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THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

"How Do You Do, Dr. X?"

Techniques in Handling Callers

by

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"HOW DO YOU DO, DR. X?"

When Persons Come To See An RF Officer In The New York Office, What Do They Want
And What Does The Officer Do About It?

I. The Least They Can Expect

A basic matter that must always be remembered - though no sensible person could hardly forget it - is that anybody who comes to The Rockefeller Foundation should be treated courteously and should leave with the feeling that he has had a fair reception. When a person appears at the door who is somewhat of a nut, however, it is sometimes not easy to draw a reasonable line between courtesy and efficiency. An officer should not be drawn into dealing with a complete nut. An experienced secretary in the division, such as AEB, can feel out the situation where the receptionist suspects the visitor is a nut. (The receptionist cannot and should not make the decision, as she might exclude some of our favorite friends!) Central Administration (FMR's office) is also adept at handling nuts. High-level nuts go to LFK. When the visitor is a borderline case, and even when he is over-demanding, as some people are, it is the clear obligation of the officer to make him feel that he has been courteously treated and has had a chance to state his case.

II. A Written Record

Whenever an officer receives anybody in his office and talks with him, the officer has the responsibility of producing after that interview a competent diary record of what has occurred.

If the visitor comes in to see Officer X about a question which clearly falls within Officer X's own field of responsibility, this officer himself decides what and how much he needs to say, the record being primarily, but not exclusively, for Officer X's use.

But suppose that Officer X is the only officer available in the Division at the moment (a situation often arising in the summer and sometimes at other periods), and a visitor comes in on business which does not fall within Officer X's field of responsibility. Officer X then must make a fuller record than he would otherwise do so that when the proper officer returns, he will have a complete record of the interview.

Even when the interview concerns Officer X's field of responsibility, it is never exclusively his business. WW always reads all NSA diaries. Other people in the Division or in other Divisions read diaries for interest or for general importance of information. Central Administration also reads a good part of the diaries.

The amount of notes necessary for an officer to make during an interview varies with the officer and his habits of work. If the officer writes diary every day, he may not have to take many notes. If he writes diary once a week, he probably will have to keep detailed notes.

Our secretarial system usually manages to see to it that diary notes of interviews get initialed to the right persons; but if there are any special and non-obvious needs of this sort, the officer should point them out.

III. Typical Inquiries

A. Exploration of the Chances for Aid - "I want to find out whether there is any chance for my getting assistance from The Rockefeller Foundation."

1. What Division

First you have to decide whether the visitor is talking to the right Division or not. If he has been directed to the wrong Division, the officer can say: "I am awfully sorry but actually I think you should be talking to a colleague of mine in another Division, and I will be glad to find out if there is not somebody in the proper Division who can see you." It is sometimes not too easy to decide in what Division a visitor belongs. If the visitor is a borderline case, it is a good idea to share the interview, if possible, with the proper officer in the other Division interested. If the officer knows in advance that the visitor is a borderline case, he should try to make arrangements to have a joint appointment made. Some examples of problems shared between Divisions are as follows:

- a.) NSA shares with SS an interest in agricultural economics and hence in rural sociology. The center of gravity here is in SS. NSA also shares with SS certain interests in statistics.
- b.) NSA shares with H an interest in new ways of reproducing written material for scholars. H is more interested in the result, while NSA is more interested in the mechanics and the engineering problems. Both Divisions are interested in the field of communication, with NSA emphasizing theory and mechanics.
- c.) NSA and H share an interest in the theory of science, in logic, semantics, the logical foundations of science, the unity of science, etc. This in H belongs to CG, who is interested in philosophy, logic, theory of symbols, etc., etc. Here the overlap comes chiefly because of WW's personal interest in these fields.
- d.) It is not easy to differentiate, by categorical rules, between some aspects of the interests of MPH and NSA. In genetics, for example, MPH is responsible for human genetics and NSA for sub-human genetics.
- e.) Studies that are essentially behavioral in character usually go to MPH.
- f.) In general, neurophysiology belongs to MPH, as do things dealing with the central nervous system. Sometimes a biophysicist comes in to see someone in NSA and turns out to be really a neurophysicist who should be in MPH.
- g.) Social anthropology goes to SS; cultural anthropology goes to H; physical anthropology goes to MPH.
- h.) Experimental psychology goes to MPH and social psychology to SS.

Some general principles on the division of interest are as follows:

If any one Division has had quite a history of association with a man and a place, they frequently go on handling the matter even though it contradicts the present allocation of fields to Divisions.

To avoid the embarrassment of personal connections, one Division may handle a matter for another. For example, if Officer A came to RF from University X's department of anatomy, and if this department makes a request to RF for support, Officer A might request another Division to handle the matter.

Any new officer ought to refresh his memory as to the statement of program of each Division by looking at the single-page statements that are put at the front of each docket.

If the visitor has come to the wrong Division but there is no one available in the right Division, the officer should say: "I am awfully sorry but I am not the person you really should be talking to, but I will gladly listen to your story if you wish, and try to make an adequate record for the right man when he returns; but if you would prefer to wait and see the right man later, please do so."

2. The Enquiry Belongs in NSA

Now assume a visitor who wants to talk about something which is, at least in theory, in the program of NSA. The program of NSA consists of four main categories: (a) modern experimental biology, (b) agriculture, (c) general support, and (d) special projects. The first two of these are self-explanatory. We occasionally recommend some general support because NSA has never assumed that it is gifted with enough wisdom to place all its bets on its own rather sharply defined program; and because of a conviction that RF is big enough so that it should do something for science in general. Requests under "general support" come from big organizations, not individuals (such as when the CNRS in France wants help for French science in general; and such as the NRC in this country). Special projects would be called exceptions to NSA program except for the fact that it is a part of that program to make exceptions. To qualify as special projects (exceptions), proposals must be of absolutely outstanding interest and importance (say in the top $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 per cent of the proposals coming in), and they must be essentially without competition (for if there is competition, we would be forced also to make exceptions for the competitors). Some examples of special projects are: (a) the 200-inch telescope, a good example as there is extremely little likelihood that another will be built; (b) the 200-inch cyclotron, a good example when it was recommended but a poor example now, for although at the time it was built it seemed to be without competition, it is now a small cyclotron and this field is heavily subsidized by the Government. If a visitor is talking about something which definitely falls within the biological or agricultural program, then just let him talk. If he talks about a proposal which is "general support" in science, one might say: "We do once in a while make a grant of that sort, but this is not part of our main program;" moreover, the man should probably talk to WW on something as general as this. Always be conservative about the possibility of such support. If a visitor talks about "exceptions to program", have him tell his story but warn him that there is a little chance that his appeal will be successful; tell him that NSA does make exceptions to program, but out of fairness you must tell him that these are very rare. Always be sure to tell him that if he wants to (despite your warning) he is free to talk.

3. You're Out of Program, Brother

The Rockefeller Foundation is always careful that nobody who raises the question of aid leaves the office feeling that he got an automatic brush-off for purely formal program reasons. Almost everyone knows that we do make exceptions, and therefore it is very unsatisfactory - and really not particularly accurate - simply to be told, "Your proposal is not in program." A better statement is: "We are awfully sorry to have to give you a negative decision on this inquiry of yours. Your proposal falls quite outside of the regular program of this Division and does not constitute a case in which we are prepared to make an exception."

4. Things We Don't Do

NSA normally never does the following (Because the South American agricultural program is young and experimental, it is less rigid and all rules apply less to it.):

- a.) Give money to completely unattached persons. We give money to institutions for the use of people.
- b.) Give money for buildings. There are rare exceptions to this.
- c.) Give money purely for publications; and we do not help the individual who wants a subsidy for writing a book.
- d.) In general pay major salaries. If a man comes in with a research project and if part of the budget is salary for him, this man probably wants to create a job for himself - and NSA does not do this. There are very infrequent exceptions in which NSA does pay major salaries. See WW's memorandum of *June 19, 1952*, on this subject.
- e.) Support work in the field of engineering. There have been no exceptions in twenty years. The Rockefeller Foundation has assumed that that field is closely enough connected with its own profit-producing applications so that it should support itself.
- f.) Support work in the field of geology. The reason is the same as for engineering. There has been perhaps one exception in twenty years.
- g.) Support work in the field of forestry, and again for the same reason. This has been our historic position. However, as certain aspects of forestry are importantly connected with agricultural problems (land erosion, water table, etc.), this is now an open question.
- h.) Finance expeditions. The reason for this is, in a sense, institutional cowardice; or should we call it prudence? For if the expedition should have a tragic accident, we might be held morally responsible by the relatives of those lost for eternal support.
- i.) Transfer grants from one institution to another when the investigator moves.
- j.) Furnish support for a man when he first goes to a new post. We are not prepared to study a request for support until a man has been in a place for a few months, and we are not prepared to entertain an active request until the beginning of the second year. The reason for this is that we do not want to become directly involved in the man's moving so that one institution might think we have helped buy the man away for another institution. Another reason for this is that until the man has been at the new institution for a reasonable period of time, he really does not know what he needs or wants at that new institution.
- k.) Pay overhead on a grant. Some large specialized organizations go to universities and ask them to pursue certain lines of inquiry. It is something that they want done, and therefore they should definitely pay the university for doing it. Examples can be found in the fields of cancer research, polio research, etc. The Rockefeller Foundation does not do this. A man comes to RF with the full approval of his institution and says he wants to do research in something; RF then offers to help that man and institution do the thing they want to do - which means we will give them assistance in part, but not that we will pay the whole bill. We are not asking the man or the university to do something we want done, and so we do not pay the overhead.

We are responding to their own desires, and are partners.

l.) Pay the travel expenses of a wife. However, we do cheat on this a little. If we are paying the expenses of a distinguished man, we offer him a flat rate figured on first-class travel and a reasonably generous living estimate. He can travel second-class and bring his wife if he wants to use the money that way.

m.) Pay the expenses for a man for short-time attendance at large international congresses. This has a long history. Right after the war it was clear that communication was badly impaired, and so RF made grants to help scientists get in contact with each other. However, this is just like the situation of people who want to write books - everybody, but everybody, wants to attend congresses. For about the first three or four years after the war we helped out and then we stopped. There are two explanatory remarks that should be made. The first is that if a man is going to go to a big congress in, say, Edinburgh and if he tells us that what he really ought to do is to visit certain specifically named laboratories in Europe, we sometimes say that if he can get his fare over and back to attend the congress, we will make a supplementary grant which will enable him to stay longer. The man should know pretty definitely who he feels should be seen and have a good reason for wanting to see them. The second remark is that although we are not interested in the big formal international congresses, and least of all in paying someone's passage to attend, we are interested in scientific meetings of a very different character. The sort of meetings we do assist have the following characteristics: they are international; they are small (WW's definition of small is about twelve or fifteen people and certainly not over thirty); they last for one or two weeks rather than two or three days; they are held in some nice, quiet, congenial, pleasant surrounding (like Amherst or Dartmouth); they contain representatives of several different classical fields; they are not meetings the titles of which are "Organic Chemistry" or any other formal classical label, but rather meetings which are concerned with a problem that brings various disciplines together (for example, protein structure); they are informal, small, working symposia. RF helps these as a sort of counter-movement to the size of the big meetings and as a contribution to the resynthesis of science. An excellent example of this sort is the Cold Spring Harbor Symposia.

5. Discourteous Promptness

An important request should never be declined immediately, even though it seems very clear to the officer that it will eventually have to be declined. It is wise to say: "Thank you for telling us about this. I will of course discuss this with my colleagues. I have to tell you in all friendliness that I do not think you have much chance, but I will of course present your case." A declination should then not leave the office for at least a week, so that there is sufficient time for us to roll the matter around in our minds, and be perfectly sure that the obvious necessity for declination is indeed inescapable.

Do not ever give optimistic advice; never say, "I think your chances are good." People take cheerfulness as encouragement, and optimism as approval. If you are conservative and then the man gets the grant, he is happy, satisfied, and thinks the officers very stout fellows; but if you are the least bit optimistic and he does not get his grant, then he is likely to feel you have let him down.

The power of declination is one which must be guarded and protected, such phrases as: "I will of course be glad to discuss it with my colleagues, even though I am afraid your chances are poor", or "I will be glad to submit this to the committee", tend to depersonalize negative decisions - which is a good idea. In fact, all indications, good or bad, should be depersonalized as much as possible.

6. How is Aid Extended?

There are various types of action. The officer must of course know these types, but there is no reason why he need explain them to a visitor beyond helping him apply for the right type.

a.) Actions taken by Trustee are commonly known in our office as appropriations and are the result of a vote by the Trustees at an Executive Committee Meeting held six times a year (in September, October, January, February, May, and June) or at a regular Board Meeting in December and April. An officer cannot normally get anything into an Executive Committee Meeting unless he has the proposal pretty well matured a month before the time of the Meeting. For the two full Board Meetings, something like a month and a half is necessary.

b.) Another type of action is an officers' action, which sets up a grant-in-aid or a fellowship. Officers' actions become effective when they have received three signatures: the Divisional signature (normally by WW), which is the first one and means that NSA approves the action; that of the Comptroller, which means that there is money in a suitable fund to protect the grant, and that this grant comes within the legal purposes of the resolution that set up the fund; and that of Central Administration, which means that they have looked at the action and seen that all is in order. A week (or sometimes a little less) is normally necessary to get these actions through (but if in a great rush, they can be gotten through in a day or even an hour). A grant-in-aid cannot extend for more than three years and cannot involve more than \$10,000 in any one action. A recommendation for support beyond three years must be considered by the Principal Officers and later by the Executive Committee of the Trustees.

c.) Another type of action is the allocation, which has an upper limit of \$500 and requires one signature, which is Divisional (again normally WW's). The allocation fund is set up by the Division out of its grant-in-aid money and is \$5,000 in any one year in any one Division. This is a very useful type of action. Allocations should be made with the greatest care because the responsibility rests almost wholly on the one officer recommending the action. A good example of a sensible allocation is that of a man from Sweden who has just finished a fellowship and is on his way home; he stops in New York and visits the Bell Telephone Laboratory, where he is shown a wonderful and very new direct current amplifier dependent upon a vacuum tube not yet on the market; Bell has some of these tubes available, however, and the Swede needs three of them at \$10 each to aid his experiments back home, but he has no dollars, and so NSA makes an allocation of \$30 to enable him to take the tubes home. This is admittedly "chicken feed"; but it may keep a very good rooster alive and crowing. Another example of the use of this

fund is to help a man, say a Britisher who is already in the United States, to see certain people it would profit him to see but whom he could not see without dollar aid.

7. What NSA Officer?

Within the DNSA what officer should a visitor talk to? Obviously, if there is only one officer here, he is the man. If everyone is here and a man simply turns up unexpectedly at the front door, AEB generally decides to whom a visitor should speak. There is partly a geographical and partly a functional division of responsibility. If the man is a European, this is in the first instance the responsibility of GRP. If the applicant is from the United States, WW handles him. Dusty or Dutch handle Latin America. Any place else in the world goes to WW. Dutch is concerned with agriculture. GRP has special technical competence in embryology, tissue culture, and endocrinology. Dusty's special field is animal parasitology. John is concerned with entomology. JGH takes the general field of plant science. As minor enthusiasms WW is specially interested in communication theory and mechanical translation.

8. Applications

The visitor will ask what is the procedure of making an application. He will also ask when he should make an application. There are no application forms nor is there any special time. Summer, however, is not a good time, for there will be no consideration until September. We do most of our work during the academic part of the year. It is wise to tell the applicant not to expect too snappy an answer. RF prefers to move slowly, or at least objects to being rushed; for the percentage of error certainly rises with speed. As there are no forms, the best way to begin is for the visitor to talk about his ideas while he is at RF. What is he doing? What does he want to do? What does he need in order to do what he wants to do? Eventually, he should write us a letter. The letter does not need to be long or complicated but it should tell us the following:

- a.) We are more interested in men than in anything else; and so we would like to have a good curriculum vitae and a list of publications of the person or persons important in this project. Do not send us the publications, however, for we can always ask you for them if there is something we especially want to read and cannot obtain through our own library.
- b.) Give us a descriptive statement of your problem or of your field of inquiry. We are really more interested in a description of your field of inquiry than in a special or detailed problem. What are you interested in, and why? The statement should be more than one page and less than five. You should do two things in this: First you should start out with several paragraphs which are fairly general and fairly understandable to anyone, saying what you are interested in and why you think it is important (in words that can be used to the Board of Trustees - not technical). We can use this in our docket, and we also find this most illuminating about the applicant himself. Second you should let yourself go and get more technical for two or three pages of description.
- c.) Tell us about the over-all budget of this activity. What funds are available and from what sources? This includes a description of what contribution your own institution is making. The institution should be interested before we are interested. Tell a little bit

about what hopes of continuity you may have - what chances of continued support.

d.) Tell us about the physical facilities available to you.

e.) If and when a formal request develops, this should be forwarded to the RF through the office of the highest authority of the institution in question (President, Rector, Vice Chancellor...), and his letter of transmittal should indicate that, he is informed about the request, he approves of the request, and his institution is prepared to accept and administer the grant if made.

Finally, we usually tell a visitor who enquires about written application that we practically never depend alone on written material. If the nature of the preliminary written approach justifies further study on our part, one of the officers will visit the man in his own laboratory, to meet his people, and to see with his own eyes the circumstances, handicaps, and progress of his work.

9. Did He Get a Chance?

One important thing is that you want to be sure that when this visitor goes out of the office, he has had a chance to tell all his story. Do not hog the conversation with statements of your own philosophy. Ask the man before he leaves: "Have you had a chance to say the things you want to say?"

B. Fellowships

A great many of the oral enquiries have to do with one aspect or another of fellowships. The main topics for persons seeking fellowships are: *

1. What kind of fellowships does the RF support?
Research - experience - training - NRC
2. Who is eligible?
Post-maturity - sponsorship - plan
3. For how long?
Policy on renewals - training fellowships
4. What do they pay?
Rates - wives - family allowance
5. Method of applying
6. Do we supplement Fullbright, etc?

The main topics for persons already holding fellowships are: *

1. Change of plan: authorization for new travel
2. Extensions
3. Lecturing or other ways of earning fees
4. Acceptance of position in country of study
5. Increase of stipend
6. Travel of wife

*This section is to have the explanatory paragraphs filled in by HMM and GRP.

7. Medical care
8. Books or minor supplies
9. Research aid at termination of fellowship
10. Tax status of stipend

C. Please Arrange a Visit

We are of course glad to be of any possible service in arranging visits of qualified scholars to universities, special laboratories (such as The Rockefeller Institute), or certain commercial laboratories (such as Bell Telephone Laboratories, where the construction and management is so specially good as to be very instructive to a person who is responsible for designing a laboratory); but we normally restrict these activities to persons who are involved in our grants. Certainly we restrict such activities to persons of whose competence, character, and purpose we are quite sure.

This last point requires mentioning, for persons have turned up, quite unknown to us, and asked, "Please arrange a complete tour of the DuPont Laboratories for us."

D. Supplemental Aid to a Traveller

In these days of air travel and Government subsidy for certain types of meeting, it is not unusual for an able European, for example, to be in the United States for a few days, with no dollar resources whatsoever which might enable him to extend the stay. He may, at the meeting, for example, learn of two or three laboratories where work is in progress which is of the highest interest and value to him.

This is a typical opportunity for a director's allocation. But the total amount available for such use is very limited, so that we can deal only with the most outstanding cases.

E. I Just Happened to be in New York

We get numerous calls from persons who drop in for no reasons other than friendliness, interest, and appreciation. Sometimes a man who had a fellowship many years ago will stop in to express his indebtedness. Also certain smooth operators (Deans of graduate schools, research directors, presidents, or even the scientists themselves) make a regular practice of coming to see us every time they are in town, presumably on the hypothesis that presence, rather than absence, makes the heart grow fonder.

F. I Want a Job

Once in a while a person turns up looking for a job with the RF. These persons can usually be handled by AEB. Needless to say, the persons who just drop in to get a job almost surely are unlikely material.

G. Recommendations

Sometimes the head of a department or a dean will come in to get us to recommend someone for a vacancy they have. Generally speaking, it is not advisable for RF officers to be very active in helping move persons from one post to another. At the worst, there might be an assumption that we have a special interest in the person, and that therefore there is some implication of future support from us. At the least, we may very likely be hurting the institution the man leaves.

NSA pretty generally declines to write any letters recommending personnel. When a man comes in to talk, and if the situation can clearly be kept very unofficial and informal, then we do try to be helpful; and chiefly by furnishing facts and judgments about men whose names are suggested by the caller, rather than by us.

H. Who Owns Equipment Bought under RF Grants?

Once in a while a scientist who has had a grant from the RF, and who is moving to another institution, asks if he can take with him some equipment bought from the RF grant. The answer is that this equipment belongs to the institution, not to the man. The institution is completely free to do what it chooses - retain the equipment, let the man take it with him, or anything else.

Warren Weaver
August, 1952

copy to JSH
JGM
KW

" circulated HMM, JRP, WW