

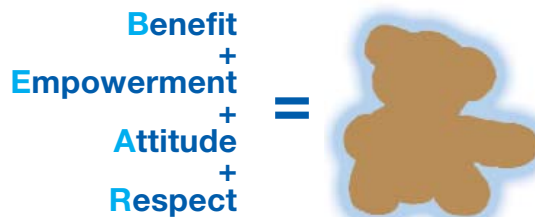
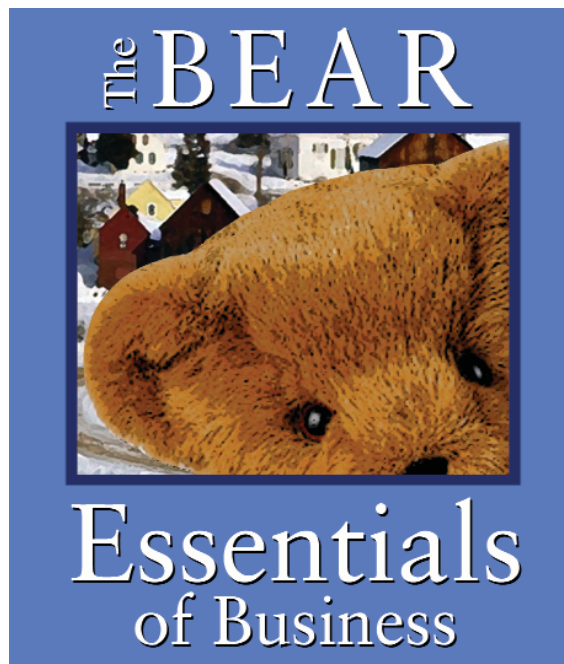
Bear Necessities

Reviewed by Bill Ellet

IF YOU HAVE AN OUNCE of cynicism in you, you may hate this video, which depicts teddy bears, Vermont, a nonhierarchical team, and love. But I have more than an ounce of cynicism in me and after watching the video several times, I haven't wavered from my initial reaction: This is the real thing, and I like it very much.

The Vermont Teddy Bear Company has created an internal culture that organizations should be eager to replicate. The focus of this video is, What are the ingredients of a culture in which people are deeply committed to their work? The four-point formula that uses "BEAR" as its acronym holds no surprises. It even dares to trot out empowerment, that well-worn concept of the 1990s that has little traction these days, through no fault of its own.

This video can be seen in one of two ways: 1) an anachronism, a bit of training nostalgia that tries to revive worthwhile concepts that were annihilated by a pendulum swing to ruthless corporate management over the last five years or 2)



a reminder that human resource and cultural strategies that focus on the contributions of employees and tolerate such simple notions as fun on the job have major business benefits.

Unfortunately, the video doesn't touch on the pay and benefits dimension of the company and that *has* to be part of making the case for a superior organization. You don't build a great company by hyping how fun it is to work there and stint on pay, health-care benefits, and promotion possibilities. (Consider the problems Wal-Mart has been having.) That's too bad, because the company has an important story to tell.

After a phone conversation with the HR director of Vermont Teddy Bear, I'm convinced the company is holding up its end of the bargain. Their wages, salaries, and benefits are carefully benchmarked against peers to make sure they're competitive. All of their full-timers are eligible for health-care benefits, and their part-timers receive

We liked...

- that the Vermont Teddy Bear Company seems to offer its employees multiple reasons for caring, coming to work with a smile, and giving their all to the business.

Could be better...

- Leaving out information on pay, benefits, and promotion opportunities compromises the training.

pro-rated benefits. Employee retention is high, and the company prides itself on promoting from within. It looks to me like they are the real thing.

Nevertheless, the training is compromised without the larger context of the company's commitment to its workforce. The producers might've worried that if they did include that part of the story, companies that don't want to make a similar commitment but want smiles on faces wouldn't buy the program. Fair enough, but the program isn't going to work with that type of company, at least not in the long run.

We didn't receive the support materials for this video from the producer, so we can't offer a complete evaluation of the training package.

The Bear Essentials of Business

Video, 2004, 19 minutes

Learncom

www.learncom.com

800.233.6067

\$595

Included materials: leader guide, PowerPoint slides, participant materials

Recommendation

The Vermont Teddy Bear Company appears to be a great model for human resource practices. But this training won't work if the organization delivering it isn't sincere about changing to an employee-focused culture.

The Bear Essentials of Business product rating

Holds viewer interest	***
Acting/presenting	***.5
Diversity	**
Production quality	***
Value of content	***.5
Instructional value	***.5
Value for the money	****
Overall rating	***

MORE/www.learncom.com, search on "bear essentials" for an online preview of the video

Performance Rx

Reviewed by Bill Ellet

MEDIA PARTNERS is one of the best producers of training videos. As other companies have gone out of business, the organization has continued to create products that cover important topics, include good content, are presented well, and are accompanied by useful materials.

Painless Performance Improvement is no exception. The program addresses the problem of poor performers from the supervisor or manager point of view. According to the program, supervisors often allow poor performance in order to avoid drama and conflict.

The video is simple in design. On an unadorned set, an ultra-competent sister and chronic loser brother define the problem from the opposing points of view of the frustrated manager and underperforming employee.

Then they review a six-point process that a first-line supervisor can use to improve performance:

1. State what you see, not what you feel.
2. Wait for a response.

Painless Performance Improvement

Video, 2004, 23 minutes

CRM Learning

www.crmlearning.com

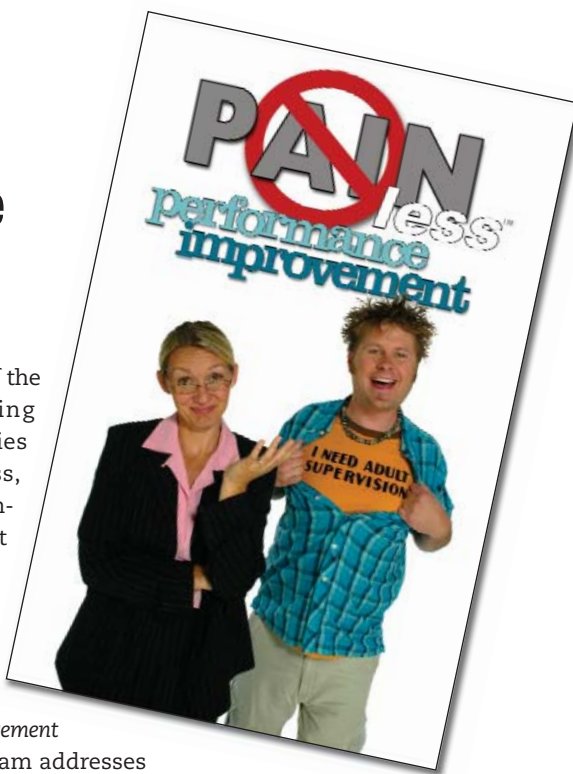
800.421.0833

\$895 for DVD, \$795 for VHS

Included materials: leader guide, manager workbook, PowerPoint slides

Recommendation

Supervisors face no more difficult issue than correcting poor performers. This program contains all of the necessary content and should be easy to deliver in a classroom or as individual instruction with follow-up.



3. Remind the employee of the goal, which must be specific and measurable.
4. Ask for a specific solution.
5. Agree together on the best solution and repair any conflict.
6. Follow through.

The points are illustrated with vignettes that demonstrate ineffective and effective approaches. They are short and reasonably entertaining.

The “painless” part of the program’s title is of course an overstatement, but the proposed process gives you a chance to deal with performance effectively rather than descend into a conflict that doesn’t improve matters.

Instruction includes information on employee “sidetracks,” responses that a poor-performing worker may use to distract the manager. Those include the stall, guilt-trip, self-inflicted wound, and attack. The instruction on these conscious or unconscious tactics is invaluable, especially for new supervisors who might be particularly vulnerable to them.

One weakness of the program is that it glosses over the issue of observation of employee behavior. The video can only do so much in 23 minutes, but supervisors need to make sure they have their facts right before they confront an employee. The program assumes that the facts of poor performance aren’t in dispute, which isn’t true in many real-world situations.

Program package

The guide and workbook provide excellent support for the program. I was particularly impressed by the leader guide, which has plans for knowledge- and skills-based training. The skills-based training takes longer, but it makes more sense if you are trying to influence the behavior of first-line supervisors, who are trying to influence the behavior of their employees. Both the guide and workbook have ample detailed content in a variety of categories, from instruction to activities.

We liked...

- the conciseness of the vignettes, which allows more to be included and makes the program interesting and instructive
- the inclusion of information on employee response tactics.

Could be better...

- The program glosses over the important concept of behavior observation, assuming that the facts of poor performance aren’t in dispute.

Painless Performance Improvement product rating

Holds viewer interest	***.5
Acting/presenting	***.5
Diversity	**.5
Production quality	***.5
Value of content	***.5
Instructional value	***.5
Value for the money	***.5
Overall rating	***.5

Bill Ellet is editor of *Training Media Review*; wellet@tmreview.com.

Missing Blastoff

Reviewed by Lynn Monaco

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD lots of hype about a course but were disappointed when you actually took it? That happened to me with this program.

The course promises to teach you how to be more productive and get all of those piles of work under control. I couldn’t wait to take it. However, it turned out to be another quite ordinary time management course, using different terminology to make it sound new and different. For example, the categories for tasks are Do-

ing Now, Not Doing Now, and Never Doing Now. But the reality is, there's nothing new here.

Basically all this course taught was how to use your calendar to schedule your time, be realistic about your schedule, only do what

you can do, and let the rest wait or don't do it at all.

I waded through the chapters waiting expectantly for the golden goose that never came. And to make matters worse, the course was boring. It has far too little interaction. I sat with my hands in my lap 99 percent of the time. I didn't even need to click on a Next button; the program turned the pages for me—and many times too quickly for my reading speed.

In addition, the repetition is excessive. I'm a firm believer in "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell

them what you told them," but this course carries the advice to an extreme. I began to mouth the words along with the narrator because what he was saying became so predictable.

We liked...

- the premise of the course: to learn how to get piles of work under control.

Could be better...

- The course contains no new concepts.
- There is almost no interaction included and the repetition of information is excessive.
- The course caters only to auditory learners and is missing key elements such as bookmarking, testing, and result reports.

Foundation and Fundamentals, and Implementing Mission Control Online, 2004

Mission Control Productivity
www.missioncontrol.com
 888.793.8323
 \$349

Recommendation

I don't recommend this product. It's uni-directional and geared only toward the auditory learner. There is no navigational overview, bookmarking, testing for comprehension, or reporting of results.

Mission Control product rating

Holds user interest	*
Production quality	**
Ease of navigation	**
Interactivity	*
Value of content	**
Instructional value	**
Value for the money	**
Overall rating	*.5

Lynn M. Monaco has served in a variety of training positions, including vice president of training and development. She is currently a consultant; monacol@aol.com.