

Spring Romance: Industry Lures the Engineer

Invading college campuses across the nation, representatives of industry are engaged in a recruitment race that makes football coaches look like pikers.

By BILL FRYDAY

SHORTAGE.

In our time and our country the word would seem to have little place. But the fact remains that America—bulging with people, food, products—has come up with a shortage where it can hurt most. We haven't enough engineers to go around.

At about the same time as O. U. engineers were celebrating by ritual their annual mid-March Week, approximately 50,000 other engineers were rallying in convention in New York City. At this convention, which was the annual meet of the Institute of Radio Engineers, a serious and intriguing struggle occurred between hundreds of companies. Badly in need of engineers, the firms set up exhibits, rented hotel suites, poured liquor glasses brimful and talked hard and fast to every visiting engineers they could get to listen. Engaged in what *TIME* magazine called "spring wooing," the companies were attempting to hire engineers away from competitors.

Why is industry forced to resort to such tactics? Simply because the nation's universities and colleges are not producing nearly enough young engineers to meet industry's demands and needs.

Dr. W. H. Carson, dean of O. U.'s College of Engineering, recently disclosed the fact that the number of company interviews set up on campus consistently outnumber students graduating from his department.

If there is little behind-the-scenes competition between company representatives visiting O. U., then there is plenty of open luring in evidence. Besides regular end-of-semester interviews, there are the brochures which choke bulletin boards in the College's hallways, large advertisements in the *Oklahoma Daily* student newspaper, and a pandemonium of competitive ads in the engineers' magazine, *Sooner Shamrock*.

Contents of the latter publication are most indicative of the struggle on the local scene. More than 40 ads—most of them full page—in the March issue ran the gamut of recruiting methods. Some of the "pitches" made by the companies combine, in a few slickly phrased paragraphs, several

silver linings which it is hoped will draw engineers in the preferred direction.

For example, one *Shamrock* ad read thusly: "(Our) salary program is planned with a long-range view for your career . . . You are considered for all new or related jobs and promotions throughout the Company. There are opportunities for you . . . in 150 cities in 45 states, plus many foreign countries. (Our) outstanding benefit program for you and your family includes all the usual life, accident and illness insurance and pension plans, plus a Savings and Stock Bonus Plan and discounts on (our) home appliances." So far this ad has offered salary, opportunity for advancement, travel and employee benefits. In addition there are other paragraphs touching on the company's good reputation, the huge range of jobs it offers, personnel development programs, opportunities for advanced studies, a little bragging about the "outstanding men" already employed by the company, and an assurance that the company's future will mean growth, growth, growth. (Incidentally, this firm already is one of the world's largest.)

So the prospect is given much to think about. In fact, with so many rewards in the offing he is dazzled.

The majority of the "pitches" mentions at least three or four of the above listed advantages. Yet most do not mention all, for there seems to be the presumption that today's graduating engineer has come to take many of the advantages for granted. Still, most of the companies continue to mention the magic word "money," or at least to imply it.

"In this industry," reads an aircraft ad, "any area of engineering study offers you a profitable and unlimited future."

"You can move ahead," reads another, "in both position and salary, as fast and as far as your talents, ambitions and achievements can qualify you."

"If you are looking for a rewarding career . . . you will find it (with us)."

A few firms decide not to be subtle about the lure of money, then go further by re-

mind the graduate what money can buy. The most outspoken—again, the ad of an aircraft corporation—is difficult to resist: "Engineers . . . look ten years ahead! Will your income and location allow you to live in a home like this . . ." (The dots lead to a photograph of a three or four-bedroom home, fetchingly landscaped.) ". . . spend your leisure time like this?" (Another photo depicts two men, probably engineers, standing on a sun-drenched golf green.) "They can . . . if you start your career now (with us)!"

Another: "Minutes away from a WEALTH of modern advantages—suburban living and recreation; famed New Jersey resort areas; New York City's scientific, cultural and entertainment centers; leading graduate schools. (Our laboratories') location . . . is a dream spot for young engineers, etc." This one features a drawing of Manhattan's skyline looming beside some lush hills and a lake. There is also portrayed a man swinging at a golf ball, a sailboat riding a lake, and a man and woman in bathing suits walking up a beach.

And one headlines, "He travels the world," meaning the firm's own employees.

Excitement in one's work is another appeal. Most often the company in need of engineers chooses to invoke this sensation through the suggestion of challenge. Therefore, one encounters such clauses as "If you are interested in a challenging career," or "Few areas of engineering or science offer greater problems," or "Unlimited challenge for your ability and training."

It has been suggested that today's young man is more interested in security than adventure. Nevertheless, some firms' overtures, though harmonious moneywise, are laden with adventurous notes.

Huge gray and black letters spell out NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT against a picture of the H-bomb in full mushroom. An electronics company speaks of "big" work. A scientific laboratory states, "(Here is) another example of exciting work at (our station) . . . break-

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ing problem barriers . . . Pioneering activities in the unexplored realms of nuclear power, nuclear rocket engines, and controlled thermonuclear power have been added to (the) weapons program . . . These activities exemplify the imaginative approach . . ."

Most often competitors remember that this crop of engineers has an eye peeled for the chance to advance. Most claim advances come relatively fast and easy for the employee who tries. Some dangle the idea in the engineer's face: "What is your future in the executive line-up? Do you have ideas? Are you willing to take responsibility? Can you convince your friends of what you believe? . . . If you are that kind of man, see (us)." And, "Advance while you're young . . . (We) offer a nine-month program of job rotation which prepares young men . . . for key responsibilities."

Comparatively new companies are making their bids, too, right along with the bigger boys. "Join the engineering team of a young and growing organization," says a controls company, while another states,

"(Our firm) is a 'growth' company . . . where you cannot 'get lost in the crowd.'"

One of the best appeals, feel some advertisers, is that which tells the prospect he is or will be respected in some manner. Here is a hodge-podge of respect taken from several ads:

"In a world where understanding is the only hope, it is needful that we pay tribute to the engineer . . . his knowledge, his compassion, his humility . . . (Our industry) needs engineers, and does not overhire. You won't be regimented. To the *creative* engineer: . . . You'll find working with us fulfilling in stimulation, achievement . . . If you're the persnickety type, come to work for us! We want YOU! The kind of engineer who is never satisfied with doing a job that will just 'get by.' The kind of engineer who constantly strives for perfection . . . The Creative Engineer!"

And there are those who each year watch the crop of young men leave "home territory" to take jobs in another climate. A gas company, attempting to keep some of them here, warns, "Don't miss the diamonds in your own back yard!" and proceeds to relate the tale of the ambitious young man who sought his fortune in distant lands, only to discover that he'd overlooked a fortune at home. By the same token, a local

steel firm says, "As an architectural or civil engineering graduate you can have a part in the tremendous growth of the booming Southwest! Build yourself a better future!"

So it goes. Other offers are made—good research facilities, modern equipment, profit sharing, diversification, top experience, and the like all keynoting them.

In fact, listings of offers are so thick that probably the engineer finds unusually refreshing the very few ads which make these statements: "(Our firm) is looking for young graduate engineers and technically-trained personnel. Why not arrange for an interview . . ." "Openings exist for engineers and scientists . . ." "No blue sky. Just black and white facts . . . No high flown promises or broad generalities. Our proposition: you and (we) should get together."

Simple or elaborate, the ads, brochures, interviews and all the rest of it make one thing pretty clear: pressure on the engineer graduating from O. U. and other institutions this year is terrific. As the shortage grows more acute, pressure will be heavier, and recruiting methods may take on a glitter heretofore unimagined. For the engineer is a wanted man, and there's a big reward for him.

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