

News You Can Use

by Haidee Allerton

ROLE REVERSAL GETS SEAL OF APPROVAL

SENIOR EXECUTIVES are learning how to work on production lines as part of training at Harman International Industries, a maker of audio products based in Washington, D.C. At the same time, line workers are being coached about executive ranks. "If we lose a worker, that investment is forfeited," says Sidney Harmon, chairperson and chief executive.

President Clinton visited Harman International's factory in Northridge, California, urging more companies to reinvest in their employees.

LENDING AN EAR

A TRUCKER'S LIFE can be lonely, for the trucker and his or her family. Long hours away from home, the temptation to take stimulants in order to meet delivery dates, and pressure to fudge log times to meet federal guidelines for required sleep breaks.

Truckers can now get help—even while on the road—in coping with both work and family issues through the Employee Advisory Resource, created by Comdata Corporation of Brentwood, Tennessee.



EAR provides a 24-hour 800 number for drivers and their families. Drivers can talk to professional counselors who are available to help them immediately and who can refer them when necessary to follow-up resources in their own communities.

Comdata views the service as a potential cost savings to carriers through early intervention, crisis resolution, and accident prevention.

TRICK OR TREAT?

SOME COMPANIES—such as Aetna—are offering concierge services to busy employees as part of their benefits programs. For a monthly fee, the corporate concierge will pick up dry cleaning, shop for groceries, run other errands, and even plan social events. Andrea Arena—president of Two Places at One Time, a concierge service in Atlanta, Georgia—says that 98 percent of her business is corporate. Here are just some of the client

requests she has helped fulfill:

- ▶ taping the season premiere of "Melrose Place" and sending it by Fed Ex
- ▶ returning 35 holiday gifts to the stores
- ▶ returning 20 pounds of unused chicken from a party
- ▶ finding a cat-proof Christmas-tree skirt



- ▶ taking three cats to the groomer
- ▶ compiling a list of public golf courses
- ▶ purchasing golf balls
- ▶ feeding live rats to a pet snake
- ▶ delivering lunch to a partner meeting
- ▶ researching the best car-insurance rates
- ▶ arranging to have an

abandoned car towed

▶ disassembling the stereo system in a client's old apartment and reassembling it in his new apartment.

Arena has also arranged to deliver to different clients a laptop, 30 tubs of caramel popcorn, balloons, a prescription, two dozen bagels, five shopping bags of shoes, and a carload of Girl Scout cookies.

For a dissenting opinion, Bonnie Olmstead of New Ways To Work, in San Francisco, California, cautions that concierge service can be just another way to demand more time on the job from employees as they no longer have the excuse that they need to run personal errands.

Sources include David Malpus, of National Public Radio's "Morning Edition."

TREND WATCH

REMEMBER Omar Sharif slowly coming into view across the vast Sahara in "Lawrence of Arabia"? Sort of like these trends:

- ▶ In the aftermath of downsizing, what do American workers say is key to survival? According to a nationwide survey of more than 700 workers conducted by Dale Carnegie Training, the two highest rated "success skills" were "getting along with others at work" and "establishing relationships built on trust." Both ranked way ahead of leadership and getting along with customers.
- ▶ In what skill areas do administrative and professional workers receive similar performance ratings? According to a recent sur-

vey by Acumen International of San Rafael, California, the skill areas are listening, interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and handling disagreements. Acumen says that the findings suggest that these four areas are the "price of entry" for employment. In other words, all types of employees need such skills for competent job performance.

► More than half of all business conducted in the United States is international, according to *Learning Link*, a quarterly newsletter published by Sony Electronics.

► University of Chicago Graduate School of Business now offers a customized corporate education program—part of a trend in B schools doing executive development for

companies instead of companies doing it themselves. One client for the University of Chicago's program is Abbott Laboratories, a health-care company. The specially designed, two-day executive program is "Partnerships in Managed Care: Approaches and Implementation." Another program is being customized for the Securities Industry Association.

QUICK TIPS

HERE ARE SOME TIPS for preventing computer-related pain, provided by Taylor Publishing Company in Dallas, Texas:

► Don't put your monitor on top of your hard drive. You should be looking slightly down at your monitor instead of slightly up.

@work

HERE ARE SOME NEW ONLINE SPOTS DEDICATED TO MEETINGS. BE THERE OR BE SQUARE.

To improve meetings, check out the Web site from the Institute for Better Meetings. It posts articles, offers a meeting IQ test, and lets you download software. The address is <http://www.california.com/~meetings>.

Another site, TCBWorks: Webware for Teams, lets you test drive "meetingware" developed at the University of Georgia. The software helps you organize agenda items and enables group voting through spreadsheet technology. The address is <http://ginger.mgmt.uga.edu:8001/>

Facilitator Central (http://hsb.baylor.edu/html/fuller/fac/fac_home.htm.) offers research and tips for people who seek to become better facilitators.

Meeting adjourned.

► If your feet don't rest flat on the floor, get a footrest to prevent leg strain.

► To avoid eyestrain, look away occasionally from your computer screen to

distant objects.

► Frequent microbreaks of less than a minute can be more effective than 15-minute breaks taken only a few times a day. A microbreak

VIRTUAL-REALITY TRAINING

TEXAS-BASED Northern Telecom (Nortel)—a manufacturer of telephone equipment—is delivering training to thousands of its technicians, operators, and customers through CD-ROM, using virtual-reality software to create "multimedia worlds" that include text, sound, video, animation, and digital photos.

These three-dimensional VR worlds react in real time, mimicking the actions and sounds of telephone equipment as users push buttons and adjust parts. One \$995 CD-ROM course replicates Nortel's three-day Familiarization course, which used to cause participants to miss five days' work and rack up thousands of dollars in hotel and airline expenses. The



CD-ROM covers all of the same material—97 learning concepts—and runs on users' PCs or laptops.

The program opens with a view of a reception area where training participants sign in and follow the verbal directions of the on-screen guide. Then, they select one of three doors to learn about

the system's hardware, software, or interface. Behind each door are instruction rooms where participants learn how to identify Nortel equipment, operate station features, and interact with a PBX system. For example, technicians find work-order forms on a table describing an assembly job.

The technicians then point and click to on-screen parts to select items and indicate actions.

Participants are tested on the skills taught and issued a training certificate.

"We've found that the virtual-reality approach reaches all kinds of learners—visual, trial-and-error, audio, and detail-based—to boost retention from 12 to 15 percent to 20 to 30 percent," says Darrell Ferris, senior manager of Nortel's virtual-reality-applications design unit.

Ferris says that VR training hasn't replaced traditional training. "We've just extended our company's ability to offer quality training by using this technology."

Contributed by Laura Lang, Laura Lang Communications, Ramona, California.

Language training made easy... and affordable.

If language training is your responsibility, you know this is no small task.

Immersion programs and classes rank high in effectiveness, but at a price that's hard to take. Self-study options, while inexpensive, are rarely effective, much less measurable. Meanwhile, the demand for language training only seems to grow.

Now Syracuse Language Systems can offer you a solution: Language Connect University

A virtual language school on the World Wide Web, LCU combines the effectiveness of classroom instruction and the convenience of self-study with custom content from the Internet. A "multimedia textbook" on CD-ROM - Your Way 2.0 - works before, during and after class to maintain language skills.

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can consist of something as simple as stretching your legs or flexing your wrists.

▶ The least stressful posture for sitting at your computer resembles a horseback rider's posture but with legs closer together.

▶ Avoid resting your wrists on the hard edge of your desk or keyboard stand. Try using a pad or palm rest.

▶ The front edge of your chair should curve downward.

These tips are from *Help! My Computer Is Killing Me* by a physician, Sheik Imrhan.

QUICK TAKES

THE RATE of workplace violence in U.S. private industry is three cases per 10,000 workers, according to Labor Department figures. But for residential-care employees, the rate rises to 47 cases for every 10,000 employees. In nursing and personal-care facilities, the rate is 38 cases per 10,000 workers.

In 1994, there were 1,071 workplace homicides—16 percent of the 6,588 fatal work injuries.

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

FOR MANY college students, Kinko's Copies is as much a staple as *Cliff Notes*. As a college student himself in the 1970s, Kinko's founder Paul Orfalea cruised campus dorms nightly selling pens and spiral notebooks from his knapsack, grossing about \$40 per outing.

Now, Orfalea's chain of 850 Kinko's stores in the United States and abroad not only offers photocopying services but also video-

conferencing capabilities in some locations and soon Internet access. The new service will be geared toward traveling executives, small-business owners, and home-office workers. Some Kinko's stores will even help business customers set up home pages on the World Wide Web.

Public Internet access is also available at universities, some public libraries, and in computer-equipped urban cybercafes that also serve coffee.

CYBERSECRETARIES

MOST—88 PERCENT—of executives polled say that they consider the recommendations of their administrative assistants about corporate computer needs important, according to an Office Team survey of 150 human resource and other managers in 1,000 large companies across the United States.

Office Team—based in Menlo Park, California—says that administrative assistants are becoming increasingly familiar with a wide range of software applications—including word processing, spreadsheets, desktop publishing, databases, and presentations.

"It's this daily, hands-on experience that makes their opinions so valuable," says Andrew Denka, executive director.

Send items of interest to "News You Can Use," 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.