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Shall I Take Orders?

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Shall I Take Orders?

Genevieve A. Callahan, editor of Sunset Magazine, San Francisco, Calif., and an Iowa State home economics graduate, recently compiled a booklet, "Preparation for the Business Field of Home Economics." This is the first of a series of reprints from the booklet. It is published by the Home Economics in Business Group of the San Francisco Bay Region and may be obtained from "Sunset Magazine" or from Miss Alice Edwards, American Home Economics Association, Mills Building, Washington, D. C. Price 10c.

Many of the suggestions given for the tea room operator and the business executive are equally applicable to the home economist who entertains an idea of going into business for herself. This, again, is not to be thought of by the girl just out of college. She must work at various types of jobs in order to accumulate experience, judgment, and capital, before she is ready to set up a business for herself.

Bake shops, shops selling cooked food, and home canning kitchens are three of the many possible businesses that the home economist interested in food may undertake. Two women who have made a notable success in a business of their own and have hired—and fired—dozens of home economics trained girls make these suggestions to women, young or older, who contemplate such a step.

The beginner must, of course, work in shops of this sort if she recognizes it as such. Too many girls, these employers say from sad experience, are simply too slow mentally and physically, too lazy, to make a success of such a job—and if they are incompetent to work for someone else, certainly they would be hopeless heads in a business. It is hard work to run a food shop; you have to be willing to get up early in the morning—at least six days a week!

Work in shops of this sort is seldom sharply defined. The girl who is alert, observant, will look around for things to do. Such a girl will be advanced rapidly, as she shows her readiness for greater responsibility. One cannot expect to make progress as long as she expects her employer to do all her thinking for her.

Too many girls are utterly lacking in concentration. They cannot even take a telephone message or an order from a customer quickly and accurately. How to use the telephone and the cash register are two simple but important bits of training for the girl who aspires to work in a food shop. A girl’s appearance and hand-writing, say these thoughtful employers, give at least some indication of the type of work she can be expected to do.

To the older home economist who considers herself ready to launch forth for herself, the following recommendations are given:

Don’t start in business until you have enough capital to tide you over month after month when outgo is bound to exceed income by a wide margin. The original expenses are not the only ones to count on.

Don’t start in business unless you know how to do everything about the work. (This applies to restaurant work, also.) Then you are never at the mercy of “independent” help; moreover, you can give directions clearly and with authority; and in addition, you know how long a time each task should require, and can be more fair about what to expect of each helper and more just in your reproofs.

And lastly, don’t as a manager and owner work so hard physically that you sacrifice the managing. You can, if you have capital, hire others to do the physical labor, but the management is up to you—and a physically fatigued person is not in a fit condition to make wise plans and decisions.

Directors of large and flourishing home economics departments are generally envied for their salaries and high positions, without much effort at understanding their contribution to their respective businesses.

Too many in the home economics profession let themselves get into the habit of concentrating on details, forgetting the big plan as a whole. It is the old story of not being able to see the forest for the trees.

The director of a department must first of all be a director, a leader. She must plan, give orders and suggestions; she must constantly be organizing and reorganizing the various units of her department in order to make them function to their highest degree of effectiveness. She must be able to hire and fire as necessary, without letting her personal feelings and sympathies influence her too strongly.

No youngster just out of college is equipped for such a big job, but if she has any executive ability at all, she can grow into this type of position. It is a line of development in which every home economist should strive to improve herself, unless she prefers the easier road of taking orders from someone else—sometimes from one less able than herself in general, but who has that vital necessity, executive ability.