# HRD CONTROVERSY: ALA BLAKE AND MOUTON

*INTRODUCTION — In our May 1980 issue, we featured Bob Blake and Jane Mouton of Scientific Methods, Inc. focusing on 11 significant issues they felt training and development professionals should gear themselves to solve. The pair pointed out, "These issues are controversial in nature by virtue of the fact that training and development professionals sometimes resolve these issues in ways that create more problems than they solve!"*

*The Journal felt that these issues needed to be exposed and/or debated at greater length. Thus, in this and subsequent issues we will repeat Blake and Mouton's original formulation and present an author's reflection on that*

**Robert Blake**

*"The trainer is the one who does things to people rather than the trainer being the person who brings insight to bear of a how-to character, with the line organization implementing the enlightened practice."*

**Jane Mouton**

*issue. — Editor*

**Living with contradictions versus resolving them.**

The world is filled with contradictions and it is realistic to recognize that they exist and to accept the reality that a person is not in a position to do anything about many of them. It is quite a different thing for a trainer to be aware of contradictions and to so separate the different aspects of his or her training as to not recognize them.

An example here is a trainer who simultaneously embraces Theory Y and Behavior Modification; or a trainer who embraces situationalism but also acknowledges that there is "one best way." The contradictions are irreconcilable, and the only way a person can bridge them is by some mental act of separation, possibly related to the "equal but different" 5,5 orientation mentioned previously. Certainly, however, a training philosophy ought to be both sound, comprehensive, and internally consistent.

# "CONTRADICTION" CAN SPELL TROUBLE

## BY LARRY W. SANDERS

*Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself (I am large, I contain multitudes) —* Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

Contradiction for poets adds to the elusiveness, the beauty, and the attention of their work. But contradictions for the trainer spells only trouble. If we, in our training and development activities, present contradicting models, theories or practices without recognizing them, we generate continuing individual and organizational woes. The most immediate loss is the silent but certain damage to the trainer's credibility with part of his or her group. Not every participant will be aware of the contradictions involved. Unfortunately the knowledgeable, understanding people who do see the conflicts are often those we depend upon for the success of our programs. Exposing our lack of professionalism robs us of their respect and confidence. Everything we present becomes suspect.

Those who are not aware of the contradictions can become a greater organizational problem. They attempt to implement our recommendations and find themselves lost and confused. They either give up in frustration and return to their old methods or doggedly persist in their efforts, driving their subordinates up a wall.

How do these contradictions come about? There are probably many reasons. Chief among them, and damagingly so, is a lack of depth of understanding of the material we present. We simply haven't taken the time to do our homework; to understand the implications of what we teach; to visualize our theories in action within our own organization. For instance, the concept of participative management is fine in the classroom. However, asking managers to actually give up part of their decision-making authority just after they've completed a five-day workshop on managerial decision-making is like asking a lumberjack to give his ax away just after he's sharpened it.

We have failed to do our homework when we read articles about McGregor, sit through training sessions about McGregor, see movies about McGregor and then try to *teach* McGregor without ever having personally read and studied the work that was actually McGregor's. If we happen to be fortunate enough to work for a firm that has a training archive, a wonderful dusty room filled with drawers full of yellowed lesson plans, then we can produce lessons on almost any subject without ever cracking a book. This may have been what Walt Whitman was referring to when he said, "I contain multitudes." We borrow a little here and a little there from sources several times removed from the original authority and we end up with gross inaccuracies. We con-

tradict the very sources we quote.

Another reason we may present contradicting material is that we become enamored with all the fascinating studies, models and theories. Perhaps you've had the dubious delight of sitting through a fast-paced training session that presents, in four hours, every managerial style model from Attila the Hun to Spiro Agnew's "No-No Bird." Similarities of the models are occasionally drawn (in the voluntary evening session) but the mutual exclusiveness of some of their content is seldom recognized or addressed.

A sensitive source of contradiction is the disparity of what we teach and what our organization practices or will support. Traditionalism, bureaucratic requirements, and the reality of organizational life often contradict what is considered to be the best practices.

We may present effective techniques for employee appraisals including goal setting, problem solving, and active listening, then have to review the required employee appraisal form that evaluates and scores people like sides of beef.

Sometimes the requirements of long-term organizational development efforts are inconsistent with the requirements placed on managers and executives for short-term results. They may understand and agree with OD concepts but they know their personal success depends, not on a healthier organization five years from now, but rather on meeting performance goals today. As a result, their expectations may require markedly different practices by their subordinates than the practices we teach and encourage.

We get classroom comments like, "I'd love to do it that way but my boss wouldn't buy it." The material we present is internally consistent but it contradicts the operating values of our organization.

What's a trainer to do, then? It would seem that first we need to do our homework and insure we have an in-depth understanding of the theories we propose to present. We must look beyond the academic soundness of the studies and envision the actual activities required to implement them. Then we should ask if these practices are consistent with the practices we recommend in our other training programs.

We need also to understand that strength in our organization will come from the implementation of a few sound, manageable programs rather than from introducing a multitude of overlapping and sometimes contradictory approaches. Feedback from friendly sources can help us in our efforts. Our peers, subordinates and our bosses can alert us to possible doctrine contradictions if we cultivate their awareness and support.

When our plans conflict with current organizational reality we need, of course, to proceed *very* carefully. Like the camel, if we can get our nose in the tent and watch closely, we may find opportunities to call for a re-examination of contradicting philosophies and practices. Rather than waving a sick evaluation form over our head and declaring the thing "no blankedy-blank good," we will probably be more effective if we wait until the problems it causes are being felt, then ask if it is possible that the form itself could be part of the problem.

Finally, as Blake and Mouton have pointed out, we do need a clearly articulated philosophy. It is important that we insure all the elements of our program, under our control, are noncontradictory and supportive of our overall training and development goals.

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