

Driver Characteristics and Accidents

The ATA CASE-INTERVIEW PLAN as a METHOD for DRIVER IMPROVEMENT

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THOSE of you who were able to attend the Highway Safety Research Correlation Conference held under the auspices of the Committee on Highway Safety Research* in June of last year, and those of you who may have read the report of that conference, may recall a discussion of management procedures as reported for the group chairmaned by J. E. Uhlener.** This discussion followed a report by Harold Edgerton on some of his work with the armed services. Uhlener's group recommended "further studies of management procedures relative to safety performance of motor fleets" and raised the question: "To what extent do management procedures, that empirically differentiate high and lower safety motor fleets produce changes in safe and efficient performance?"

At that meeting, I commented to the effect that certain management procedures had proved successful in accident prevention in commercial fleets and suggested the possibility of research on the applicability of some of these for use by motor vehicle administrators in controlling the private motorist. Today, I shall discuss one specific management procedure to which I was referring at that time. This is the Case-Interview Plan for Administration of Discipline, as developed by the American Transit Association.

This plan is a procedure for use by management with employees whose performance on the job has become so poor that either immediate and substantial improvement is considered necessary, or dismissal will be warranted. The primary objective of the plan is to obtain improved performance. However, when improved performance is not forthcoming, provision is made so that the management action of dismissal will be substantiated.

*The Committee on Highway Safety Research of the National Academy of Sciences--National Research Council is organized separately from the Highway Research Board. The latter is under the Division of Engineering and Industrial Research while the former operates in parallel fashion to stimulate research in all of the scientific fields and divisions of NAS-NRC. Its emphasis is on human factors related to highway safety although these are considered in relation to engineering and physical factors.

**Report of Group B, J. E. Uhlener, Chairman. Report of Highway Safety Research Correlation Conference, June, 1952, NAS-NRC Committee on Highway Safety Research, Washington, D. C. pp. 67. See Item 4, p. 31.

2.

Before discussing details of the plan, and as a background for considering its applicability, let us review together the record of a problem employee, the type of person with whom we are presently concerned. This is the record of a bus operator in the employ of a large city transit company.

Since being employed in March 1946, this man has on his record: 34 accidents, 18 of which were judged preventable; failed to report 6 times; turned in short 19 times; 13 passenger complaints and 3 traffic violation reports. Certainly we cannot consider that as a good record, or even an acceptable one, in our industry. However, of perhaps greater significance than the record in this discussion is the manner in which management has handled this case as it developed over a 6½-yr. period.

Now, let me cite all items on this record which illustrate the pattern of disciplinary action taken by management.

- 3/19/46 - Employed as bus operator
- 12/4/46 - Advised of record - must improve
- 1/8/47 - Preventable accident, suspended 3 days - warned of poor record
- 7/30/47 - Warned on nonattendance
- 9/16/47 - Suspended pending hearing for dismissal - Reinstated 10/28/47
- 7/30/48 - Preventable accident - Lectured on poor accident record - Suspended 5 days
- 11/11/48 - Preventable accident - Suspended 2 days
- 12/16/48 - Interviewed and given last warning
- 6/3/49 - Warned - running by passengers
- 7/1/49 - Warned on turning in short
- 8/15/49 - Warned - abusive to passengers
- 12/13/49 - Preventable accident - Interviewed and discharged - Reinstated 12/20/49
- 4/12/50 - Warned on turning in short
- 5/25/50 - Warned - abusive to passengers
- 9/3/50 - Preventable accident - suspended 1 day
- 11/24/50 - Preventable accident - suspended 2 days
- 11/29/50 - Warned - running by passengers
- 12/12/50 - Preventable accident - Given last warning on attitude, accident record, complaints, turning in short. Given last chance and retrained.
- 6/11/51 - Warned - turned short
- 11/11/51 - Warned - abusive to passengers
- 11/19/51 - Warned - running by red lights
- 11/30/51 - Warned - failed to pull into bus stops
- 12/9/51 - Interviewed on general record. Advised it was poor
- 2/16/52 - Preventable accident - Suspended 3 days. Advised unless a complete new attitude and change of operation, he will be dismissed.

Certainly we can agree that this man is not a desirable employee. We probably also can agree that there are numerous other persons with equally

poor and perhaps even poorer records, still in the employ of many companies. Why is it, then, that these people continue to stay on our pay rolls as employees?

Very direct and yet very common answers seem to be: "The union won't let us fire them. If we fire this man and the case is carried to arbitration, the man will be reinstated with back pay. We can't make a discharge case stick if it involves only accidents; the man must be guilty of some more serious offense."

Why, only a few months ago in New York there was a 3-day wildcat strike where one of the reasons given was that the men were angered over the dismissal of an operator for "a bad accident record." He apparently had had only 10 accidents in a year's time.

This unhealthy and unfortunate situation appears to exist more widely than we like to admit, yet does it necessarily have to be so? I say No, and I say No on the grounds that an increasing number of companies have been able to inaugurate procedures for handling these problem employees which seem to be almost foolproof. They either get the desired improvement in performance or they get a discharge that sticks. To illustrate, I quote:

"As regards those who do not show the required improvement, we have had no difficulty in dismissing them. Several cases have been appealed by the union authorities to our president, thence to the conciliation board, and in each case we were successful, I believe because we were able to show a clear and sincere attempt to correct the employee.

"One in particular was of a man who had been employed in 1947 and had always had a bad accident record, but because of the fact he was a union official we 'soft pedalled' the issue till late in 1950 when he became involved in a collision with another company vehicle. This was followed by an interview which was later followed up by a second interview advising him that his performance was still not acceptable. Finally, late in the spring of 1951, we dismissed him after an accident.

"The union appealed to every authority without success. The union people now seem to have accepted the procedure and only make a sort of policy appeal realizing it is useless to go beyond this step."

While there is still more encouraging evidence on the effectiveness of the procedure in handling of discharge cases, we must not neglect the other objective — and actually the most important objective — the improvement of performance.

Here, too, the results have been most gratifying. For example, a recent report on the effectiveness of the plan, sent to me by an over-the-road bus company, reads as follows:

"During the period from February, 1951, and up to March, 1952, 27 individual interviews were held for the purpose of improving the standards of work performance of these employees. Of the 27 original interviews, there have been 14 follow-up interviews with these employees, and outstanding improvement in their attitude and work performance has resulted.

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"The records of all 27 drivers were checked for the number of accidents they had had in one year prior to their initial interview, an aggregate of 336 months of driving. The 27 drivers had 57 collision accidents during that period. Those same 27 men have driven a total of 219 months since their interview and have had eleven collision accidents. These figures are very convincing evidence of the value of the plan to our organization."

Referring to these figures, for the period prior to the interview they show 6 man-months of operation for every accident, while for the period after the interview this had increased to 20 man-months of operation for every accident, an improvement of 70 percent in the accident rate per month of operation for this group.

Still another company--in fact, the first transit company with which we tried out the procedure--made a special study covering the first 14 men interviewed, the records for one year before and one year after the initial interview. This revealed a 90 percent reduction in complaints and a 76 percent reduction in accidents.

To us who are interested in the prevention of accidents, in better public relations, in improved employee relations, and in higher efficiency generally, these results cannot be laughed off. They are of real, practical importance. Moreover, these are not isolated examples. There are many more just like them.

Up to now I have talked merely about results being obtained from the use of a procedure, plan, or interview. Many of you are undoubtedly wondering just what this procedure actually is and how it differs from the procedures or interviews now being used quite generally among transportation companies. What is there about this particular interview technique which enables one to get such results?

For full details, I would refer you to a printed manual entitled "The Case Interview Plan for Administration of Discipline" available from the American Transit Association. Details of the interview pattern are given in Appendix A and two typical cases with records are cited in Appendix B.

Actually, the procedure calls for an interview conducted along well-defined lines. There are a series of specific steps which are taken, for best results, according to a definite sequence. Moreover, it probably is the sequence of steps taken during the interview which distinguishes this case interview from the interviews conducted by most companies today. Experience also indicates that it is the sequence which makes the case interview so effective.

Still another element in the interview plan is the written record. As you know, many corrective interviews are held with employees, but the records that are made of them consist, for the most part, of mere notations, such as "reprimanded," "warned," "suspended two days."

The record called for under the case interview plan is quite different and certainly much more complete. First, there is a statement as to the

reason for interview; next, a very complete statement on past record. Following this is a brief, summary version of the employee's statements; then a summary of the supervisor's statements and finally—the most important part of the record—a statement as to the mutual understanding and plan for future performance.

The purpose of this record is to have, in written form, the essential elements of the record and the essential facts brought out during the interview so that there can be no misunderstanding as to just what took place. Both the position of the company with respect to performance on the job, and the expression of understanding in acceptance of these conditions by the employee, are made perfectly clear.

If the interview is conducted properly and an accurate record made of it, then there can be no question as to the quality and character of performance expected by management and as to the understanding by the employee of what is expected of him, and expected of him as a condition of employment.

It is this form of record which prevents union representatives or the employee from later claiming that they did not realize just what was expected or that the employee might lose his job if he failed to do certain specific things.

Still another somewhat unique feature of this interview plan is the follow-up interview. In our minds, the initial corrective interview does not settle anything. It merely opens up a case which remains open until there has been a check on future performance and a follow-up interview.

This follow-up interview is scheduled to take place just as soon after the initial interview as there is reasonable grounds to believe that a definite pattern of future performance has been established. In any event, the follow-up interview should be held not longer than three months from the date of the initial interview, and sooner if possible.

At the time of the follow-up interview, the situation may fall into one of three categories: (1) the employee has failed to meet the mutually understood job requirements as outlined in the initial interview; (2) the employee has shown definite improvements in performance on the items covered in the initial interview; or (3) the employee might have gone well beyond acceptable performance and done an exceptionally good job on the items covered in the initial interview. Naturally, the follow-up interview pattern fits the specific situation.

As a result of the follow-up interview, there also is a written record made which first specified the situation, cites the specific reason for interview and summarizes the supervisor's statements, the employee's statements and the disposition of the case.

This follow-up interview, and its record, are of critical importance to the success of the plan. In discharge cases, the full justification for the action on the part of the company is set forth in clear, completely understandable terms. In the cases where there has been improvement in performance, then recognition is given to this by management, both to the

employee in person and definitely on his record. It may sound odd, but one of the most common statements by employees as a result of follow-up interviews is: "I'm very grateful to know that my efforts to do a better job have been recognized and that the company is willing to make such a notation on my record."

To me, this is fundamental to the attainment of improved employee relations. Management must be equally willing to recognize satisfactory performance, and to do so on the record, as it is to cite employees for their failures to perform properly.

Up to now, I have discussed the so-called case interview plan only as a means by which management may take major corrective action. However, that is not the entire scope of the plan since it also calls for similar action on the part of management when an employee performs far above normal job requirements and, therefore, is entitled to formal commendatory action. In such instances, a formal interview is held and a formal record is made. In this way, management again demonstrates as much willingness to place exceptional performance on the record as to place below standard performance on the record.

The case interview plan is built upon sound principles of human relations and lends itself to the practice of intelligent, modern leadership techniques. It is designed to attain the following five specific objectives: (1) improve performance of employees to the point of at least satisfying minimum standards, or provide justification for removal from the job; (2) establish or reestablish the dignity and the effectiveness of supervisors and build greater confidence between employees and management; (3) put objectivity into personnel records by creating a record which includes a clear and accurate statement of the employee's performance, whether good or poor, together with a statement of the understanding as to future performance reached during the interview; (4) stimulate the desire to meet high standards of performance by providing a formal means whereby exceptionally good performance is discussed with the employee and is made a permanent part of his record; and (5) provide a means by which all levels of management may keep intelligent control over the consistency, the fairness and the effectiveness of discipline being administered throughout the organization.

As to Item 1, the foregoing discussion has endeavored to demonstrate how that objective is attained.

As to Item 2, the results reported to us by managements who now use the plan definitely indicate that that objective is accomplished.

On Item 3, the matter of objectivity in personnel records, the fact that union representatives, arbitrators and conciliators invariably support the action of management is rather convincing evidence that this particular form of record does have objectivity.

As to Item 4, while the occasions for commendation are much less frequent than for correction, the willingness of management to recognize such acts through formal action cannot help but stimulate employees to maintain high standards of performance.

Finally, on Item 5, the existence of complete records covering all cases requiring major corrective action enables an interchange among all levels of management on the handling of these cases and provides the opportunity for adequate review both before and after the formal handling of all cases. This can assure control over the consistency and the fairness of all discipline administered throughout an entire organization. I am sure we can agree on the necessity and desirability of this.

The A.T.A. Case-Interview Plan has proved to be a very effective method for driver improvement. Interest in it is growing and it is believed that a similar approach could very well be used effectively by motor-vehicle administrators with private motorists.

Appendix AThe Case Interview as a Corrective Measure

The case-interview plan, when used for the correction of exceptionally poor performance, calls for the use of a standardized procedure which consists of the following steps, normally taken in the sequence set forth: (1) Prepare for the interview; (2) state specific reasons for the interview to the employee; (3) have the employee explain his actions; (4) arouse recognition by the employee of the seriousness of his errors; (5) create a desire on the part of the employee to improve; (6) state specifically how the employee is expected to perform in the future; (7) arrive at a mutual understanding as to just exactly what both the supervisor and the employee will do to bring about improvement; (8) write a report of the interview for the record; and (9) make certain that the employee is fully aware of what is put into his record.

The Case Interview as a Commendatory Measure

The use of the case interview in a commendatory situation follows a pattern similar to that of the corrective interview but the specific steps are slightly different, as is also the final form of the record.

The steps involved in a commendatory interview are as follows: (1) Prepare for the interview; (2) state specific reasons for the interview to the employee; (3) permit the employee to comment on his actions; (4) arouse recognition by the employee of the value, or importance, of his actions; (5) create the desire on the part of the employee to continue such performance or to do still better; (6) write a report of the interview for the record; and (7) make certain that the employee is fully aware of what is put into his record.

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Appendix BExample of A Corrective Disciplinary Interview, Record,Follow-up and Action Resulting Finally in DismissalPersonal History

Name - R. J. Peters*
 Age - 25
 Employed - October 13th, 1949 as an operator at North End Div.
 Previous History - Worked as taxi driver after leaving school
 Service 3 years armed forces
 Transport driver

Personal Record

November 1, 1949 - Collision with auto which was overtaking bus and cut in ahead. Operator not at fault.
 November 21, 1949 - Rear end collision with auto. Operator at fault. Inspector Lucas rode with this operator for an hour and instructed and encouraged him.
 December 1, 1949 - Cautioned by Inspector Jackson for running ahead of schedule.
 December 15, 1949 - Collision with an auto when passing same at night in the rain. Operator at fault in not allowing for greasy roadway. Interviewed by divisional superintendent and advised on safe operation and proper judgment of clearance.

*All names of persons used in the sample cases are completely fictitious.

February 12, 1950 - Cautioned by Inspector Jones for running ahead of schedule.
 March 8, 1950 - Collision with auto when passing same. Operator not considered at fault.
 April 13, 1950 - Summoned for going through a red light.
 June 3, 1950 - Reported by Inspector Jackson for running ahead of schedule.
 August 11, 1950 - Complaint received from passengers stating that they were thrown to the floor by the sudden stopping of bus operated by Peters.
 Sept. 28, 1950 - Collision with motorcycle when operating coach at night. Operator considered at fault. Interviewed by divisional superintendent and given 3 days training in safe operation at the school of instruction.
 October 17, 1950 - Reprimanded by Inspector Jones for running ahead of schedule.
 October 30, 1950 - Referred to superintendent of instruction for interview.

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XYZ TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

Corrective -- Initial Interview

NAME:.....R. J. Peters..... NUMBER...1262..... DATE...October 30, 1950.....
 POSITION:.....Bus Operator.....
 DEPARTMENT: ...Transportation..... DIVISIONNorth End.....
 LENGTH OF SERVICE: With Co.1 year... Present Position1 year.....

REASON FOR INTERVIEW:

Annual summary of operation revealed bad record of collisions and minor accidents as well as failure to respond to advice and instruction on safe driving practices. Appears careless and unable to judge vehicle in traffic or under bad rail conditions. Careless about maintaining schedule and observing regulations.

PAST RECORD:

Five collisions in 1st year as operator, fully responsible in 3 instances. Had one passenger complaint on rough operation and four cases of running ahead of schedule. One summons for traffic violation - going through red light.

EMPLOYEE'S STATEMENTS (Summary):

Peters stated that he wasn't able to guess the actions of other vehicle operators and couldn't help their stupid driving. Said he was a competent driver but didn't feel there was enough time allowed on the schedule for safe operation, therefore he kept a bit ahead of schedule whenever he got a chance in order to allow extra time in case he got caught in heavy traffic later.

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENTS (Summary):

As to his remark re other drivers, I reminded Peters that he had been found to be entirely at fault in three collisions, and that it was part of his job as a professional driver to drive so as to allow for the action of motorists. I also stressed that bad weather and night operation require extra care. He was warned that there was no excuse for running ahead of schedule. I made it clear that the excuse he offered was not acceptable as other operators were able to maintain their schedules. I emphasized that unless his record improved he could not continue as an operator.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND PLAN FOR FUTURE PERFORMANCE:

I have arranged for further training to be given to Peters at the school of instruction to help him correct any driving errors that may be contributing to his trouble. He understands that he has no excuse for running ahead of schedule and must cease this practice at once. It was also made quite clear to him that he would be open to possible dismissal unless there was an immediate improvement in his accident record. He realizes that his record will be reviewed in 3 months.

Follow-up Date: ...January 25, 1951.

Superintendent of Instruction.....
Signature of Supervisor

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XYZ TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

Corrective -- Follow-up Interview

NAME: ...R. J. Peters..... NUMBER: ...1262..... DATE: ...January 25, 1951.....
POSITION: ...Bus Operator.....
DEPARTMENT: ...Transportation..... DIVISION: ...North End.....
LENGTH OF SERVICE: With Co. ...15 mos..... Present Position ...15 mos.....
THIS INTERVIEW WAS HELD AS THE RESULT OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION:

- (1) Failure to meet mutually understood job requirements as outlined in the case interview dated Oct. 30, 1950 X
- (2) Definite improvement in performance on items covered in the case interview dated
- (3) Exceptionally good performance on all items covered in the case interview dated
- (4) Other (Explain)

SPECIFIC REASON FOR INTERVIEW:

Has been involved in 2 collisions in last three months and was considered to be at fault in both cases. He was reported running ahead of schedule on 3 different occasions.

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENTS (Summary):

I have explained to Peters that we cannot continue men on this job who do not obey the rules and are constantly involving the Co. in accidents. Pointed out that this was made clear to him in interview on October 30, 1950 and that he understood he would have to improve.

EMPLOYEE'S STATEMENTS (Summary):

Peters could give no explanation for his repeated disregard of the schedule. He maintained that the majority of the accidents he had been involved in were not his fault.

DISPOSITION OF CASE:

Referred to Department Head - dismissal recommended.

Superintendent of Instruction

Signature of Supervisor

1/26/52 - Interviewed by department head and dismissal confirmed

1/31/52 - Appealed, accompanied by union business agent. Department head stated that the record showed that Peters had been given every chance to improve and had not done so. The appeal was denied. Union declined to take any further action.

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ABC TRANSIT COMPANY

CORRECTIVE CASE INTERVIEW RECORD - INITIAL

Name	<u>George H. Johnson</u>	Date	<u>August 26, 1949</u>
Position	<u>Bus Operator</u>	Division	<u>Lorain</u>
Length of Service: With Company	<u>10-28-46</u>	In Present Position	<u>10-28-46</u>

REASON FOR INTERVIEW

Rear-end collision on August 15, 1949 and review of a generally poor accident record.

PAST RECORD

Since date of employment Johnson has been involved in 16 accidents - 11 traffic and 5 passenger. He is held entirely at fault for 8 of these accidents - 6 traffic and 2 passenger. Received one warning for going in a diner. Accident record reviewed on 5-20-47. Told to improve record. Commended on 12-29-47 for capable handling of passengers during snowstorm. Attended safety meeting on 5-7-48. One report, smoking on bus. Two-day suspension for rear-end collision of 6-21-49.

EMPLOYEE'S STATEMENT (Summary)

Johnson acknowledges responsibility for seven of these accidents but, it is his opinion that he should not be charged with the rear-end collision on August 15, 1949. His reason is - slack brakes on the bus #852. Johnson admits however that he was aware of the brakes being slack for more than one hour prior to the accident. He states that he was attempting to get through the PM rush before turning bus #852 in for slack brakes.

He gives the following reason as the causes for the remaining seven chargeable accidents - following vehicle ahead too closely, misjudgment of clearance, schedule consciousness, and finally Johnson states he has become overconfident regarding his ability as a bus operator.

Regarding going in diner and smoking on bus Johnson states he thought it OK to do this when no passengers were on.

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT (Summary)

I told Johnson that, although the brakes on Bus #852 were not as good as they could have been, they did nevertheless meet state requirements (Tests showed 27 ft. at 20 mph. on service brake. Fifty feet on emergency brake at 20 mph. State requirements are 30 ft. at 20 mph., and 60 ft. at 20 mph. for service brakes and emergency brakes, respectively). However, I told Johnson that, in view of his knowledge of the condition of the brakes and his failure to report this bus (#852) promptly for slack brakes, gives us no alternative but to charge him with this accident.

I explained why it is necessary for him to follow the vehicle ahead at a safe distance

at all times. Regarding misjudgment of clearance, I told Johnson that, if there is the slightest doubt in his mind regarding clearance, that he must not attempt to go on, instead he is to wait until the way is clear.

As to the schedule consciousness, I told Johnson we appreciate his efforts to maintain schedule, but, not to the extent of chance taking, that from now on he is to operate his schedule consistent with safety.

Regarding his falling of overconfidence I told Johnson that, inasmuch as he personally recognized this fault we expect him to correct it immediately and permanently.

Finally, I told Johnson that his accident record is not good - that, it has been particularly bad since the first of this year. Furthermore, if he expects to continue as an employee of A.B.C. it is his responsibility to improve his record immediately and permanently. As for going in diner, he is not to do this except in case of necessity. About smoking, I told him he must not smoke at any time he is operating a bus.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND PLAN FOR FUTURE PERFORMANCE

Johnson understands that, he must improve his work performance to meet job requirements, immediately and permanently. He understands that his failure to do so could result in his dismissal.

He further states that in keeping with the above paragraph, he will maintain a safe following distance at all times, specifically, one vehicle length for each ten miles of speed, such distance to be increased two to three times on wet and slippery roadway. Will not attempt to move bus where clearance is insufficient, will report promptly any defect he may find in the bus he is driving, will not take chances to keep on time, will go into restaurant and diner only when necessary. He also understands he must not smoke while driving a bus.

It is understood that Johnson and myself will meet not later than November 26, 1949 to discuss his record.

This record has been shown to Geo. H. Johnson on August 27, 1949

Signed T. W. Motte
Signature of Supervisor

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ABC TRANSIT COMPANY

CORRECTIVE CASE INTERVIEW RECORD - FOLLOW-UP

Name George H. Johnson Date November 28, 1949
Position Bus Operator Division Lorain
Length of Service: With Company 10-28-46 In Present Position 10-28-46

This interview was held as the result of the following situation:

- 1. Failure to meet mutually understood job requirements as outlined in the case interview dated _____

2. Definite improvement in performance on items covered in the case
interview dated August 26, 1949 X
3. Exceptionally good performance on all items covered in the case
interview dated _____
4. Other (Explain) _____

SPECIFIC REASON FOR INTERVIEW

To tell Johnson of the improvement in his accident record. No report of any kind since 8-26-49.

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENTS (SUMMARY)

I told Johnson we recognize the fine job he has done during the past three months, and now that we know he can operate his bus safely, which is a job requirement, we expect him to continue to do so. Also, that although we consider this case closed as of today, it can be reopened at any future date that he fails to meet job requirements.

EMPLOYEE'S STATEMENTS (SUMMARY)

Johnson says he has tried to do a better job. That, for a while he felt he was under pressure. He states he finally eliminated this pressure by relaxing and doing as good a job as possible always keeping safety in mind. Johnson adds that he feels the interview three months ago did help him and he feels satisfied, now that the company recognizes his work. Also, that as far as he is concerned, his case will not be reopened.

DISPOSITION OF CASE

Definite improvement noted, and record placed in Operator's file.

This record has been shown to George H. Johnson on Nov. 29, 1949

Signed T. W. Motte
Signature of Supervisor