BOOKS

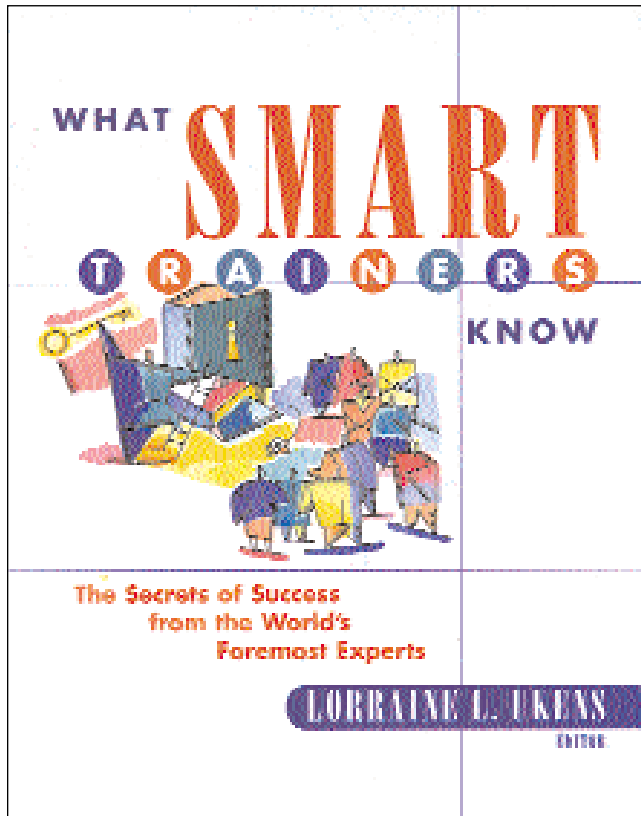## What Smart Trainers Know

Reviewed by Robert J. Rosania

Lorraine Ukens, the editor of *What Smart Trainers Know: The Secrets of Success From the World's Foremost Experts,* describes her book as a "one-stop compilation…of the topics that are most important to training and development professionals." My guess is that few who read this 400-page book would quibble with Ukens's characterization. Imagine more than 35 of the greatest minds in training and development sitting in your living room, each presenting his or her thoughts on subjects ranging from adult learning to performance improvement to determining return-on-investment.

The book is "an aid for new practitioners who want to develop a working knowledge of the field, as well as an opportunity for long-time practitioners to examine various experts' views in one convenient package"—that's Ukens's promise. I'm usually skeptical of such claims, but Ukens covers topics relevant to trainers at both ends of the t&d spectrum with grace. The book's "Training and Development Methods" section provides two examples: Mel Silberman's excellent introduction to "Facilitating Active Learning" and Fran Rees's insightful take on the facilitation

process, "Involve Your Learners; Enhance Your Training."

Silberman debunks the notion that a trainer's responsibility is to just "[pour] information into another person's head." Instead he offers a more active approach: "For people to learn something well, they must hear it, see it, question it, discuss it with their peers, and do it." Like Silberman, Rees offers practical advice in her approach to facilitating learning. She not only describes the facilitation process and its benefits, but also provides excellent examples of open-ended questions that both new and experienced trainers can use to facilitate discussion and encourage group interaction.

If you've been confronted with a request for ROI information, you'll find Jack Phillips and Patricia Pulliam Phillips's "The Return-on-Investment Process" a helpful resource. They offer a detailed ROI process model and an easy-to-understand formula for calculating ROI. They also expose many false assumptions and misconceptions that have long discouraged veteran trainers from attempting to compute ROI.

Mary Broad's chapter, "Transfer of Learning to Performance," is ideal for trainers who are knowledgeable about the current emphasis on performance but are looking for a specific example of a successful transition from learning to performance. Broad's case study features a large international company that meets that need.

Seasoned and new practitioners alike will enjoy "Learning to Lead," James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner's essay on leadership. Based on more than 20 years of research, this chapter provides readers with an interesting slant on leadership development. Kouzes and Posner point out that while most leadership development is focused on "trying to mimic the great leaders…the real leadership development challenge" for those aspiring to lead is to move beyond copying what others do and, instead, "find our own true voices."

Bob Pike's personal account of what he has learned over the course of his 30-year career is disappointing. Reading "What I've Learned: The Picture is Bigger Than You Think" is a little like arriving at an elegant party expecting a gourmet meal by a master chef only to discover that hors d'oeuvres are being served. It's disappointing that Pike chose to share only a tiny glimpse of his vast training knowledge though the principles he has learned are enlightening: 1) Training isn't the only solution to what are often performance problems, 2) training is a process, 3) people's attention spans have shortened, and 4) to be an effective trainer means getting "to the CORE (close, opening, review, and energize) of our training."

That minor criticism does little to diminish the overall value of the book, but it's hard to fathom why a book about what smart trainers know and will need to know pays so little attention to the biggest issue to hit the t&d field in years: learning technologies. Only four chapters attempt to address that topic.

Of those, only Kevin Kruse's "Guaranteed Results With Multimedia and Online Training" and Zane Berge's "Applications of Communication Technology in Training and Education" address how technology is changing the way trainers conduct business. Kruse appropriately refers to his chapter as "a crash course in the design, development, and management of technology-based training programs," while Berge is right on target in describing communication technology as "a catalyst for changing how we teach and learn." Both chapters offer clear definitions of the various kinds of technology-based training, along with explanations of the authors' practical applications.

Ideaship: How to Get Ideas Flowing in Your Workplace
By Jack Foster

Jack Foster's got an idea: Don't be a leader who directs, runs, or leads your department: Be an ideaist who practices ideaship. "Ideaship is a step beyond leadership, for an ideaist does more than lead—he or she restores to people their belief in their own guidance," writes Foster in his latest book. Using the knowledge he has garnered from more than 35 years of experience in advertising, Foster reveals how you can encourage employees to become idea prone and construct an idea-friendly work environment.

Ideaship: How to Get Ideas Flowing in Your Workplace by Jack Foster. Berrett-Koehler; www.bkpub.com. 137 pp. US$14.95

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Seasoned and new practitioners can use this book to learn from the best in the business.

Another criticism concerns the makeup of the "Employee and Organizational Development" section. Ukens captures the employee side of development, including informative chapters on diversity, leadership, and teams, but she doesn't offer any real explanation of OD as an approach to change. Assuming that's what the title refers to, it would've been helpful to have at least a chapter providing a basic introduction to OD, perhaps including some models and practices, especially for people less familiar with that strategy for achieving organizational effectiveness.

Those shortcomings aside, *What Smart Trainers Need to Know* is a welcome addition to any trainer's library. Read it from cover to cover, or review the chapters randomly. This book offers numerous opportunities for seasoned and new practitioners to learn from the best in the business. Besides, when would you have time to get all of those people in your living room?

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