

"SELLING AIEE MEMBERSHIP"

(Remarks by an Oldtimer, Overhead at the October meeting of the Membership Committee, in Chicago)

Those of us who have been members of AIEE for many years feel that the values in such membership are obvious. We take it for granted that anyone who calls himself an electrical engineer should see for himself that he ought to be a member of AIEE. Like many of the other things that we value most highly in life, we are likely to take AIEE for granted and seldom think it is necessary to stop and "count our blessings" and reaffirm our confidence in the importance of what we are doing. Many of us accepted AIEE as we accepted our family, religion, or our politics, without too much conscious thought going into the reasons why we joined. This seems to become more the case with the passing years.

Some of us joined AIEE a long time ago. Life was simpler in those days. There were not so many organizations to join. We were pretty sure we could use all the help any organization could give us to find a job, and keep it, and get ahead in it. As the years pass, our judgment is confirmed and our attachment to the organization becomes greater especially as we contribute more to it and depend more upon it. But in this complex world today, it is apparent that what to us seems obvious is not so to everyone. Our membership includes less than half of the total electrical engineers in the United States, according to the census figures. It is also true that over half of the electrical engineers in our country today have graduated from college in the last twelve years. During that same period, we have admitted to the Institute as Associate Members less than half as many as have newly graduated from college. There is a market for AIEE memberships. The better than 60,000 electrical engineers I spoke of a moment ago, graduated in the last 12 years from accredited engineering colleges. They are all eligible for membership, as Associate Members, in AIEE. There is a market for AIEE membership. There are at least thirty or forty thousand potential members fully qualified.

Perhaps AIEE is big enough, or already too big. Do we need any more members? Unless the Institute is going to die slowly, beginning now, it is obvious that we must have new members, particularly among the younger men who have graduated recently. We must add them in numbers which will not only replace the loss of older members by retirement and death, but which will also keep AIEE abreast of the growth of the profession in numbers as well as in new technical developments which are inevitably in the hands of young men.

We have then a product of whose value we are confident. We need to sell it for the continued health and well-being of the organization, and we have a large market for it. In these complex and stressfull times there are other organizations and many other elements crying for the attention of the same people who we may feel at times ought just automatically and inevitably be interested in what we are doing, or what we have to sell. There are so many good jobs going hunting for young electrical engineers these days that there is not the incentive to associate himself with an organization in the hope of getting thereby help in finding, or holding, or progressing in a job.

The simple fact is that new members are not seeking admission to the Institute. A selling job needs to be done. The Membership Committee of AIEE, by accepting its appointment, has obviously undertaken to do that job. It has undertaken to present the desirability, the importance, and the many values of AIEE membership to this very considerable group of good prospects who are thoroughly eligible but to whom the invitation to join has not been put with enough emphasis, or attractiveness, to make the desirability of membership clear. Perhaps indeed, it hasn't been put at all. Two very capable young electrical engineers dropped in my office just recently and asked for membership application blanks. They told me that they had been employed for over two years in one of our largest electrical manufacturing organizations and living and working in a city which is the headquarters of one of our oldest and finest Sections. They had just never been invited to join AIEE. They began to worry about whether something was wrong with them that their "best friends wouldn't tell them".

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Authorities on the subject say that successful salesmanship depends on the following four requirements:

- 1) Know your product
- 2) Know your customer, particularly in relation to his needs and applications for your product.
- 3) Believe in your product.
- 4) Work your territory.

These are four essentials of successful salesmanship. I think we might spend a few minutes seeing if they are applicable to successful selling of AIEE membership.

First of all, what is our product? That is the same as asking what is AIEE? That seems almost too obvious to answer; and yet I get letters from members who have been appointed to various committees in AIEE who apparently have not thought through the purposes and objectives of the Institute to answer it for themselves. One thing that has to be understood, to begin with, is that AIEE is a non-profit, scientific, and educational institution. Even the tax collector concedes this. It is, however, something of which we have to remind ourselves. The business of AIEE is the discovery, recording, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. It has essentially the same high calling and purpose as a university or college. It enjoys the same legal position as a church or a school. There is no reason why anyone should feel called on to apologize for the purpose and program of AIEE, nor for urging membership on a qualified electrical engineer.

The Constitution says this purpose is the "advancement of the theory and practice of electrical engineering and the allied arts and sciences and the maintenance of a high professional standing among its members." The theory and practice of electrical engineering resides in the minds and skills of men and in the records they have made and preserved for posterity. The right of any culture or profession to grow and prosper, even to continue its existence, depends on its ability to transmit and communicate its purpose and program, and its accumulated knowledge, to future generations. This is the work of education, and AIEE is an educational institution.

The maintenance of a high professional standing is a matter of principle, conscience, and spirit. It is a matter of ethics and morals, the highest expression of which is found in religion. There is every reason why, in the eyes of the law, our organization should be classified as educational and should enjoy the same tax privileges as churches and schools.

Now we all know these things. Perhaps we don't stop to think about them, but if we are going to transmit this knowledge to other people, and persuade them to want to join with us, we will have to think about them consciously and be sure, in our own minds, that we believe in them. We will have to formulate the means of transmitting that belief and enthusiasm to others. That is what I have here called "salesmanship." Actually, it is more than that, because its basic purpose is the sharing of something good and not the selling of something for profit.

It is not enough for a good salesman to know his product, and to be confident of its quality and to know how to communicate his enthusiasm for it. To do this successfully he must also know his customer. He must be equally confident that what he has to sell is good for his customer, as well as for himself. No reputable sales engineer would think of selling a piece of equipment or machinery to a customer unless he was sure that it would be applied properly and successfully to his customer's service. I think we have the same obligation to know the prospective members of AIEE. This is important to save embarrassment that arises when a prospective member is induced to make an application which cannot be accepted. It is wrong also to persuade some one to join AIEE if he is so situated or so constituted that he actually can't get the benefits out of it that he should. Many years ago I was in the motor truck business. A lot of farmers, small businessmen, and haulers were buying their very first trucks. We soon found we couldn't afford to sell a truck to a man unless we knew what he intended to use it for. The tendency was to buy a one-ton vehicle and put five tons on it; and then to spread the word that it was no good, when it broke down under the over-load.

I sometimes say that our Membership Committee is the Sales Department of AIEE, and the Board of Examiners is the Credit Department. Both are essential to a successful business organization. Both are necessary to the proper functioning of AIEE. I think there is no organization in which there isn't a certain amount of conflict between the enthusiasm of the Sales Department and the care and skepticism of the Credit Department. That is as it should be. In AIEE, we don't have to turn down many applications for membership. Less than 3% last year were found not to be acceptable. This speaks well for the care of the membership committeemen; because that number includes quite a few who made application "over the counter" without going through a Section Membership Committee. Now I know that some Section Membership Committeemen feel that they should get a full report, including all the reasons, whenever an application for admission or transfer is turned down by the Board of Examiners, or the Board of Directors. This has been discussed for years, but the conclusion has always been that an application that comes in without coming through the Section Membership Committee is a personal matter between the applicant and the Institute. It is not proper to report the action, or the reason for it, to anyone but the applicant himself. On the other hand, an application that comes in from a Membership Committee, and is not accepted, is reported back to the Membership Committee with the same information that goes to the applicant himself. This information is sometimes found not satisfactory. If the reasons for turning down the application are Constitutional; if the applicant has failed to meet some specific requirement of age or experience, or education; of course, that is easy to explain and will always be explained. On the otherhand, it must be remembered that most applications require four references. These references respond in confidence. They are promised that what they say about the applicant will not be divulged outside of the Board of Examiners, and in cases of particularly personal matters it is reported only anonymously to the Board of Directors. Now, when the application is denied on the basis of the reports of these references, chosen by the applicant himself, we cannot make a full report to the applicant on the reasons for his application not being accepted; and certainly we cannot make such a report to the Section Membership Committee. We would be violating the confidence of the references. If we expect to get frank responses from the references, we simply cannot do this. As a matter of fact, a lot of the delay, involved in getting applications acted on, arises from the fact that a certain number of references just never respond. It is suspected, that in some instances at least, these members are unwilling to recommend in the negative and give their reasons because they are not sufficiently sure that their statements will be held in confidence. There is no reason for this, but certainly there would be reason for it if such statements were freely reported to the applicant himself; and also to the local committee.

I said that there are less than 3% turn-downs in a year's time. This is exceedingly small. It seems to me, considering the large potential membership that is fully qualified, there is no reason to stir up so much interest and even emotion over the few marginal cases. The solution is for the Membership Committees to be sure that those they invite to apply are qualified for the grade for which they apply, and to avoid issuing invitations to the marginal cases. There is plenty of good grain in the middle of the field to be harvested, we don't need to glean in the corners for doubtful quality.

The business of getting to know the applicants is one of the high privileges of a Membership Committee. It can yield a great deal of satisfaction to the Committeemen to extend their acquaintance while bringing something worthwhile, especially to the new men who come into our business organizations and communities. Getting "to know the customer" can be very interesting and worthwhile.

The third point about successful salesmanship is the need to believe in your product. That means not only giving one's personal consent and allegiance on the basis of accumulated experience and knowledge which tend to set one's patterns of thinking and action and form one's conclusions in such a way that they are taken for granted. It is not enough to believe in your "product". It is necessary to know why you believe in it, and that means sitting down and thinking through again the meaning and purpose of AIEE and what it has to offer in the way of tangible benefits; and more particularly, what it has to offer in the way of opportunities which are not all tangible.

Every penny AIEE gets in income is spent in services of one kind or another to members. Members' dues for 1955-1956 totaled \$778,334.92. Total income (and expense) for the same year was \$1,475,812.37. The subscription price of ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING, plus one Bimonthly, to a non-member, which is about at cost, alone would be \$17.00 a year or more than the Associate Member dues. All publications are either included in dues, or sold at half-price to members.

A part of what an AIEE member gets out of his organization can be measured in dollars. We can see what a favorable deal that is. But over and above that, he shares the experience, and work, and effort, and the contributions of all his fellow electrical engineers in AIEE. If we were ever to try to evaluate in dollars the services of over 2500 members of our National Committees to say nothing of the District and Section and Subsection and Technical group committeemen who work and contribute to the Institute; it would run into millions. If we had to pay the authors of our papers, even at the modest rate paid by commercial magazines in the technical field, it would again add hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. All of this the new members gets for his very modest dues, which barely pay half of the out-of-pocket cost of providing the Institute's services. Over and above this he gets much more. One of our leading members contributed an article to ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING recently in which he characterized AIEE as a post-graduate school. Now, that is not at all a far-fetched concept. We have already seen that the purposes of AIEE are essentially the same as those of our best colleges. Our purpose is to contribute knowledge, to preserve that knowledge, and to disseminate it for the benefit of mankind. So AIEE is a post-graduate school. As such its tuition is negligible compared to what it offers, not only in technical knowledge but in social values and organizational skills and the development of acquaintances, contacts, and friendships.

The same author went on to say that in a specialized line of business such as his, he would normally have come into contact only with a limited number of electrical engineers engaged in the same line, or in the immediate fields of application of his work. Through AIEE he has come into contact with electrical engineers, not only all over the United States, Canada, Mexico and overseas, but also with electrical engineers in totally different specialties, with whom he would have had no occasion to have any dealings in his business. These contacts and acquaintances and friendships have been of immense personal value to him and have broadened even his specialized technical knowledge by contact with different fields where at least analogous problems exist.

I spoke of friendships through AIEE and, of course, we can all testify to what that has meant to us. Somehow, we need to make it clear to the prospective member, too. It is interesting to know that romance enters into the possibilities we have to offer. I don't think it would be entirely right to offer the young man a strong prospect of finding a wife by going to AIEE Meetings, but I assure you that it has happened. I have been carrying on a delightful correspondence with a young couple down in Phoenix, Arizona for several years. It began when one of our members wrote and told me that she had married another member of AIEE and that they were wondering whether they needed two copies of ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING coming into their home every month - didn't we have some kind of family membership. Neither she nor her husband wanted to give up membership in AIEE; but they thought there were certain duplications. Well, there is nothing in the Bylaws or Constitution to provide for family membership, but we worked out a deal by which they should both continue to pay dues and hold their regular memberships. Instead of two magazines, we would send them the Transactions and the Bimonthlies and other special publications to somewhat more than make up the difference. At the same time, we pointed out that AIEE might not grow at the expected rate if matrimonial mathematics were brought to bear on it-by means of which one plus one makes one - unless we could expect that there would in time be one to carry. So, if we were going to make this special arrangement, we would at least expect the prospects of a future member of AIEE. Well I want to tell you that this young couple made good. In about a year, I received an announcement of the birth of a son named Robert Louis Cook (RLC) and he is said to be resonating all over the place. He is now a year old. Just so none of you think this is a fabricated story, I am going to tell you to watch the magazine; because very shortly, I hope that you will be able to read this story and see the pictures of this young family - all AIEE members. But as I say, we must not oversell our product. Romance is possible and that's all we can say on that subject.

However, we should not leave the subject without pointing out that the answer to the man who says, "What do I get out of it?", is to detail some of these things that I have been talking about. They are very real. They represent a great deal more than he will put into it, in dues. Then he should be told that, if that is as far as his interests go; if he is only interested in what he will get out of it, AIEE is not interested in him. We really don't care whether he joins or not. We would just as soon he didn't. On the other hand, if his perfectly healthy and natural desire to know what he is going to get out of it is satisfied, and if, in addition, he intends to use AIEE as a channel for making his personal contribution to the good of the profession; if he wants to put his share into the great pool of information, effort, and skill that is being accumulated through the years by AIEE; then he is the man we want as a member.

Finally, a good salesman gets out and works his territory. Given a knowledge of the products, a knowledge of his customers' needs, and a firm belief that his product will serve those needs, the only thing that remains is to see the prospects. The most experienced salesmen will tell you that the number of their sales is in direct proportion to the number of calls they make. That, I believe, goes for selling memberships in AIEE. Let me say that this job of selling memberships in AIEE itself is not without its rewards. Contacts made, and a better understanding and knowledge achieved of other members, or prospective members, and the better understanding of AIEE itself; that one gets through describing it and selling it to somebody else are worth-while. There is no reason why it should not be made the basis of a certain part of one's social life. When new young couples come to the community; I don't see why a membership committeeman and his wife shouldn't call on them. It seems to me that it would lend a lot of meaning to AIEE and be a convincing piece of evidence of the interest that AIEE has especially in young engineers, I think we are sometimes a little too self-conscious to express this interest fully.

One of the most popular and meaningful slogans of salesmanship was coined by the famous Elmer Wheeler who advises, "Sell the sizzle rather than the steak". You have all sat in a restaurant and noticed the attention gotten by a sizzling steak being carried to a table. The sound and the smell of it always sells a lot more steaks. Now, of course, it takes more than the sizzle to make a steak. It takes a well-bred and well-fed steer, properly butchered, dressed, aged, refrigerated, and cooked or broiled. All of that goes into it. But the thing that really sells it is the sizzle. I think sometimes in connection with our AIEE work, and particularly in the membership work, we try to sell the whole damned slaughter-house on our first contact, rather than the "sizzle." We who are active in the Institute are naturally, interested in all of the organizational machinery and the statistics that go with it, and the committees and the meetings, the numbers of units, and one thing or another, and how they operate. Of course, that's interesting to us; and it is absolutely vital to the Institute. Without the ranch and the slaughter-house, the butcher-shop, the chef, and the kitchen, there wouldn't be any steak to sizzle. Nevertheless, the "sizzle" is what sells it, and we shouldn't overlook this fact.

Now in our terms what do we mean by "sizzle"? I would say the most important element of it is the obvious pleasure that the local members in the Sections and Subsections and Technical Groups of the Institute get out of their activities. These most immediately reach the "sight" and "smell" of the prospective member. There should be enough going on, and it should be of a nature that a sufficient number of people enjoy it, to have the "sound" and the "aroma" carry to the attention of non-members. Where the AIEE Section is a factor in the community life, and where AIEE's activities are such as to be stimulating and interesting and important to its own members, there will be "sizzle" to attract the prospective member. If these elements: "the Post-Graduate School", friendships and the like, are present; they are bound to "sizzle". It is not enough, of course, for the salesman to claim that they are there, if they are not. First of all, they have to be there, and second the salesman has to point them out and call them to the attention of the prospective customer and invite him around for a sample.

I look back on some of my earliest experience as a committeeman in a Section of AIEE; and I appreciate now some of the things that it did for me. I remember most vividly my experience on the "Attendance Committee". After the boss went home (he had the only telephone in the office) I used to go in there and start calling up my list of a dozen or more members of the AIEE Section to inquire as to whether they were going to the next meeting, and whether they were planning to drive, or whether they would like to have a ride with somebody else, who was driving. I should explain that this Section was scattered over a circle about a hundred miles across. Most of the time, we had to drive anywhere from 25 to 100 miles to the Section Meeting; so this matter of transportation was important. I learned a great deal. I learned many reasons why a man can't get to an AIEE Section meeting. I knew when the ore boats were being unloaded at the nearest port. I knew when there had been a break-down in the mill. I knew when the local power system had lost a line, or a transformer, or a generating unit. I also knew who was expecting a baby, and a lot of other interesting things. But the point is that I extended my knowledge and acquaintance through service to AIEE. That repaid me many times.

So, I believe, like every good salesmen, the Membership Committeeman needs to know his "product". That means also knowing the application of his "product" to his "customer's" needs, which means knowing his "customer", and the "customer's" qualifications to use the "product". He must believe in his "product" and know why he believes in it. Finally, and most important of all, he must get out and work his "territory"; See his "prospects"; and sell the "sizzle."