

April, 1967

Letter to Staff:

A few thoughts about your job this summer - You have chosen to work as an instructor at the Colorado OUTWARD BOUND School and have been selected from a large number of applicants.

As best as one can judge from your references and from meeting and working with some of you, I have found you to possess three qualities. First, a commitment to a concept of full living and a set of values regarding life. Second, a background of experience that gives you the skills to be safe in the mountains. Third, an interest in young people and the ability to relate to them. The job is a tough one, more than a job really. It is a way of life.

What is OUTWARD BOUND?

As an educational idea, OUTWARD BOUND makes certain assumptions about man and society. Basic is the thought that man is a part of nature. Millions of years of his evolutionary history are rooted in life as a hunter, a nomad, an adventurer. Deep facets of personality, emotional needs, are tied to this past. Urban industrial society increasingly fails to meet these needs. The sociological theories of alienation bear further light on man's predicament, as do the romantic poets and conservation literature. Kurt Hahn talks about the three declines - a decline in fitness, a decline in craftsmanship, a decline in compassion - as critical in our age. While the benefits and potentialities of industrial society are immense and irreversible, we have yet to learn to live in it.

Another assumption is that with youth, modern man's predicament is even more acute. Not only is the step from childhood to adulthood an ill-defined one - when does a boy become a man? Witness the confusion we have in addressing a group of teenagers. What do you call them? Boys? Men? Teenagers? Students? But also opportunities for proving or discovering their manhood are increasingly denied them. Because of the increased volume and sophistication of knowledge, the time when a person is ready to assume adult responsibility is increasingly delayed. The doctor across the street from me was 34 years old before he held his first job. Talk about prolonged adolescence and delayed adulthood. In spite of his physical and sexual maturity, his intellectual energy, where does the teenager have the opportunity to realize his capacities unless he is needed in war? William James saw the need for vigorous, demanding, stretching experiences to provide the moral equivalent of war, a substitute for violence.

A third assumption has to do with education and learning theory. Traditionally, a boy learned working side by side with his father, a girl beside her mother, an apprentice beside a master craftsman. This was education - learning through doing, through experience. What was learned was not only a skill but a whole series of attitudes about the adult world, relating to other people, values, a range of roles and expectations. Only with the growth of literacy and the power of the written word did the artificial structure of the classroom, with its narrow emphasis on book learning, pre-empt the concept of education. It was this that John Dewey attempted to counteract in his theories of education.

This is probably OUTWARD BOUND's greatest contribution to educational thought: To rediscover a process of teaching through activity. It has to do with motivation, with involving students in their own learning, with the development of a person and not just a mind, bringing together knowledge and action. At a recent conference the term "action-oriented education" was suggested, or "experiential education."

To what end? What is our aim? Character development, or character discovery, we say. But what do we mean by character? I find it restrictive to define the term and prefer to look at it from different perspectives. These ideas are basic: integrity, compassion, style.

In the first place, character involves some concept of integrity - integrity seen from different points of view. Certainly a sense of values is fundamental, and a commitment to these values. Webster defines character as "highly developed and strongly marked moral qualities; individuality distinguished by moral excellence." Individuality needs further emphasis, for integrity assumes having a sense of one's self, being true to one's self. "Know thyself," Plato said. Of having answers to the question "Who am I?," Tillich uses the term "Seeking the ground of our being." Loving thyself, in the context of "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Honesty, courage, particularly moral courage, are a part of integrity. Having something to believe in, to die for, and more important, something to live for, is basic. A matter of faith in theological terms. Integrity.

A second dimension of character hinges on a concept of human inter-relatedness. Kurt Hahn sees the main concern of education being the fostering of a compassionate spirit. By this is meant a concern for others, empathy, a sense of responsibility and humility. Selflessness. Donne's concept of no man being an island. Here we speak of the willingness and the ability to function in a group, of being loyal followers, leaders when needed. It speaks to the human condition of needing to belong, of assuming the consequences and responsibilities of belonging. Love thy neighbor. Faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love.

The third dimension of character can best be called life style. By this I mean a sense of competency, a quality of confidence that imparts confidence, in the sense that success breeds success. Charisma. Qualities such as wonder, curiosity, enthusiasm, humor. Man actively asserting himself, reaching out and up. Man the problem solver, the inquirer. Self-actualizing man. A toughness with great gentility, as Christ was tough. Optimism, hope - in Paul's hope, faith and charity.

OUTWARD BOUND has no monopoly on these ideas - they are a part of the values and wisdom of the ages. OUTWARD BOUND does represent, however, one clear attempt to redefine them and structure them in an educational program.

This is our job. As an instructor, your role in this is central. How we do it I have started to outline in "The OUTWARD BOUND Technique." What happens to students varies immensely. We each have our own hunches. To give you a flavor of what others say I am including the statement by Bill Coors, President of our Board of Trustees, an article by Pete Willauer, Director of Hurricane Island OUTWARD BOUND School, and an article on Joshua L. Miner, President of OUTWARD BOUND, Inc.

Perhaps the most important thing to appreciate is that we are a school, and we teach not for the mountains but through the mountains. What we seek is to give young men a greater sense of themselves and strengthened values, deeper insight into the questions of What am I?, What is my place in the world, my responsibilities to my fellow man?, Where do I fit into the scheme of things?, Where do I belong in the universe?

Welcome to the Colorado OUTWARD BOUND School.