Dear Mr. Hill:

Through much current student thinking about business runs a rebellion against the prospect of knuckling under to a corporate mold. A smart company will welcome this attitude (though the same smart company will distinguish between an individual with creative ideas and a malcontent— with a chip on his shoulder).

You put the matter this way: The "distinguishing mark" of the businessman is "sameness." Mark Belnick at Cornell feels corporate use of personality tests "destroys any attempt at convincing students that business is truly interested in them as individuals." Harvard's Jim Hill says students want to keep the "sense of individuality and creativity" which a college education nurtures.

From the University of Illinois, Bob Byman asks why, if business does indeed offer opportunities for individuality, people do not know of it. Ed Kokalas at Michigan State writes about "the square peg in the square hole" and Larry Warner of the University of Texas speaks of "being lost in the corporate crowd."

Across all these comments falls the ghostly shadow of a stereotype.

A writer friend of mine used to give a wind-up toy to each child every Christmas. Now that his children are grown, they give one to him. This year's toy was with a chip on his shoulder.

Behind any folk myth is at least enough fact to tap it alive. Joe Colleges and Absent-Minded Professors do exist; so do Dizzy Blondes and Organization Men. But all blenders aren't dizzy and all businessmen aren't robots. We must sort fact from fancy and act accordingly.

Here is the crux of this "conformity" question: Does or does not business try to make people into wind-up robots? The answer: Any company which tries to do this or does not try to prevent it from happening is not a smart company.

This is how Crawford H. Greenewalt, chairman of the 100,000-employee DuPont organization, spoke of this in The Uncommon Man, The Individual in the Organization: The alert and well-managed organization will be fully aware of the dangers associated with individual submersion. Progress will be made in direct proportion to the intellectual freedom of action given all the men on the team. There is nothing inherent in large organizations which closes the door to individual performance, but the larger the organization, the more assiduously it must work at the job of keeping its channels of encouragement and recognition open and flowing.

In the preface to this book, Columbia University's Courtney C. Brown points out the distinction between "debilitating conformity of thought" and "rational conformity of behaviour within the bounds of commonly accepted purpose."

Would you buy this? I do, because I believe success and fulfillment come to men who innovate, engineer, develop, invent, create; to men who interact as unique backgrounds and insights to bear on a unique problem.

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How much "cult of the organization man" do you think there might be in a stock exchange? Listen. The Midwest Stock Exchange used to be just an apparently comfortable carbon copy of the New York Stock Exchange. When it realized it was a rut, it hired a 44-year-old stockbroker named James E. Day as president. His challenge: to develop completely new and independent ideas, to build a meaningful and major exchange.

His first change was to allow corporations as well as partnerships to join the exchange. This had never been done anywhere. "Clearing by mail" was Day's next innovation. This let out-of-town firms deal directly with the exchange and improved the service these firms could give their customers. The exchange next pioneered by installing a computer center to do the bookkeeping for member firms.

Note here that the organization—a stock exchange—specifically welcomed radical innovations. Note also that these "industry firsts" resulted—and the New York Stock Exchange has since adopted the first two and is developing the third. Midwest volume grew from $109 million to four billion dollars in the process.

Would you expect to find "organization-ism" in a public utility? But Illinois Bell Telephone Company, for example, consciously and constantly—even systematically—encourages its employees to question every system it has (from the customer's point of view), to ask why it is the way it is, to find ways to make it better.

Probe any successful organization and you will find attitudes like those in these two examples. They are what make the world go. Business benefits from individual creativity working in and through rational conformity of behaviour. So does society. So do you. Bob W. Galvin Chairman, Motorola Inc.

AN OPEN LETTER

This open letter about conformity in business is written by a businessman to one of six student correspondents on six different campuses. It is part of a continuing series of open letters published in 29 student newspapers reaching some 360,000 college men and women.

James Hill is a student at Harvard. Robert W. Galvin is chairman of Motorola Inc. If you have comments or questions, write Mr. Galvin at 9401 West Grand Avenue, Franklin Park, Illinois 60131.