

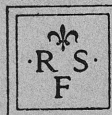
Series B No. 4

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ON BEING A DIRECTOR

AN OPEN LETTER TO
ONE OF THE BOARD
OF A SOCIETY FOR
ORGANIZING CHARITY

BY
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of Charities and Correction



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AN OPEN LETTER

This is a verbatim copy, with names changed, of course, of a letter written to a Director of an Associated Charities (Charity Organization Society). It is reprinted from "The Survey."

May 1, 1910.

Mr. INTERESTED DIRECTOR,
Cariton, Caritania.

My dear Mr. Director:

JUST as we parted after lunch the other day in Cariton, I promised to write to you concerning the Associated Charities work. I have been very much occupied since then and have been away from home most of the time.

We, who make speeches at Associated Charities meetings, never fail to commend organized charity as being business-like, and it is a valid claim to make. But I want to remind you of an essential difference between the management of a department of a great business concern, and the management of an Associated Charities.

In organizing a new business department, the one important thing is to find the right man for manager, and then give him as free a hand as possible. If he makes good, we leave all detail to him, only furnishing him with the plant and capital. But such one-man-power only applies in a limited degree to the management of an Associated Charities. The office detail, the direction of subordinate paid employees, and, perhaps, the relief department pure and simple, may be so controlled. But all that, important as it is, is only a part of what we have to do.

To co-ordinate the friendly forces of a great city for the benefit of the distressed and unfortunate, resembles, to some extent, the organization of a reform movement in politics or civic betterment. No one man can do it. There must be a nucleus of interested people, thoroughly convinced of the necessity and value of the movement, who are known as giving, not merely money, but, still more, time and thought to the effort. The directors must not merely lend their names, they must give intelligent interest,

contagious enthusiasm and real directive force.

In my experience in charity work of more than twenty-five years, I have seen various methods tried in various cities. The only permanently successful societies have been those in which the directors really directed. Given the right goods, the proper market, fair prices and a good advertising medium, and the way to do business and make money in ordinary commercial enterprises is plain enough. But, to enlist the hearty and persistent co-operation in voluntary and unpaid work, of a wide circle of people differing in temperament, creed, habits of life and even nationality, is a far more delicate and difficult operation. We try to do it by making our boards of management as representative as possible. But the best list of names will not suffice, though every church, social and business interest is represented on it. No one man, no matter how tactful and resourceful, can be wise enough and prudent enough to avoid the misunderstandings so constantly arising, to convince the people, so apt to look only from their own

point of view. The representatives of the various interests associated must recognize that they are co-operating; they must feel that they have a genuine share in the work, and they can only be brought to this point by the aid of the volunteer directors. Then, again, it is sometimes necessary to show the co-operating agencies certain faults or deficiencies in their methods. To do this without giving offense is difficult enough under any circumstances, but it is much more difficult when it has to be done by the paid secretary than when it is undertaken by a volunteer member of the board of directors.

An ordinary business pays, in money, everyone who works for it. But an Associated Charities must have many other workers besides the paid agents. How can we enlist them and keep them in line? It cannot be done unless they feel that those who direct are themselves unselfish workers, actuated by the same motives that have brought them into the fellowship. And, when the volunteer workers lose interest and drop out, the society is at the beginning of the end of its best

usefulness. The numbers and interest of the volunteer workers are among the best tests of a society's vigor.

Please do not regard this letter as implying any unfavorable criticism of the board of directors of the Associated Charities of Cariton. The evident and pronounced success of the society proves that such comment would be unjust. But I know, by bitter personal experience, how natural it is for men of affairs, when success seems to have been achieved, to let things drift into mere official routine; to leave direction more and more in the hands of a competent secretary, who is naturally embarrassed in telling his superior officers what they ought to do, and often accepts responsibility which does not really belong to him, because that is the easier way.

Faithfully yours,

ALEXANDER JOHNSON,

General Secretary,

National Conference of Charities and Correction.