

Are Managers Flesh and Blood, Too?

My recent membership in ASTD has brought me the *Journal*, that I consider to be the best publication in the field. However I would like to take issue with the message of your May editorial, in which you suggest HRD "must identify more closely with the purposes of the business institutions it serves." Surely it all depends on the institution! What about those who are currently vastly overcharging the Pentagon, for example?

HRD professionals know there is no best way of running a business, though there are good and bad ways. Flexibility and adaptability of people (both as employees and customers) enable them to cope with a range of environments and treatments. In some cases employers who do not espouse the values usually reflected in your *Journal* continue to run successful businesses. People may suffer, but they adapt or move on. These may not be the best organizations in their field, but they survive and remain profitable. In these cases we might argue that if the management values and style were changed they would do even better. To do this, we would have to challenge those particular managements and their values. It would not be enough simply to serve them in their current purposes. Many of our techniques may be value-free, but that does not mean we should be.

In the final paragraph of your editorial you talk in terms of the line manager controlling the "unruly flesh and blood component." This conveys a "Theory X" view of human nature (which I am sure you don't intend) and leads me on to a general point about the flavor of a number of otherwise well-intentioned articles I have read over the past year. It is as if the authors (and, in this case, yourself) put the manager on some sort of pedestal as though he or she were not part of this unruly flesh and blood

component. In TA terms, a parental and authoritarian view of management and organization still stalks your pages.

HRD people (and, incidentally, I don't really like the "R" in the term) must stand up and be counted. We are for business results, yes, but not at the expense of treating people as children, or as objects to be manipulated or disposed of (like assets). When we sense this happening we should resist. At bottom of truly effective human relationships and production of goods and services is an atmosphere of openness and trust. On these values there can be no compromise or gradation—you either believe in them or you don't. Trust is only developed with adults when they are treated as adults and as equals.

I increasingly find it difficult to believe that this is ever possible given the hierarchical view of organizations that we currently hold. For most managers this still seems to mean that the higher you are the more important, better and more deserving of status and respect you are. If managers could only see themselves as the servants of the people they employ, that would be a big step in the right direction.

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June Shines

I finally subscribed to the *Journal* and am elated with the first issue!

The June issue is crammed with good information useful to both me and my staff. Also, the June issue contains information and suggestions that are invaluable to me in "my other life" as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates.

I commend you for your excellent publication. I am looking forward to future issues.

*Kenneth R. Plon
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Office of Adult and Community Education
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Congratulations on the superb June issue of *Training & Development Journal*. Although partial to the article "When A Sales Pitch Won't Do," I am most impressed with the overall theme approach taken this month. You and your colleagues are to be commended as the *Journal* just keeps getting better and better. Best wishes for continued success.

*David Severson
Cambridge, Mass.*

Editor's Note: To express your views in our monthly "Issues" department, please address all correspondence to: "ISSUES," Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.