

Conversation with 39 year old white female, White Pine, Tennessee (Transcription)

What's a typical day at work like

MC: There's no such thing as a typical day in the personnel field. There is just no such thing. You take it as it comes. Uh the first thing that I do when I go to work, I check all the offices and talk to everybody and see where everybody is and what they're doing, what kind of mood they're in. (uh-huh) Then I go to the plant and I stay in the plant at least thirty minutes to an hour during the morning, and then I come back to my office and do the paperwork and interview people, hire people, discipline people, counsel people, do the public relations work for the company, anything that happens to come along. Are you familiar with the personnel field?

M: No

MC: Well, any time the door to that office opens, well, it's open all the time because we have an open door policy there. I want the people to come to me anytime they feel like it (uh-huh) for any reason. But every time somebody walks through the door or the phone rings, it's an entirely different situation, entirely different problem, and it has to be handled in an entirely different manner. (hmm) Everything from health problems,

*subject deletion

65

Library of Congress

VIII4-6

to personal problems to work problems, discipline problems, legal problems. It's just one right after the other, so there is no way you can say there is a typical day in anything. (uh-huh) I may start out a day doing reports or paperwork and wind up never pick up a pencil, (hmm) because the people demand my time. There's only two things that I do on a routine basis, and that's go in and spend at least an hour in the plant every morning, at least an hour in the plant every afternoon, because we work a three shift operation, and I want to make myself available in the mornings to the people on day shift. So if they've got problems or questions and, about their benefits, of course, all this comes under the personnel department, or anything, I want them to know that I'm there. (uh-huh) And then the afternoon, when the shift changes, oh, about three thirty, four o'clock, I do the same thing, and when I'm doing that, I'm also checking for safety hazards and improvements could be made, and see if people are wearing their safety equipment, or if there's anything, any danger to 'em at all. Or if things are going smoothly, the orders are going like they should. I guess I'm more or I-, uh more or less a liaison sic between the people and top management, presidents of the company, general managers. All our general managers are imports, so to speak, and they take me as one of the natives, you know. I'm one of them. So they'll talk to me.

M: I see, is there any kind of a division there, say, a psychological division, between the local people and the other people or does everybody get along well?

Mc: Oh, everybody gets along well. The people that are at the plant in management have been there, with the exception of the general manager, for quite some time, and they've blended themselves into the local atmosphere. (hmm) Most of the people that work at the plant the plant is about five miles from here, (uh-huh) and it's centrally located between White Pine and Morristown, and a lot of our people working at the plant come from White

Library of Congress

Pine, simply because of physical location. It's easy, you know. It's a good place for them to work. It doesn't take but a few minutes to get back and forth, and then some of 'em are from Morristown, so I'd say it's about equally divided between Jefferson County

76

VIII4-7

and Hamblen County. Now, we have quite a few people from Cocke County working out there, (uh-huh) but not an appreciable percentage.

M: Uh-huh. What's the most difficult thing you have to do?

Mc: Discipline someone. I hate to do it. I hate to do it. I'd rather joke with 'em or play with 'em or work with 'em or help 'em, but when it comes to disciplining someone I, forget it, I won't fire anyone. I've fired two people in my life. Our foreman do all that. TEhy, they fire the people if they need it. Course, now, we're unionized and that has to go through union procedure before you can fire someone. (uh-huh, uh-huh) But I hate to fire someone or to discipline someone. I guess I kind of feel like I've failed because it's my decision as to who is hired and who's not hired, you know, (uh-huh) and I feel like when I have to fire someone, I've, I goofed somewhere along the line. Course, I think I should bat a thousand, but you can't bat a thousand in that field. Our turnover percentage is surprisingly low, though. (hmm) For the year, it was only like point six, and that included people we laid off. (uh-huh) It's a good place to work. We, I try to keep it on a family basis (uh-huh) I guess I more or less set the tone for the whole thing, but I like to, to keep it to where, if a man wants to bring his family, he's not ashamed to bring his family, (uh-huh) and if he wa-, uh, if a, a lady wants to bring her husband and children, fine. Show 'em the plant. And I try to hire people of the caliber that, if a lady sees one of her co-workers, one of her male co-

Library of Congress

workers on the street, she's not ashamed to introduce this person to her husband, and vice versa. (uh-huh) And I like it that way, and it works out real well. We have very, very few failures in that area. (hmm) Of course, you know, any time you're working with a group of people, somebody going to blow it every once in a while but very rarely.

M: Oh sure. I guess it was at #87-9 is M telling about <unintelligible text> experience telling people they were being let go. and that was teh major reason.

Mc: Yeah, now he was uh with the <unintelligible text>, which is a, a, a different thing from <unintelligible text>(??). Uh Daniel's, of course, is under con-

90

VIII4-8

trac to to do the building work, and I was familiar with <unintelligible text> work then. I remember when <unintelligible text> was in the Army, my husband wrote a letter to his commanding officer in order to get him released from the Army on an early out, I think they called it. He has to have employment, or the guarantee of employment before he could be released on an early out, so my husband wrote a letter and said that he would hire him, let him come back to work for him. But just did not like to tell people, you know, that they were terminated or things like that, and I can understand that, I really can.

M: I would resign before telling anybody myself. I just couldn't see myself coming up with the words to do it.

Library of Congress

MC: I fired one woman point blank on the spot because of a conduct problem she had, and I, that's, I didn't regret that one. She was causing problems with everybody else and doing it deliberately, and I had to, quotation marks, let one of my secretaries resign. I gave her the option of resigning. I couldn't condone her conduct in a public place, and the way she was acting. I just don't go for that kind of stuff, so I gave her the option of resigning, and it took me three days to steel myself to do this, because she was such a cute kid, just really a precious kid, (hmm) but a kid and one I couldn't control. I'd tried everything I could think of, you know. Even sitting down and telling her point blank "This is not going to get it, What you're doing is got to stop." But, I had talked to her for about three months <gap>, (uh-huh) and she wouldn't listen, so I didn't, didn't have a choice. I just couldn't see that kind of example.

M: What kind of an impact has american <unintelligible text> had on White Pine?

Mc: <unintelligible text> I guess, is the primary moving force behind White Pine, Newport, and parts of Morristown. I think <unintelligible text> now, let's see now, I, I'm having to search back in my memory. I think it was nineteen forty eight when <unintelligible text> came into being. Up until that time, this was strictly rural farm area, as far a I can remember, I was in and out during this periods of time. (uh-huh) There was no industry. There was the furniture factories in Morristown, (yeah) and I think maybe <unintelligible text>

VIII4-9

may have had this Industrial Carving up here. I'm not even sure of that. I, excuse me, I know he's been here a long time, but with the coming of <unintelligible text>, that brought steady wages, steady jobs, and brought more money into the community, which, well, you know what b ringing money into a community will do. White Pine, I think the population

Library of Congress

then in that time might have been somewhere around four to eight hundred, something in that neighborhood. Now, those aren't exact figures. It's really not grown all that much between that time and now, but there's more money here. There's more affluence. At that period of time, there was about three or four families here that had money. I mean lots of money. And the rest of 'em were, you know, tradesmen, uh carpenters, bricklayers, welders, uh farmers. The pathetic thing about White Pine at that period of time, and this happened to the people in my age group. When you got out of school, the first thing you did was head for Cleveland, Ohio, or Detroit, Michigan, to work in the mills and the factories. Some of 'em went to New Jersey to work on the big farms and things that they had out there, people who had quit school early, you know, and didn't have really the educational background. (uh-huh) NOW, I know when my husband graduated high school, and he was in the top of his class, I believe it was about two weeks after he graduated, he cut out and went to Cleveland, Ohio, because it was the only place to go to find a job. There was just none in this area. But, and you couldn't get on at <unintelligible text> at the time unless you knew somebody or, (hmm) you know, one of those deals, (uh-huh) sort of a domino thing. And, of course, they just so many jobs at any place, and they're very selective in their hiring. So a lot of the kids had to leave town to find a job. But <unintelligible text> has been good for this whole community. I'd say for an area within twenty five miles of <unintelligible text>, you could draw a circle around <unintelligible text> twenty five miles, (uh-huh) and a large percentage of the people in that circle either now or have in the past drawn their livelihood from <unintelligible text>. I'd say at least sixty percent, (hmm) and probably a greater percentage than that has been affected by <unintelligible text> in that their fathers worked there, (uh-huh) or their brothers or sisters. Anyway, <unintelligible text> has in some way contributed to the economic support

117

VIII4-10

Library of Congress

of at least seventy, sixty to seventy percent of this ar-, people in this area, in some form or other. (hmm) It's huge.

M: I've never been out there.

Mc: Well, it, it is absolutely huge. I think, now I'm not even sure of these figures now because I haven't updated my own research figures lately. There is around fuor thousand people working there. (hmm) NOw, they've had cutbacks and layoffs and things like this. I'm not even sure, you know, what the figure is, (uh-huh) but four thousand would be roughly correct. Of course, you know, with the coming of Enka, other industries come in, service industries. As a matter of fact, one, the company that I work for is here partially because of American Enka. Of course, the company that I work for has many, many plant sites, and they built this one to service the local industry, because it's cheaper to build and operate a plant than it is to ship the product in when you're competing on a local market like we are, with a very limited product. <unintelligible text> they've brought people in here, families in here. As the families grew, they branched out and went into businesses and, of course, they've, since that time, they've got a very active chamber of commerce in Morristown, (uh-huh) and they, they're just dragging business in left and right. And, you know, each time a business comes in, there's offshoots (uh-huh) in many directions. A business makes an impact in the community. I'd say that uh <unintelligible text> has been the primary force behind the development of this whole area.

M: Well, are there any other industries in the area of any size.

Mc: Oh, yes, there's many. Many. Let's see, there's uh <unintelligible text> I;m sure you're familiar with the <unintelligible text>.

Library of Congress

M: In Morristown. Yeah.

Mc: Others. <unintelligible text> in Morristown, and they're building one in Jefferson City and another one in Greeneville, (hmm) which is, Greeneville, I think, 's thirty five miles up the road. (uh-huh) Okay, their headquarters are in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and they are now a

129

VIII4-11

division of North American Philips Industries, which I'm sure you're familiar with North American Philips. It's one of the largest conglomerates of industries, I guess, in the United States. I don't even know where (whether?) they rank them still, but they are huge. (uh-huh) Okay, we have uh furniture manufacturers running out the ears. I guess Morristown and this particular area is the hub of the furniture indus- in the Southeastern United States. I think maybe I would go a step further and say that probably one of the major furniture industries in the nation. Right here in White Pine, do you know how many furniture manufacturers we have right here in this little town?

M: I've heard there are two or three.

Mc: Okay, we have uh <unintelligible text>. We have uh, only recently changed his name, <unintelligible text>. And we have <unintelligible text>. Right down the road, which, five miles, right behind the plant where I work, they've recently put in another furniture factory. It's called <unintelligible text>. They manufacture upholstered furniture too. Now, these people that I've just named manufacture all upholstered furniture. (uh-huh) You have

Library of Congress

<unintelligible text>, which is a-a-jor, major uh supplier of upholstered furniture for the world. You've seen their product on TV, giving away on game shows. You've seen it advertised in your leading magazines, Uh Home, House and Garden, things of this nature, you know. Beautiful furniture.