

A memo to the CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Two nation-wide surveys recently conducted have come to the disconcerting conclusion that "training for Top and Second line Executives is Number 1 problem of Industry and Business today."

This is in U.S.A.

Is this Number 1 problem in India too?

Only YOU can tell.

Because you know these arresting facts:

That in 1956, Indian industry is producing goods at **MORE THAN DOUBLE** the pre-war rate. Still, the key administrative staffs are no larger than they were 15—20 years ago.

That our Executives are overworked. They are aging ahead of their time.

That the rapidly expanding Indian economy needs more and more Executive personnel. We were caught napping. We did not look ahead and train our administrators and business and industrial executives.

That the acutest shortage is that of Management talent, top Management talent in particular. The shortage of materials and trained technical manpower is insignificant compared to it.

That most of our companies are run by one or two strong personalities. They have not made plans for ensuring the future health of their Business. They have not insured proper lines of succession in case of death or retirement of key personnel. And yet, all of the creative accomplishments of present successes can be obliterated overnight through lack of just such future planning.

That executives have to be trained and developed. In number. And quick. That way only, they can and will want to handle increased responsibilities.

That any training and development programme should be an integrated one. And an **ACCELERATED ONE**.

Executives are the most precious asset of a company; management succession should be insured in a planned way: these thoughts have been accepted by countries like United States of America and Australia for many years now. Developing and training managers continuously has been held as important a function of management as that of production or sales.

In this nation building work, individual companies, universities, professional associations and *management consultants* have played a commendable part.

The Basic Problem

Still, these surveys maintain that "training second-line executives is problem Number 1 of American industry and business."

How is that? The other findings hold the clue.

Frequently mentioned during the surveys were three short-comings of Junior Executives. They read:

1. Lack of initiative and leadership;
2. Inept human relations with subordinates and superiors;
3. Failure to plan ahead.

In India, as it is in U.S.A., all these three are important.

Plus one more, I would say. And that is the proper attitude to work and achievement.

Is a Solution Possible?

"All this is O.K" you say. "Tell me how you can train an executive. In human relations skill, for instance. Not that I do not believe in the need for better human relations skills. My reservations are regarding your training programmes."

You are apparently referring to the fact that many competent administrators have developed a high level of human relations skill *without training*. Or, may be, to the fact that every one has some degree of human relations skill on which to get along most of the time.

Even so, won't you concede that human relations skill is not innate but can be developed? That everyone can improve his performance in this all important field? And that such improvement requires conscious, directed effort?

Perhaps, you wish to emphasise the fact that it is a tough job to improve human relations skills. And, you object to this over-simplification, over-selling and over-sentimentality. You are disappointed by the programmes that dole out lot of information which only serve as material for glib talk.

May be, you maintain with Dr. Robert Katz that the real test lies in the degree to which the man's performance at his regular job improves. His training should not be considered successful unless at least

some of the following observable (*albeit* subjective) outcomes take place:

1. Increased productivity of the group for which the man is responsible, resulting in cost savings, improved quality, or increased profitability.
2. Improved understanding between the man and his superiors.
3. Greater insight into problems and improved judgement in predicting the results of proposed courses of action.
4. Increased readiness of the man to accept responsibility for the actions of his subordinates, admit errors, and not 'pass the buck.'
5. Greater willingness on his part to seek help in solving problems and initiating action, when necessary, even though those consulted be lower in the organisation than he.
6. Accelerated growth and readiness for promotion of at least some of his subordinates.
7. Fewer grievances, lower turnover, and greater satisfaction with their jobs among their subordinates.
8. Greater loyalty to the man and enthusiasm for him as a leader by those he directs.

Experience has shown, says the same authority,* that human relations skills CAN be sharpened, their performance in working with others can be improved. "And this has been demonstrated time and again in their subsequent on-the-job work experience. Inevitably, however, as with all things of importance and value, significant improvement requires real effort on the part of the trainee, as well as deep understanding and skill on the part of the instructor or coach, and not every man puts forth that effort."

The Particular Problem

"Right," you say. "You can strengthen management skills, leadership skills and the rest by training. But, see our problem..."

"We have very few men. We cannot afford to let them go for a school here or abroad for any length of time. Please, don't tell us: Think of the future. We do. Only, we have to think of the present as well. "Our men are not interested in diplomas. With due respect to all the seats of academic learning, we submit we want to 'grow our executives locally.' Laboratory growth does not appeal to us.

"We want a down-to-earth programme and tailored to our company's present and future needs. It has to be an ACCELERATED programme besides an integrated one. And it should not require our men to be away from their work for more than a few hours a week."

That is making it tough!

You pose a very *practical* problem. Your requirements are exacting and difficult to meet.

A Tested Answer

They are not impossible, however. They can be met. In fact, they have been met. Yes, right in our country.

And, quite successfully, according to the Executives that participated in a programme presented by the Modern Management Council.

This Programme was developed by the writer after considerable research here and abroad. The important feature is that it is for *Indian conditions* and to meet *Indian requirements*.

The credit for trying it out for the first time in India goes to a Bombay Industrial House. It had the vision to sense the merits and it had the integrity to offer the success factors.

Success Requirements

And what are the success factors? They are not many but they are important.

Top Management support comes first. The Director-in-charge and General Manager chose to participate in this programme and that in an enthusiastic way.

Second is the realisation that a programme of this kind calls for continuous and extensive research and specialist assistance.

Third comes the active and enthusiastic co-operation from the participants. The energy and interest they all displayed throughout the programme is as much a credit to themselves as to the programme.

Did they benefit by the programme? Did the company that sponsored it benefit? Did the participants benefit as members of the Executive Team? As Executives at work? As Men?

They say: "Yes. And considerably so." They say now that "development is a continuous and dynamic process. It does not end at the completion of a specific training programme but it goes on *throughout* a man's life."

THE POINT IS THAT AN ANSWER HAS BEEN FOUND TO INDIAN MANAGEMENT'S PROBLEM NUMBER ONE. IT IS NOT THE ONLY ANSWER. IT IS ONE ANSWER—ONE TRIED ANSWER.

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* In *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 1956.

EXECUTIVE SELECTION BY PROXY

By N. H. ATTHREYA

Management Consultant

LAST WEEK, I had been to a factory site. I say 'site' because I found every other production facility except the needed higher technical and executive personnel. The owner told me that, for almost a year now, the production had been held up for that reason. He had been doing 'everything' he could to get the proper men. Only genuine enquiries he received and none of them he found worth considering.

KEY EXECUTIVES

When one looks around, one is driven to the conclusion that, if only we had the executive and technical personnel for the projects in both the sectors, our industrial development tempo would have been almost twice as fast.

MANAGERIAL SLIPS

The executive and technical personnel are not there for a number of reasons. For one thing, some men in authority think that they can do without such personnel. Others think that they are an avoidable overhead. Neither of them calculate how much more they are losing for not having the managerial assets.

NON-AVAILABILITY MISNOMER

A third popular reason some take cover under is that we do not have enough men to go around. What seems to have a factual basis is the phenomenon of people being wrongly placed or not properly utilised; the availability is hardly the problem.

Getting good men without a desire and a skill to use them or keep them is not likely to work. Anyways, it is not a sound proposition

for any party. I make reference to this because this aspect is so often conveniently ignored.

THEIR STRATEGIC VALUE

There is certainly a section in industry that knows the strategic value of executive and higher technical personnel and that make conscious provision for them and it is such men I have in view when I talk on this subject.

A director of a British company was telling me the other day that nine months had elapsed since he advertised for the position of a chief storekeeper and he was still to find time to look at the applications; he was much too busy with more pressing things.

PLACING RIGHT MEN

That is a common phenomenon again. The key executives have unlimited and increasing demands on their time, and this is the only item that says: 'I will wait if you want me to'. Selection of the right men for the senior positions is a very important job calling for time and thought. Casual approach to this job invariably boomerangs. As it happens, this job is prepared to wait and it is let to wait at one stage or another.

When it cannot any longer wait (meanwhile, enough damage has been done to the job), we tell a few friends and agree to 'try' one of them. Often, we repeat this trial. Or, rush to the "Situation Vacant" Columns in the press.

BOX NUMBER APPROACH

For a number of reasons, many companies prefer box numbers, but the box num-

ber method frightens off many excellent job seekers. If they respond, you cannot make out much from their replies. They also don the cloak of anonymity. A senior executive is certainly coy about answering anonymous advertisements — how is he to know he is not applying for a job with his own firm? Or more subtly, will the managing director he is going to see know his own?

"AD" DOESN'T CATCH

Or again, the advertisement copy may be such as to get not the right material. Most advertisements speak of personality and initiative. No one will decry personality and initiative, but who will claim he does not have both? This is just to mention that the copy itself is not matter for casual attention.

Having not planned well in advance, done things in a hurry, and almost in a casual manner, if the right man does not come along, can we say: 'They say there is unemployment and where are the men?'.

HIGHER LEVEL MISEMPLOYMENT

There is certainly misemployment at the higher levels but not unemployment. They can be choosy and they are choosy; they are unwilling to jump from a frying pan into the fire. They wish to save themselves embarrassment.

EXECUTIVE SELECTION SERVICE

How does such a service meet some of the objections raised?

First, it helps its clients to beat the 'box number allergy'. Prospective employees want to see without being seen and consultants provide employer and candidate with the best of two worlds. Both can remain

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anonymous up to the final stage.

Secondly, the consultant performs the chores of advertising, interviewing and short-listing candidates-operations which can take up a lot of valuable time of senior executives and directors. Indeed, the time thus saved is frequently worth more than the cost of the service.

Thirdly, the consultant assesses the firm, assesses the job, assesses the candidates and then tries to match. In so doing, he helps the client to formulate his thoughts, to clarify his thoughts and often reconsider them. It is possible that the consultant recommends another approach to the problem.

Fourthly, the consultant can be objective and impartial. The consulting firm

takes no payment from and owes no obligation to any particular candidate. Neither internal politics nor external 'influences' matter to him. He is bound to do a professional job.

A PROFESSIONAL JOB

Fifthly, to the consultant this is a full time job. He does a better job in lesser time; he does a professional job in a scheduled time.

Sixthly, a selection consultant has advantages which an employer can never have. Just to mention one: He can choose from a much larger range of candidates than would ever come to the attention of one firm. In fact, over a period, he is able to help you even without advertising; he should have scores of candidates on his books.

And finally, he helps the delay loving employer make

a decision. One reason why companies do not get good men is that they do not make up their mind fast enough. Perhaps the fact that the consultant has to be paid a fee hastens decision!

And don't they charge for the services they do? They do because they render a professional service, a highly delicate and skilled service. But as against the benefit for the organisation, the fee is negligible. They save time, energy and bother for senior executive and release them for productive revenue work. They get better men and they enable get better men quicker which means stepped up production or sales or improved relations and that way a keener edge on competition. The hidden profits such a step taps is much more than the professional charges.

THE V. J. T. INSTITUTE

An Outstanding Technological Institution

By R. K. MODY, M. Sc. Tech. I (Manchester)

Principal V.J.T.I.

TO-DAY, when technically trained persons are urgently needed to provide manpower for running the country's industrial units, the importance of technical displays cannot be over-stressed.

It is a matter of pride that, in the post-graduate field as in other areas of technical education, the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute's contribution has been of a pioneering nature. Its Department of Textile Manufactures, which was the earliest to be started as the Ripon Textile School, has added a number of firsts to its credit, having the distinction of being the first Institute to take up higher level courses in Textile Technology for which the Bombay University have instituted awards leading to the Degrees of Bachelor and Master of Textiles, constituting new milestones in higher technical education for the country's vast textile industry. Even to-day, in spite of extensive developments in technical education all over India, the students coming out from the V. J. T. I. enjoy a premium over others. Post-graduate courses in Public Health Engineering, Automobile Engineering and Industrial Management, too, were the first courses of their kind to be started in the State.

POST GRADUATE STUDIES

The development of Institute's post-graduate activity along well defined recognised lines based on sound academic principles has been favourably commented upon

in reports given by officials of assessment committees appointed by the All India Council of Technical Education, All India Board of Management Studies, Bombay University, as well as by the eminent educationists and representatives of commerce and industry who have visited the institution either in official or individual capacities over the last decade.

NUCLEUS OF RESEARCH

The V.J.T.I. had the privilege of playing hosts to two visiting committees comprising of eminent educationists and industrialists including Prof. G. D. Parikh, Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, Sri Y. A. Fazalbhoy, Dr. Pranlal Patel and others who expressed satisfaction with the work we were doing in the field of Management studies. The Tracker Committee Report on Post-graduate studies in Engineering and Technology has drawn pointed attention to the need for ensuring adequacy of teaching staff of requisite calibre having post-graduate qualifications and experience as designers, research specialists in post-graduate teaching, etc. They would form the nucleus of active schools of research.

Albeit, the provision of laboratories equipped with the latest testing apparatus for performing tests according to specifications conforming to international standards is an essential pre-requisite. Not only staff laboratory and other physical facilities but also the calibre and motivation of those undergoing post-graduate courses

are equally essential if post-graduate activity is to thrive in higher technological institutions.

The Institute, which is a recognised all-India centre for post-graduate studying in Textile Technology and Automobile Engineering, has been responsible for pre-attracting students from all over the country drawn from the top-layer of the scientifically talented youth entering the field of technological studies. Some of the most brilliant of these, after graduation, are increasingly going in for advanced level courses with the help of post-graduate scholarships awarded by the Central Government which now bears almost the full brunt of the expenditure incurred for running of engineering and post-graduate courses. In view of the fact that the intake is necessarily limited at the higher levels and the enthusiasm of our young graduates to conduct research is high, we have unfortunately to disappoint a large number of intending candidates, as witnessed for our diploma and under-graduate courses. The large majority of the senior faculty members whose number is substantial out of a total compliment of 120 members constituting the teaching staff and 200 constituting the workshop and laboratory staff and other services have been accorded recognition by the Bombay University for guiding research. Their efforts have been responsible for preparing over 200 students who have left the portals of the Institute with post-graduate diplomas and degrees since the inception of the various courses.

Their services which have been utilised as managers and foremen in industrial concerns and as junior and senior scientific officers in

5 / Executive Paper Flood and Rapid Reading Skill

In this era of 'knowledge explosion', you have the problem of keeping abreast of developments in your own technical field, your own organisation, and the outside world - whether you are an executive or an editor, economist or engineer, scientist or salesman, psychologist or pathologist, teacher or lawyer. There are so many things to read for so many different action, information, or discussion purposes: correspondence and office memoranda, operations reports, trade publications, technical bulletins and articles, internal instructions, technical digests, business digests, news magazines, business publications, and books.

What piles up ?

How do we cope with it ?

We do manage to find time to read items like letters, memoranda, and other action documents. What piles up is "what has to be read but what cannot be read just now".

Some years ago "Business Week" surveyed the reading problems of top executives and drew some less than optimistic conclusions.

"In all truth, there's little likelihood that the modern manager will ever catch up with his back reading. He may be able to control the flow a bit more efficiently, but he'll never be able wholly to dam it up.

"By the very nature of his job, the top executive has to assimilate as much information as he can. If his intake slows down, or reaches

him in a form whereby he can absorb more in less time, he promptly expands his field again. Some facts he can get by word of mouth, but most of them have to come from reading. So the executive, whirling the treadmill of reading, wonders wistfully how to escape - and how the other fellow is doing."

What applies to the chief executive applies to the other category of executives and professionals.

One possible solution

One possible solution to the reading problem which has come in vogue in recent years is the taking of a course in rapid reading.

These rapid reading courses have been popularised with vigour in the USA. Even the American Management Association has come out with a Rapid Reading Kit costing over a hundred dollars. The British Institute of Management offers a two-half day course at London on "Quick Reading" - almost round the year.¹ There are over a dozen books on "Help yourself to faster reading",² mostly of American origin and some of them are in the paper back editions.

How true the claims

What exactly is the value of these courses ?

The claims made in behalf of these courses, by their sponsors, range from modest to amazingly incredible.

The author's experience in India since 1959 when we gave the first course in Rapid Reading

in India—suggests the following :

The average adult who has not had prior training in rapid reading can cover about 200 words per minute. It will take him about a little more than two minutes to read a page in an average book. This speed of course will depend on one's formal education, nature of work, range of interests and reading habits.

With *systematic* training in rapid reading, adults are seen to raise their level of reading to about 400-500 words a minute, or about one page of a book every minute.

THIS IS AVERAGE. SOME PEOPLE WILL NOT DO AS WELL WHILE OTHERS WILL DO MUCH, MUCH BETTER. MOST OF THEM AT LEAST DOUBLE THEIR RATES OF READING SPEED WITH IMPROVED COMPREHENSION. ALSO, THE BETTER READERS KEEP A HIGHER RATE OF IMPROVEMENT THAN THE POORER READERS.

The reading scores referred to above are based on reading tests using material of average difficulty. Light reading materials will move much faster, such as novels, while more difficult technical material will take more time for reading and comprehension.

What can be said of the claims of reading 12,000 words per minute ?

One can "read" 12,000 words per minute or even more! What you do then is not to read ("scan" is the technical term) but to skip or skim. It is a surface kind of reading which picks up main ideas without actually reading all the words.

The Logic

And what is the logic? The logic is simple.

Firstly, most of us are currently utilising 20% or less of our capacities to read swiftly and intelligently. It is therefore simply a matter of **realising our potential**.

Rapid reading develops our latent or unused capacity to read faster and comprehend more.

Secondly, some of our current reading habits are hindering the possible rate of reading.

These habits were useful when we were children. They are unhelpful for the adult situation, for the present demands.

Most of us stopped learning to read when we left school. In our first halting months we mastered the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represented. We then learnt to spell out words letter by letter C..A..T, CAT, R..A..T, RAT, etc.

Gradually, we came to recognise words as a whole. We knew that C..A..T spelled 'CAT' without having to break it up into letters.

When we tackled a sentence we read word by word, not letter by letter. And that is where most of us stopped learning to read.

Once the old, unhelpful reading habits are noted and corrected, the speed tends to go up and by speed is always meant '**speed of comprehension**'.

Also, Rapid Reading means **raising** our reading skills beyond the "sixth grade level". Better Reading training helps us develop visual skills, and improved reading **habits** that increase our reading speed, our comprehension and concentration.

Thirdly, in many fields, and reading is no exception, we do not watch out for the research findings and apply them to our day to day work. The findings of psychological laboratories and the survey results of executive reading practices provide valuable clues to reading faster, to reading better.

If, therefore, we consciously and systematically cultivate the more efficient habits to reach our potential, we should be reading faster and better.

Even a few **days** of guidance and practice can enable participants to double their speed or more as the accompanying chart shows.

A few **weeks** of systematic practice can certainly take us nearer our potentiality.

Reading Performance Before and After M M C Rapid Reading Programme

The first and last day performance of the first 30 executives who took this 10-day programme in 1959-60 is given below. To facilitate reading, the grouping has been made on the last day.

Conferee	Final day			First day			Conferee	Final day			First Day		
	RI	R	C	RI	R	C		RI	R	C	RI	R	C
1	96	- 239	- 42	54	- 108	- 53	16	228	- 326	- 70	90	- 150	- 62
2	76	- 252	- 34	48	- 121	- 40	17	199	- 332	- 56	89	- 177	- 50
3	153	- 255	- 56	21	- 105	- 33	18	233	- 333	- 42	49	- 164	- 30
4	165	- 275	- 60	95	- 190	- 50	19	233	- 334	- 67	126	- 180	- 66
5	193	- 276	- 67	88	- 125	- 66	20	205	- 342	- 60	99	- 142	- 66
6	173	- 388	- 60	100	- 125	- 83	21	192	- 385	- 50	98	- 163	- 55
7	203	- 290	- 67	128	- 160	- 83	22	273	- 391	- 66	136	- 170	- 83
8	175	- 292	- 64	55	- 109	- 51	23	344	- 429	- 80	168	- 210	- 80
9	180	- 300	- 60	110	- 220	- 50	24	250	- 433	- 60	151	- 215	- 66
10	180	- 300	- 60	161	- 230	- 66	25	344	- 491	- 70	192	- 240	- 81
11	240	- 300	- 80	176	- 220	- 83	26	416	- 520	- 80	205	- 410	- 50
12	182	- 304	- 60	75	- 126	- 60	27	317	- 528	- 58	168	- 210	- 75
13	183	- 305	- 58	88	- 126	- 73	28	348	- 580	- 60	111	- 185	- 56
14	256	- 320	- 79	74	- 124	- 63	29	219	- 578	- 51	87	- 124	- 72
15	161	- 323	- 53	66	- 132	- 47	30*	666	- 666	- 100 ³	320	- 320	- 100

QUICK Reading

by N H Athreya
illustrations by Kishore Vij

The late President Kennedy, it is reported, took a programme in quick reading. The programme enabled him to raise his reading score from 250 to 1200 words per minute. He took this programme long before he became President, perhaps by way of preparing himself for such a position. He knew that the higher a man climbs up the executive ladder, the more he has to read; he knew also that *how* to cope with this added load would be one of the executive's continuing problems.

But this is not merely the problem of an executive; it is common to everyone, whether one is a scientist, a doctor, an engineer or an accountant. The

professional is living today in a world of knowledge explosion. Each day he returns to his desk to find it more and more inundated with reading matter — memos, reports, correspondence, journals and publications that come in ever increasing numbers. The flood is drowning the boss.

The professional faces two grim realities. One is that it is unsafe to be uninformed. The other is that there is so much to read and so little time. The options are: a.) dump it all into the wastepaper basket, b.) take it home hoping to read it, or c.) find out a quicker way of attacking the printed word.

Many are tempted to choose the first option! Some choose the second but not with much

success — they bring it all back unread! More and more are considering the third option, namely, develop the skill of quick or rapid reading. They start with reservations, though. They ask: Is it possible? Is it safe?

Quick reading training started in USA during the second World War — the executives that came to government from industry found that there was so much to read on a governmental job that to survive they had to augment their reading skill. Industry took to it and rapid reading courses became freely available. They spread to UK; they did not however, get acceptance in the American form. British Leyland Motor Training School modified it for British conditions and came



THE FLOOD IS DROWNING THE BOSS.

doors beyond and throughout life. A more recent one adds:

"One cannot become an educated person today just by spending four years at college. One can no longer even become educated by studying for many years more, because knowledge is doubling every ten years. Therefore, even after one has completed formal education, he must devote at least one-tenth of his time in keeping up with new knowledge being developed. If he doesn't do at least this much, he will fall behind."

Is quick reading possible?

It is possible to double or treble our reading effectiveness. The logic is this.

Firstly, most of us are currently utilising 20% or less of our capacities to read swiftly and intelligently. Secondly, some of our current reading habits are hindering our possible rate of reading. Thirdly, we have not followed research findings and applied them to our day-to-day work.

The uninitiated do have fears, among them: *Won't I understand*

up with a quick reading programme. And so did many European countries.

A modified version of the reading course to suit Indian conditions was first offered in 1959. When the course was first announced, skeptics understandably remarked: "What we need is not a programme in rapid reading; we need a programme in just plain reading — people just don't read."

Basic questions like "Why read?", "Why read faster?" "Is fast reading possible?" and so on deserve to be addressed first, if only briefly.

Why read? An earlier day thinker observed: "Reading is the key that unlocks the doors to all other subjects and to other



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TAKE IT HOME, HOPING TO READ IT.



FIND A QUICKER WAY OF ATTACKING THE PRINTED WORD.

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less if I read faster? Can I read technical matter faster?

Scientific studies have shown that understanding usually increases as reading speed increases!

These studies show that the slow reader is often so concerned with the words that he often misses the main ideas.

It is true that we can't expect to zip through a scientific text book as we would through a mystery novel. Our reading rate will vary from material to material. The point is that the rise in speed will be proportional. If the reading rate on light material improves from 250 to 500 word per minute, the reading rate on technical material will improve from 150 to 300, say.

In our rapid reading skill development programmes since 1959, we noted that the great bulk of the participants — numbering some 9000 — read at approximately 150 words per minute with 70% comprehension — the normal reading rate of a tenth grade pupil. This may sound shocking. The grim fact is that most adults considerably cut

down their reading — especially their serious and professional reading — after leaving school or college, and for that reason, among others, their speed drops back from the college level of 200 to a high school level of 150 or less.

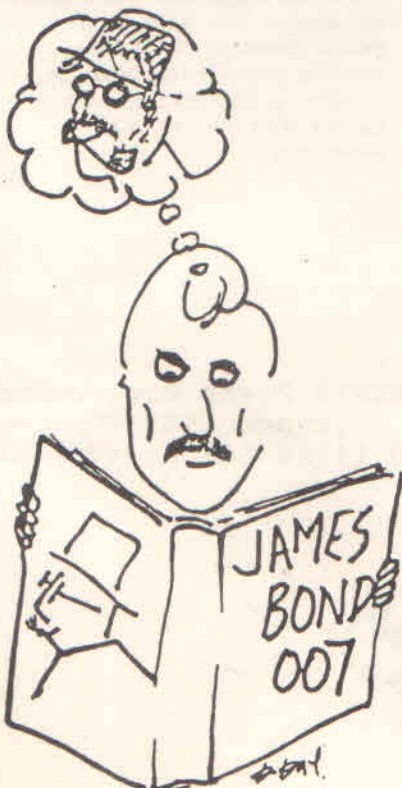
Slow reading leads to no reading! Slow reading is awkward, unsatisfying reading. Tortoise readers see their friends — especially younger friends — cover the same ground in half the time and with more enjoyment and better retention. They rationalise their limitation, saying: What is the big use of reading and knowing more? They thus restrict their reading to the daily newspaper, light journals and the office correspondence.

Research at a number of reading clinics all over the USA reveals the same startling fact: three out of five Americans are "reading cripples" — they are woefully inefficient readers who jog across the printed page at a "horse and buggy" rate.

Realising that reading skill directly influences the size of their

income, the pleasures they enjoy, and often the degree of their social success, students, teachers, professionals and even housewives in countries like USA take up one of the reading skill development programmes. It is not uncommon to find 200 people in a class held by the Harvard Reading Clinic.

Such enthusiasm for acquiring this skill is yet to be seen in India. Also, the training facilities are few and far between, in part due to prejudices in academic circles. The defence establishments have, however, taken the lead. The Military Engineering, College, Pune, has been giving a course in quick reading for nearly two



IT IS TRUE THAT WE CANNOT EXPECT TO ZIP THROUGH A BOOK AS WE WOULD THROUGH A MYSTERY NOVEL.

decades now. The various defence training centres provide, from time to time, facilities for acquiring or augmenting this skill. MMC School of Management and Indo-American Society organise in-company and public programmes. While self instruction books help, a course taken with a specialist has added value.

A typical rapid reading training programme starts with a 'test'. A passage on a general subject of approximately 1000 words is given and the 'student' is asked to read it at his normal speed, remembering he will be called upon to answer ten questions on that text. The pre-programme reading score is ascertained. This consists of a) the number of words per minute read; b) the percentage comprehension calculated by the number of questions answered correctly out of the ten; c) the reading index which is the product of (a) and (b). Thus, if a reader's words per minute (or w.p.m.) is 150 and he has answered 8 out of 10 questions correctly, his reading index will be 150 multiplied by 80% and that is 120.

A comparable passage on the same subject is given and the post-programme reading score calculated. This gives a rough measure of the progress made.

In a 10-day programme given to a group of 30 managers and

professionals, the reading index on the first day, ranged from 31 to 320; and on the last day, the range was 76 to 666. The person whose reading index score was 31 on the first day raised it to 153, and the person whose score was 320 on the first day raised it to 666.

Where it is given in schools — the one school that has been giving it for many years now is Jnana Prabodhini, Pune — the score is calculated at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. One group of 25 students in the 5th standard (Marathi medium) had an average reading index of 165.75 as the initial score and the final score was 321.93. When the training continued in the next year, namely the sixth standard, it was noted the initial reading index at the beginning of the year was 415.60 and at the end of the year the score was 491.70.

After the initial pre-test, the principles are explained. The best part of the training goes in guided practice to master the key techniques of rapid reading. Some of these techniques are phrase reading, span stretching and paragraph reading.

In the phrase reading, the 'student' is trained to look at printed matter in terms of logical groups of words or phrases, instead of single words. In the span stretching, he/she is trained to increase his/her eye span or "eye bite". In paragraph reading, the focus is on looking at reading material in terms of key words, key

phrases, or key sentences.

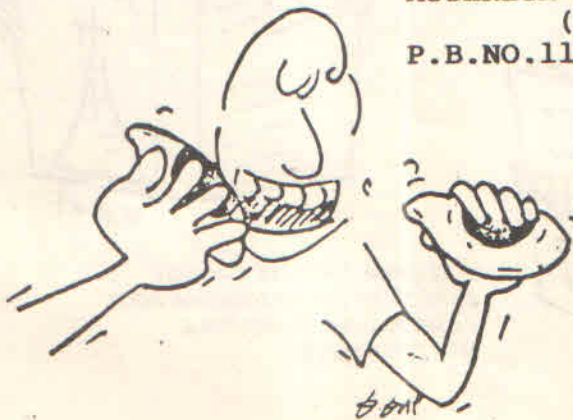
These techniques are taught sometimes with instruments like tachistoscope or reading films. They can be almost as effectively taught with the help of exercise manuals.

The 'home work' is usually for about 30 minutes per day for about 3 months. What is practised with conscious effort during the practice period becomes in due time automatic and welcome reading habits.

Let us say, for the sake of argument, that you now read 10 books a year. If you could finish 20 or more books without spending one extra minute on your reading, if you could learn to whip through your daily newspaper or favourite journal in half the time or less without missing anything of importance, and if, as a result, you are to discover added pleasure in rewarding reading, would a few months of serious effort be worth it?

Such an effort will not guarantee that you can compete with the Filipino teenager who, it is reported, read at 6000 words per minute (yes, with comprehension) but it does promise your reading pleasure doubled and/or reading time halved. And that is quite something!

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IN THE SPAN STRETCHING....
EYE SPAN OR 'EYE BITE'.