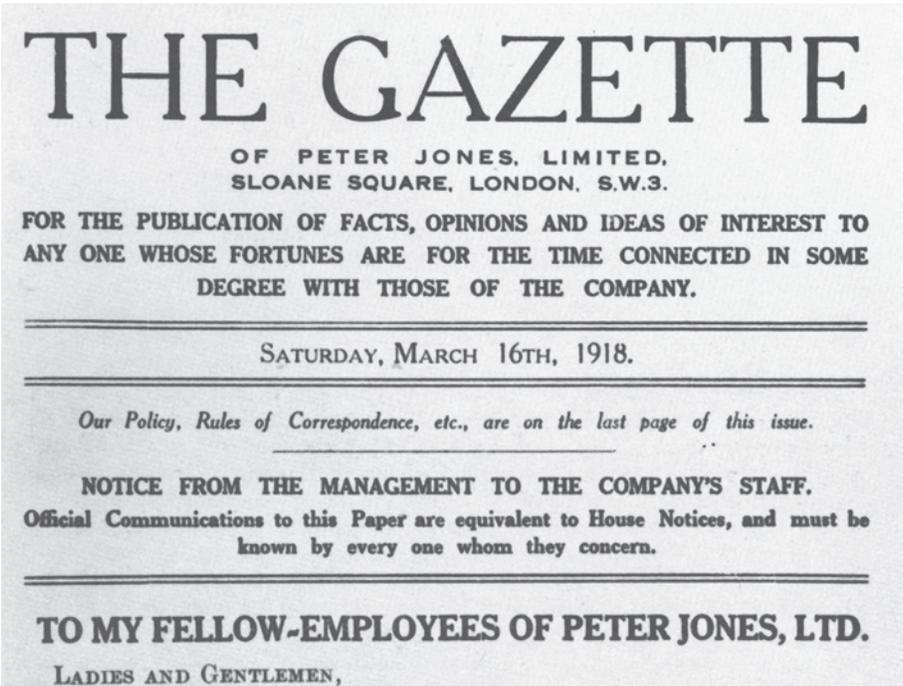


Forging a Partnership



The front page of the first Gazette. The sub-heading is classic Spedan, and note the decorous 'fellow-employees', and the Ladies and Gentlemen...

'Oh, Matron, Florrie's got her share money!' 'What about it?' 'But are these things really money?' 'Of course they are really money, as I keep on telling you silly girls, and now perhaps you'll believe it.' Whereupon the questioner said: 'But I have got thirty of them! Fancy me worth thirty pounds!' – and she burst into tears.

SPEDAN LEWIS, RECALLING THE EARLY DAYS OF PROFIT SHARING,
IN PARTNERSHIP FOR ALL, 1948

Spedan's Innovations – Sharing Knowledge

So what were the reforms that Spedan gradually brought into Peter Jones that would make it so different from all other department stores, and ultimately from almost any other business? How would he convince his employees that he meant what he said? From the outset he defined the key components of a genuine Partnership as the sharing of Knowledge, Gain and Power. He introduced a regular staff 'council' meeting; he improved pay and started his profit-sharing scheme; and he started a two-way journal he called the Gazette. He readily understood that a sense of the power of joint ownership would only emerge through shared knowledge. He had started early on by the simple expedient of posting the week's results by department, on cards along the stairs, annotated with his comments. That was well before he began the Gazette. He recalled, using the old-fashioned term 'House' for the shop:

Another innovation that made the House gasp ... was the admission of the whole of the staff to knowledge of figures normally reckoned to be highly confidential. It had an extremely tonic effect upon the minds of the recipients. My father had carried secrecy even to the length of not merely not giving to his buyers figures of their own buyerships, but strenuously discouraging their attempting to keep any figures for themselves...

The publication of these and other figures has always been a marked feature of the Gazette ... and I was told that one critic declared that in doing so we 'loaded the dice against ourselves' ... but a Partnership must be very reluctant that any particular thing must be kept secret.

Early on after his arrival at Peter Jones, Spedan introduced a method of sharing information between managers and managed. He called this a committee for communication, something he'd tried with some success at Oxford Street in his early days there. The idea was that the shop assistants – not the managers – from different parts of the shop would elect representatives to regular meetings with him, so he could keep them abreast of events and they could make him aware of any grievance. He recalled how bitterly it was opposed by the Peter Jones buyers, who were in practice the middle tier of management of the shop, and used to ruling without question:

How sensational an innovation that was in those days is shown in the fact that the buyers, who at that time were still managers of the selling departments for which they bought ... promptly took the very unusual step of sending me a 'round robin' to ask that I would hold a buyers' meeting, and at that meeting expressed extreme dislike of the idea. I listened to their objections and persisted