

# SPEAKING OUT:

## Comments on Career Education— A Little Knowledge . . .

Sharen Wago

"My lay concept of career education is that it is a practical approach to educating our youngsters. It teaches application of academic subjects to the real world. It prepares students for work, not just for further education. It takes them from isolated scholastics into meaningful contribution. It integrates them into society.

"Ah, but the term is *career education*, not *job education*, which implies that it is a lifelong learning process—a birth-to-death concept. But let's not shoulder the responsibility of adulthood. Let's focus instead on our real influence—the impact we have on the secondary school student. What have our schools been doing to implement career education? Well, we have guidance classes, where students learn about jobs. We have job-shadowing days, where students learn about jobs. Are you keeping score? We have career days, where students learn about jobs. We have vocational speakers, where students learn about jobs.

"Now that students know about jobs, can we teach them how to get those jobs? Can we orient their attitudes toward work? If we preach *career education*, can we show them what's in store for them? Can we show them how to exploit fully their own career ladders?

"If we can agree that the purpose of education is a practical one—to prepare individuals for work, making them self-sufficient and contributory, not a burden to society—then doesn't it make sense that we seek the advice of those who will be hiring these individuals? Career education curricula should not be conceived and implemented without input from industry and labor. What do educators know about what employers need from future employees? Industry should be telling us how prepared our end products are; how employable they are.

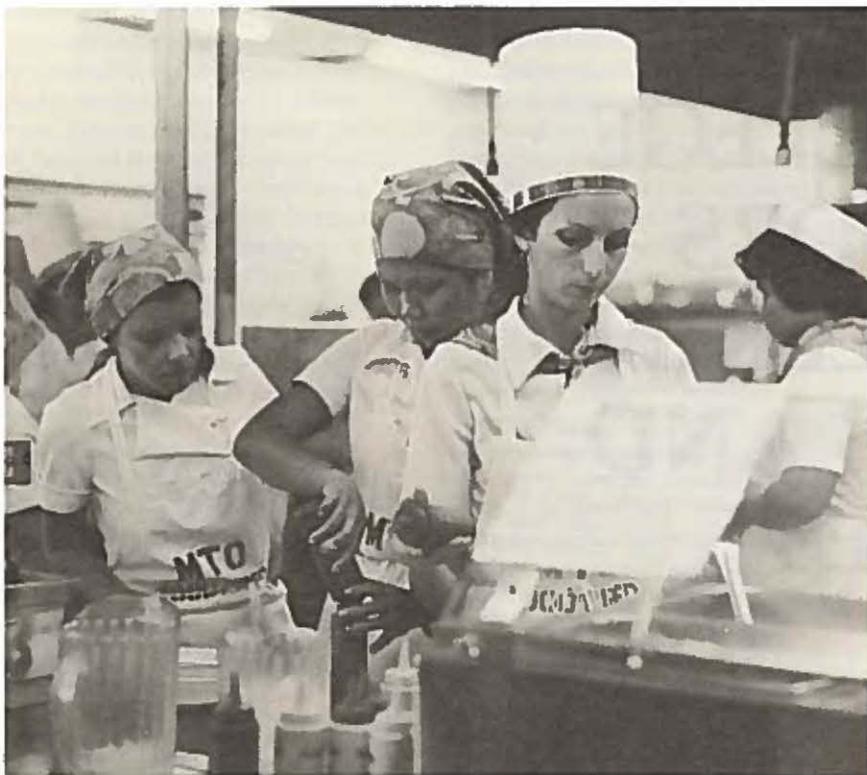
"It's easy to criticize, isn't it? I know, I know. But what about suggestions? I have a few of those, too.

"Let's begin with basics. We must teach our students to communicate—simple reading and writing and verbal expression. Let's not adopt the attitude that I'm just one of forty-plus teachers that this student will have before high school graduation. How much can I possibly be responsible for? Let's take the posture that we owe it to this student and to ourselves to have enough professional integrity not to *pass* a student on to another teacher merely because we don't want to face him again next year. Perhaps the *system* breeds this lack of accountability and responsibility, but we're doing ourselves a terrible disservice not to confront such problems. Let's

be the kind of teacher we would want our own children to have.

"Let's incorporate into our guidance classes those aspects which will result in greater awareness. I find that students know so little about work. Some are shocked that 'you don't have to work every day, only 40 hours during the week.' They've never heard of FICA. They don't know what the current minimum wage is. W-4, what's that? What should I put for exemptions (what is it, anyway?). And on, and on. The list is actually frightening. How can we possibly say these students are ready for work? They don't even know what work is!

"Let's pass on better attitudes about work. Yes, you! As a teacher, you may be one of only a few role models a student has to emulate and learn from. When you complain about that after-school meeting cutting-in on your personal time, students pick up on it. When you gripe about chaperoning Saturday night's dance, students pick up on it. When you tearfully complain about how bad the administration/faculty/facilities/students/workload is, students pick up on it. They not only feel negatively about you and the whole concept of work, but they often develop a low self-concept as well. We want them to



feel positive and enthusiastic about their educational process, their teachers and most importantly, themselves.

"Let's cut through the civil-servant syndromes and lend some professionalism to our work ethic. Let's not avoid seminars which will upgrade our knowledge and help us do a better job for our students merely because these seminars are on weekends. Let's not fail to attend workshops or keep up with our reading in a continuing effort to improve ourselves just because we're not being paid to attend or to read. Let's not use the same lesson plans year after year because it's easy and we're too lazy to improve. Let's not misuse guest speakers and films because we're just plain lazy!

"Let's remember that most of us went from school right into school. We must make an effort to find out what's happening 'out there' and pass

this on to our students. Most of us have never had to 'apply' for a job, complete with application, right? The civil service system is quite different from private industry. How can we then tell our students how to apply for a job? We have no idea how the process works! The same is true for an interview. How can we prepare our students for an interview without having gone through one (or several) ourselves? We've got to take the initiative to experience these traumas (and they are to many students!) ourselves so that we can be more effective in helping others, or we will only be parroting what we've read in a book.

"Failing at increasing our awareness, we must utilize resources more effectively. If we have a cadre of individuals who avail themselves to us, let's use them. They can pass on more current and useful information than we can. If they open up their establishments to tours and hands-on experiences, take advantage of it.

If they offer brochures and other materials, start a library! Take a positive attitude toward the resources that are available and use them!

"Well, you say, that's easy enough to say, but what makes you an expert? I'm not an expert; I'm an interviewer. I determine whether that individual you so carefully or carelessly prepared for work will indeed work! I can determine how diligent or disinterested you were in working with that individual. I can tell whether the student lacks the basic qualities to begin with. I want to help you do your job so that you can help me do mine. I want to help you prepare your student so that you can help me hire him. Remember, it's the student that suffers when we don't do our jobs. What is career education? It's you and I working together."

*Sharen Wago is Personnel Director, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Waikiki.*