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Recommended Citation

H&S Reports, Vol. 06, (1969 autumn), p. 02-03

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PEOPLE IN H&S: ED LANG

his committee's resolution
commits American Institute of CPAs
to open the doors to minorities

In all honesty it must be said that in some ways the accounting profession has had to be nudged into recruiting Negroes into its ranks. As in other fields of endeavor, it required government prodding, including new laws, before organized action was taken.

Let it also be said that once the issue was out in the open, action was not slow in coming. On taking office in October 1968, Ralph E. Kent, then President of the American Institute of CPAs, named a Committee on Recruitment from Minority Groups, with Edwin R. Lang of H&S as chairman. At last spring's meeting of its governing council, the Institute committed itself to action that would "integrate the accounting profession in fact as well as in ideal" through a resolution submitted by Ed Lang on behalf of his committee.

The climate was right for action. Ed reported to the Institute's Council "a widespread feeling" that the present situation "is intolerable because, in addition to moral reasons, it results in a waste of scarce human resources."

Favorable as the climate was, the actual picture was not good. The number and proportion of blacks in the CPA profession is far below what it is for other leading professions. Of more than 100,000 CPAs in the country, only about 150 are blacks. Fewer than 300 of the 16,000 students with accounting majors who graduated in 1968 were black. Although some in the profession contend that many blacks do not have adequate education, a more likely root of the problem is the reluctance to hire all but the very best in order to minimize risk of failure. But as one black member of Ed's AICPA committee, Bert N. Mitchell, says: "The minority groups must have employment for their fair share of average performers, like the rest of America. A black should no longer have to be a Jackie

Robinson in order to make the team."

In fact, as Ed told Council, what is needed is more than a response to civil rights laws. "It is easy to make all the right motions. In spite of compliance... the profession as a whole does remain segregated in fact." He set the stage for initiative, not simply response. His committee is now embarked on a program of communicating to minority-group students and their teachers the genuine desire of the profession to recruit blacks and to ensure that a real opportunity awaits them in accounting.

Recruiters will have to get to know the black accounting faculty, who are wondering: "Is there really an opportunity for black kids in business?" Ed Lang strongly advocates informal discussion for getting to know the black students. "...not getting up and lecturing to them, but sitting down informally...talking to them about their problems, and asking how they see this whole thing." To be effective, recruiters must adopt new attitudes and techniques. The recruiters will need the kind of sensitivity that makes them aware of a black student's special needs. He may be a well trained accounting graduate and still not be confident of the way to respond to an invitation for an office visit. He may have a housing problem. He will probably need more than usual patience, understanding and on-the-job training.

Ed has a feel for this kind of recruiting which he credits in part to his background as a boy with a Polish immigrant father in Cleveland, and to his five-year experience as national partner in charge of personnel. He was born and raised in the Hough section of Cleveland during the Depression, in a home without car or telephone. Beginning at age 10 he was in advanced groups in school. At 11 he had a paper route. At 12 he worked for the Cleveland Indians as usher and on



the ground crew. Already at his full six-foot-two height, he picked up extra change chasing flies for the immortals. ("Joe DiMaggio was the big tipper; he'd tip a dollar.") And so he went, maturing fast and getting back all he put into life. His promising athletic career was cut short by a knee injury in football his first season at John Carroll University, but he continued to play amateur basketball outside of school before graduating from Case Western Reserve in 1951. He moved fast at H&S and was the youngest partner in the Firm when he was admitted at 34 in 1963, as he had been the youngest principal five years earlier. Before he came to the Executive Office in 1964 he had had a rich experience in auditing and SEC registrations. He now assists Messrs. Queenan and Chetkovich in long-range planning, and he and his family (Ed and Betty have two boys and two girls) are delighted to have another assignment in the New York area to look forward to. "We think it's the finest place in the United States to raise children," he says. "It's where the action is."

Bert Mitchell, Ed's colleague on the minority group recruitment committee, says that Ed is a good chairman because "he has a total commitment to the problem." Ed himself explains: "I'm not really a crusader for any one minority group, not even the one I

come from. I just think everyone should have an equal opportunity."

He insists on everyone's right to his own views, which makes him about as American as they come. But he also has the realism of the lanky kid who earned his way shagging fly balls before major league games, and it was with sheer pragmatism that he digressed thus from his text as he laid his committee's resolution before Council last May:

"Believe me, gentlemen, it won't be long before the business community and society as a whole will be judging us in this area." Council adopted the resolution with an overwhelming majority in favor.

Within two months, the AICPA committee had implemented a pilot program of summer internships, under which black students majoring in accounting who had completed the junior year were employed by many firms in unprecedented numbers. The summer internship program, Ed says, "will be expanded significantly for the summer of 1970. Its purpose is to provide a meaningful experience for the students and to help convince them that the accounting profession does in fact offer them a real opportunity."

The 1969 internship program was just a starter for the committee on which Ed Lang serves. Much more action, he promises, is on the way. □

Ed Lang (r.), Executive Office partner, and Bert Mitchell (l.), partner in the New York CPA firm of Lucas, Tucker & Co., take time out from AICPA committee work to discuss what's on the minds of two Harlem workers. Mr. Mitchell, who has an MBA from New York City College, is an active member of the 11-man AICPA Committee on Recruitment from Minority Groups, headed by Ed Lang.