

Ferdie J. Deering

Youngsters With Resourcefulness, Ambition Can Succeed With Effort

IF child labor laws had been in effect throughout this century, a number of successful Oklahomans might not have gotten as good a start as they did. They learned to work early in life.

Many examples might be cited to show how "underprivileged" youngsters began working "too young" out of necessity and came out on top. Every city and town could produce several such "heroes" and the countryside is full of them.

One such person is Beverly Osborne, restaurant owner. Anyone looking for a youngster who might have been regarded as having a slim chance to become a business, civic, church and community leader would likely put him on the list.

Born in 1896 to sharecropper parents on a small farm near Marlow, Beverly left home after completing the fifth grade, took his shoe box nearly full of clothes, about 30 cents in cash and walked to town to make his fortune.

Small of stature, he had no great assets, education, reputation or influential friends to help him get started. His first job was as a shine boy in a barbershop. He slept in the backroom and ate lightly from his meager earnings.

One day, the president of the local bank came in for a shoe shine. He asked several boys standing around what they wanted to be when they grew up.

One said he wanted to be a cowboy, another an engineer, a third hoped to be a big farmer, and so on. Beverly responded: "I want to be a millionaire!" He figured if he became rich, he could be other things on his own. He eventually reached

his goal.

Osborne came to Oklahoma City in 1921, established a string of restaurants and syndicated a special way to serve fried chicken when another famous name was still selling groceries.

This type of success story, built upon hard work, honesty and perseverance, may be less common in the future. Today's youngsters have to wait until they are 16 to get jobs and minimum wage laws make it difficult for them to get a start.

Unquestionably, restrictions were needed to stop exploitation of children by both parents and employers at the turn of the century, but 1938 laws may have gone too far.

Lack of work training in childhood results in unemployable teen-agers. Years spent in idleness often lead to bad habits, indolence, undesirable attitudes and crime.

"The child labor law is the worst thing that ever happened to children," Osborne says. "It has kept children from working and making something out of themselves."

Are there opportunities today for young people to get ahead on principles of honesty, dependability and fair dealing?

"I see the greatest opportunity right now for a man going in, working hard and giving true value with what he produces or sells and getting back a fair price, without taking advantage of others," the 80-year-old businessman said.

There still is hope for young people who are ambitious enough to work for success and resourceful enough to get work in spite of "do-gooder" laws that discourage an early start.

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