

# Who Wants A Training Job ?

## A Look At Some Training Problems of the Future

LORETTO DAMERELL

How would you prepare yourself for a job in which the functions are not defined, the skills and aptitudes needed are unknown, and the kinds and amounts of knowledge you will have to acquire have not yet been determined? From the signs and symbols we see around us, this is the nebulous climate in which future training directors will have to function. The job must change because everything else will—workers, structure, media, and the kind of person needed to run a training program. And the training job has never been one in which there was time to mutate! So, for you new ones, in case it's any help, here are some of the dim images we see. But, to be sure, in a glass darkly.

We have been very busy in the last 10 to 15 years establishing training as a management function and providing training to meet the changes in a dynamic world. We have been busy learning. We have racked our brains for methods, techniques and gimmicks that would make the training "take" fast—and "stick." We have established goals, organized programs, trained trainers and measured results (not too validly!). We have stopped doing the training and started to direct programs. We have had to realize that training means creating something in people. That led us to psychology, psychiatry and anthropology. We found we needed to acquire the basic disciplines of the social scientists

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and concern ourselves with the implications of emerging "Organization Man." We have had to face up to the wry truths of "Parkinson's Law."

Many of us sense the change in the job we need to do and in how we are going to do it. Before we can reset our sights, we must discover what this change is and, so far, we only have bits and pieces of what the future pattern will be. But these bits and pieces are beginning to have a shape and a direction. The causes for change are beginning to come clear and the root is the basic concept of job or position. From this firm platform, all training springs. The tools of personnel management were our tools—the task list, the position description, the job standards and the performance review. We knew what we wanted as a result of the training and our problem was to devise the means of getting it. We did develop the means, and we knew when we had achieved the result: The employee could do the job acceptably.

### **"Job" Concepts**

But where will we be when our concept of a "job" no longer fits, when the tasks and activities are changing so fast that we have no time to train *an* employee to do *a* job; when procedures and processes veer rapidly to try to keep up with the dynamics of our inventiveness. What will we mean by performance? And how will we measure it? We begin to see a vague shadow of a new shape. We will probably abandon the whole job concept and substitute occupational field or aptitude area. Suppose we must find a way to develop a work force that is able

to perform certain kinds of related tasks? The work done by today's statistician or research technician may be done tomorrow by machine. Where will we need the high skills of these displaced people? How should they be trained so that they expect to use their disciplines in many different contexts, and they can make changes with maximum efficiency?

What happens to the work force in our society when all workers must be highly skilled? We have already reached the point where there are more white-collar workers than blue-collar workers—more thinkers and planners, fewer doers. From all the signs, this development will be accelerated at a frightening rate in the next decade.

The changing balance in the work force leads us to our next training problem—the growing numbers of those people whose work turns them inward—to their own thoughts and the use of their own hands: The chemist, mathematician, physicist, electronic data programmer, research analyst. These key people usually solve problems alone. They do meet with people and coordinate work. But solutions are often in their own hands because such highly specialized knowledge is needed to find them. And there is an increasing demand for people with skills so complex that they must spend most of their lives in acquiring and keeping current their technical competence.

At the same time, the supply of people with extroverted skills might wane. The salesman's job may be done by subliminal suggestion. The jobs of hundreds of teachers can be done more effectively by one superior teacher on T.V. The effect of the exhorter and persuader on the public is diminishing.

One of the best public speakers I have heard is a mathematician, economist and actuary. People are always amazed at his rare combination of outstanding introvert and extrovert skills. Unfortunately, he is an exception. Will we find enough people with extroverted skills to build a sound fabric of organization, to provide channels of communication between the various kinds of experts, to direct and coordinate with vision and imagination the efforts of the "loners" with high skills. If we had to plan today to train these "movers and shakers," what would the program look like? What techniques would we use? What would management training consist of?

### **Organizational Structures**

And in what kind of operating framework will we function? Is there something sacred about the pyramidal organization? Could the wheel replace the pyramid? Some decentralized organizations approach this design. We may have to realign our ideas about organizational relationships. We have based the pattern of our functioning on principles of organization we consider basic and immutable.

They have served us well. But so did the law of gravity, and Euclidean geometry. We have barely formulated and tested the principles of administration, and we are already questioning their validity in the face of tomorrow's problems. Dr. James Fesler sums up our present plight:

"It is fair to say that the field (administration) has been infused with skepticism about our ability to prescribe principles of public administration at this stage of our understanding. In turn, this means that the principles and axioms laid down by the pioneers are no longer accepted as gospel. The vacuum created by this rejection has not been filled by substitutes acceptable to men who must act.

"The contribution of recent scholars is negative only in the sense that there is lacking an agreed upon set of universal principles."<sup>1</sup>

So, if we are not looking sharply, the rules of the game may change without out noticing. We have an indication of such change in organizationally aligned training groups—the supervisor and his subordinates. Not too long ago, we thought people could only be trained if the boss wasn't there. Now, with some help from the anthropologists, we perceive a producing unit. We accept status, hierarchy, responsibility and interaction as important considerations in planning training, because these factors are basic in the dynamics of the functioning which is our training objective.

### **Communications**

What of the trainer's main function—communicating and teaching others to communicate? We are already facing mechanical problems in this area. Things are changing so fast that we

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1. Dr. James W. Fesler, Cowles Professor of Government, Yale University. From a speech delivered at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, September 4, 1952.

cannot get information in writing and disseminated before change makes it obsolete. The information available at any one time is so complex and multifarious that all of the available knowledge which would influence decision-making cannot be brought together and communicated fast enough. Still, we must solve this problem or waste much research, development and training time in duplicated effort.

Certainly, media must be a part of this solution. We have spent much training time on learning to read faster, but we never catch up. And there is a physiological limit to reading speed. We are still joking about influencing the subconscious with subliminal devices. Why should we be skeptical about these methods? Perhaps more research needs doing to make them effective; but, in our time, breakthroughs come pretty fast. We should be thinking at least, if not actually planning, how we can use these new techniques.

### **The Training Director's Job**

And what about the training director? What skills and aptitudes must he have? The principal attribute required may be imagination, and the next most important, flexibility. To imagine what *can* happen, and *probably* will, and to plan on that basis, may be the training director's main function if the training program is to keep up with the needs.

Keeping flexible may be our more difficult job. We will surely have to scrap plans and form new ones much faster than we do now. We will have to learn not to cultivate pet theories and methods so we don't have to fight our

own resistance when we are faced with new theories and strange problems.

If future training focuses on the development of capacities rather than skills, we must develop our *own* capacities to the maximum. As training veers from groups to individual analysis and development, the training director must first turn the probe and the light on himself. He must know a great deal more than most of us do now about a great many more things. And he must, by some clairvoyant technique, discover what he will need to know and be able to do in the future.

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