

THE BOSS IS GOING TO SCHOOL*

*O.U.'s SUMMER EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

WITH so many Think!-provoking signs plastered about their offices, today's businessmen seem to have something like tomorrow's Big Brother watching over them. Despite the motto mania, there's one truism seldom found framed in the outer offices. It's the age-old saw, We learn by experience.

This truism is more feared than revered in business, in that experience seems to connote "mistakes." Mistakes are things which few businessmen can afford to make—especially for educational purposes.

Such a stern reality does not in the least qualify the necessity of Learning by Experience. But it has suggested to many educators—O.U.'s included—that businessmen could learn by involving themselves intellectually in the experiences of other businessmen.

Come June 15, O.U. will once again open its collegiate gates on a five-week course designed for businessmen who want to profit by the experiences of other businessmen. Now in its third year, the University of Oklahoma Executive Development program, sponsored by the College of Business Administration and the Extension Division, has a former student list of 60 (enrolled by their firms at \$600 per) who so far have come mostly from the upper-middle management ranks of Oklahoma's oil, utility, and Air Force organizations.

"Upper-middle management" is the term used by the program's newly-hired director, former Syracuse University business teacher, Howard T. Lewis.

"The men who enrol in our summer program usually are slated for top management positions," Lewis said. "The firms send them to us for what might be called 'broadening.' These men have demonstrated their business know-how while rising within limited areas of a firm, and the firm wants to promote them into its top positions. But first the firm wants its man to be able to cope with over-all problems in the best manner possible."

The 42 major universities in the nation which have graduated over 10,000 businessmen from similar courses, are nearly unanimous in agreement that the case history method is the best manner possible.

Lewis explains the method, which O.U. also employs, as being rather unique in education. For one thing, never during

the course are the businessmen given tests; primarily because there are no correct answers to the questions posed, only answers "most likely to succeed."

These answers the men arrive at by studying company case histories and then by discussing the pros and cons of the company's decisions. The teachers' main contribution is in keeping these experienced broncs bucking in the right corral.

One of the teachers, Business Management Research Professor Ronald B. Shuman, cited an example of their work:

"A problem which comes to my mind concerned a Pacific Coast company which had manufactured aircraft parts during the Second World War. The end of the war brought this company face to face with the swords-to-ploughshares problem which many companies faced at that time.

"This particular company looked over the variegated civilian items which they could possibly begin manufacturing; and they finally decided upon two items, carpet sweepers and light-weight metal ladders.

"With such a situation, the class is then asked—knowing what they've read of the company's financial situation, management, production system, and distribution, to comment on the decision that the firm made in changing from aircraft parts to sweepers and ladders.

"The question involves not so much a 'school solution' as it does a broader issue—what answers are intelligently sound and hold out the prospect of a profitable future for the enterprise."

Professor Shuman puts it even more succinctly: "I give them the facts and ask, What would you do and why?"

Shuman is one of four O.U. professors who will conduct classes this summer on administrative practices and human relations, business policy for widely diversified industries, financial management, and marketing administration. The other three professors are Assistant Dean of the Business School James Hagler and David Ross Boyd Professors William H. Keown and Othel D. Westfall.

A fifth, Edmund P. Learned, Professor of Business Administration, is a guest lecturer from the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, the school where the case history method for business exec-

utives first came into its own. Professor Learned will conduct case-history classes on social problems of the firm.

Another, but untitled instructor, is the University's IBM 650 computer. Used late in the five-week program in an exercise called "The Management Game," the computer provides the businessmen an opportunity to exercise their newly-developed capacities under pressure . . .

Director Lewis explains that the businessmen feed their decisions into the computer which in turn feeds them the profits or loss they will incur under known conditions of competition, production costs, and other determinates.

"It's one of the high points of the program," Lewis says.

Asked how businessmen act in what could conceivably become a mishmash of conventioning and second childhood, Lewis speaks in terms which would endear his enrollees to the heart of any boss.

"Despite the fact that we have no written work and that no report on their conduct is ever made to their companies, these men take their assignments quite seriously. They are, of course, top men in their fields, and they realize the implications of this schooling for their future."

Are most of the "students" college graduates?

"Most are," Lewis said, "but those that aren't are usually our most industrious participants."

Actually, the men have little time for the ruhr-rah activities for which college campuses seem to be renowned. Their four-and-a-half hours of classes in the air-conditioned Union building begin at 8:30 in the mornings, and after a casual lunch with the faculty and then afternoon case readings, the formal studies end with a meeting of assignment groups (about six to a group). These groups try to bring particular aspects of the next day's problem into better focus.

Lewis, who has spent most of this semester interesting firms in sending some of their top executives to the summer course, is enthusiastic about this year's class; and expects an enrolment equal to the two previous classes.

He's learned by the experience of other directors that teaching businessmen is an expanding and worthwhile business.