure it is desirable to curb it. Maybe he is coming up with many of the relevant answers, contributing to the solution of the problem. It may be a matter of petty jealousy on your part, but you sense that you are responding to this as you should not. That is the first reaction. The second is, you can use again a number of devices. You can center the attraction and attention away from that individual back to you. One of the simplest ways I know is by movement. By movement I mean, if you are in a chair--as everybody in a conference usually is, in a chair--simply stand up, as a public speaker. You remember last week Professor Roberts went back and forth across this platform two or three times showing you how attention was fixed on him in terms of his movement.

The same thing can be done in terms of a conference. The second thing is, not only stand up, but walk, and their eyes are more likely to follow you. That's the second thing. The next thing is, you can say, "Here is what we have done," and use the visual aid device, to show what they have contributed.

The last aspect of the reply to that question is, you can let your group handle that sort of individual. It may be that they have sensed that he is very domineering, and you can let them break away from him physically and mentally, by directing questions away from him. Here you can get a counter-balance to his position.

Lastly, you can perhaps do it by the technique of suggesting, "Well, we have heard a number of points of view and, in all fairness, gentlemen,

shouldn't we take a little time to get a counter-balance to determine if there are other points of view. I wonder, George, if you would mind waiting." It may be well if you then can let your group overcome it by way of the technique of psychologically taking attention away from him.

DR. REICHLEY: Ed, with the talk you have given us this afternoon, I am sure our technique in conducting conferences will be improved, even though we don't solve any more problems than usual.

Thank you very much.

PROFESSOR STEVENS: Thank you, Doc.

(25 Nov 1955--250)O/en