

In Practice

Think Globally; Sell Locally

Companies that want to build long-term relationships with international customers should prepare their salesforces to think globally but sell locally.

Worldwide, customers have similar needs, but their ways of doing business vary by culture, says Kathleen Murray, director of international marketing and development projects for Learning International, based in Stamford, Connecticut. Companies in different nations also have different expectations for customer/supplier relationships.

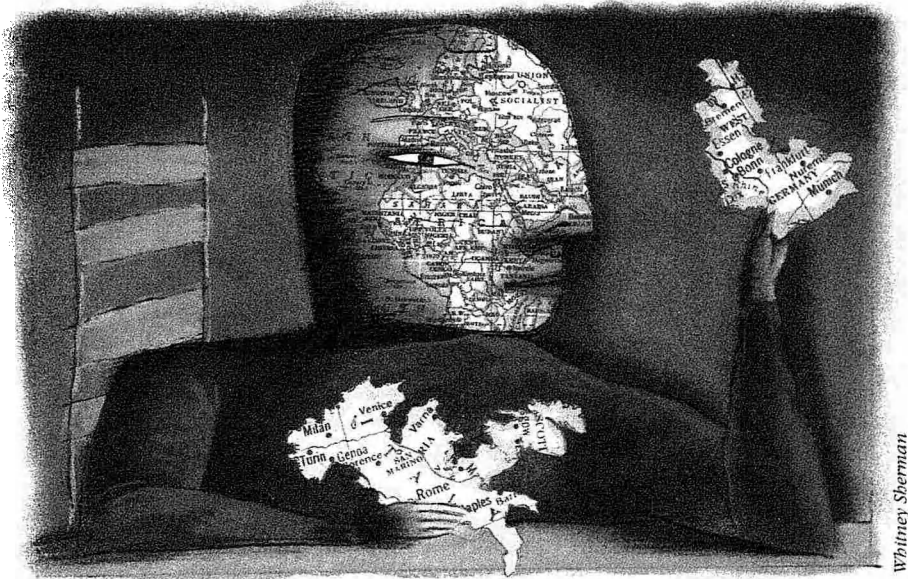
Learning International asked more than 1,000 large companies in 10 western European countries to rank 65 characteristics that they expect long-term suppliers to demonstrate. They also asked respondents to describe how long-term suppliers measure up to those expectations.

In all the countries, the knowledge, honesty, or dependability of the salesperson ranked first or second among customer priorities.

In all 10 countries, most respondents reported that their regular suppliers do not meet their expectations for basic selling skills, such as advising customers of changes, showing sensitivity to customers' pricing needs, knowing products and services thoroughly, and meeting emergency needs.

The study polled businesses in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

"If suppliers try to approach each market with the same sales-training program, they might miss opportunities," says Murray. In particular, North American companies might find that their programs do not translate well to European soil.



Whitney Sherman

She cites as an example a U.S. financial services organization that wanted to sell a high-end product in the United Kingdom. The company sent a "SWAT team" of crackerjack salespeople to the United Kingdom—which failed miserably. Team members knew the product, but "their style worked only in North America," says Murray.

In Europe, relationships between suppliers and customers are more formal, and customers are more reticent, Murray observes. "Americans will share information [with salespeople] much more readily," explains Murray. "In Europe, they will say, 'you should know about my business already.'"

Smart suppliers train their salespeople strategically by aligning their sales strategies with their marketing strategies, says Murray.

"Look at how the customer wants to do business before you look at sales training," advises Murray; "If your organization is aligned to meet customers' needs, then you give your

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salespeople opportunities to sell. If not, you're asking them to be magicians."

Above all, says Murray, make sure your international sales training program prepares your salesforce to pursue your company's global strategies by meeting local needs.

Single copies of the report, *Achieving Customer Loyalty in Europe*, are free; additional copies cost \$25 each. Contact Learning International, Marketing Department, 225 High Ridge Road, Box 10212, Stamford, CT 06904; 800/456-9390.

Follow the Bouncing Ball

By Van Symons, a training and development consultant based at 7137 Via Solana, San Jose, CA 95135.

The pace of business continues to accelerate. To keep up with customer demands, companies have to improve quality, develop new products, and find ways to cut costs at an ever-increasing rate.

Often, employees can't keep up with shifting roles and responsibilities, and processes break down. Employees lose sight of their organizations' goals, situations that are exceptions to processes fall through the cracks, and employees find ways to work around processes when they want something done.

When my company suddenly grew rapidly, all employees dealt firsthand with process breakdown. Even though we developed new processes to cope with broadened responsibilities, many people tended to revert to old practices or circumvent the new systems. Everyone seemed to understand how the new processes worked but frequently made mistakes in communication and implementation.

So, we decided to "bounce the ball"—a communications technique that creates a humorous, nonthreatening environment in which every person involved in a process, regardless of his or her status, participates in a process walk-through. Here's how it works.

Everyone involved in a process forms a large circle. A facilitator stands in the middle. To illustrate different steps in the process, employ-

ees toss a ball to each other.

When a person catches the ball, the person explains what is received, done, and produced at this step in the process. As the ball bounces around the circle, the facilitator encourages communication and ensures that the ball keeps moving.

Managers may comment only if necessary to clarify a task. If a step in the process requires a meeting among managers, the managers move to the middle of the ring and describe how they make decisions.

The technique always unfolds in the same way: Someone eventually asks a "dumb" question, which triggers the identification of an array of issues and problems. Typically, groups start the process walk-through after a lengthy discussion.

At my company, we carried out "bounce the ball" off site and provided music and refreshments to help participants relax.

We also carried out the review in two stages. During the first stage, to give everyone greater insight into others' roles, every employee was assigned to represent someone else's job in the process. The facilitator encouraged employees to use funny signs and hats to represent their assigned jobs.

Several weeks later, after the issues the group developed during the review were resolved, everyone participated again. This time, each person represented his or her own job in the process.

In contrast to other review techniques, "bounce the ball" focuses more on people than on things. "Bounce the ball" helps boost employees' morale and commitment by illustrating the value each employee brings to the process and the ways that all their jobs fit together to help meet organizational goals.

Most Likely To Succeed

Great training—that's the distinction that earned six up-and-coming companies a place in *Inc.* magazine's second annual roundup of "The Best Small Companies To Work for in America."

Why did training make the final cut of this year's six characteristics of

worker-friendly companies?

After considering the merits of a dozen or so categories, "it was obvious" that training serves to increase employees' productivity, self-esteem, and commitment to their employers, says *Inc.* Senior Editor John Kerr. "Companies stand a better chance in the long term if they make the investment in training."

Here is *Inc.*'s pick of small companies with big ideas about training: **Datatec Industries.** About one-third of the 325 employees of the Fairfield, New Jersey, computer-systems installer serve as mentors, sharing both "hard" and "soft" knowledge with their peers.

Dettmers Industries. A maker of airplane furniture, based in Stuart, Florida, Dettmers focuses on "learning to learn," with Saturday role-playing games that help foster teamwork among its 25 employees.

Luitink Manufacturing. The metal-stamping manufacturer in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, defines training as the horizontal learning passed from skilled worker to worker on well-run teams.

Northwestern Tool and Die Manufacturing. Under its aggressively run apprenticeship program, this Chicago-based manufacturer of precision tools, with 105 employees, pays unskilled novices good wages from the start—even when all they do is observe.

Starbucks Coffee. A coffee retailer and wholesaler headquartered in Seattle, Starbucks ties its training to its business strategy by building its 2,800 employees' "affinity" with the company. Starbucks offers employees classes in everything from coffee knowledge to interpersonal relationships.

Triton Industries. The metal-stamping manufacturer in Chicago spends 1.5 percent of its sales revenues on training for its 160 employees. All employees attend its four-semester, 32-week Triton "university," where they study such subjects as reading blueprints and team building.

"About the only common element" among the companies, writes Tom Ehrenfeld in *Inc.*, "is that great training serves an immediate purpose and vividly illustrates the values and culture of the company itself."

Wall Street Project

Corporations could find that their human resource policies toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees can actually affect their standing in the investment community.

A three-year-old grassroots advocacy group called the Wall Street Project fights workplace discrimination by discouraging investments in companies that do not treat gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees equitably.

WSP, headquartered in New York City, encourages "socially concerned" investment funds to weigh companies' track records on issues of sexual diversity when deciding on appropriate vehicles for investing.

Also, as part of an ongoing research project, WSP is surveying the CEOs and human resource managers of *Fortune* 1,000 companies to find out about their nondiscrimination policies, diversity-education programs, and compensation and benefits packages.

WSP Chair Nick Curto says the project expects to finish collecting and validating its first round of data for national dissemination in February 1994. Curto says the group expects such information to be welcomed not only by gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, but also by their friends and families.

"You don't have to be gay to understand what we're saying here," Curto says. "We don't want more privileges and rights in the workplace than anyone else; we just want the equivalent."

Workplace Literacy

A new, comprehensive guidebook from the Center on Education and Training for Employment covers resources, practices, trends, and tips on workplace literacy.

The guide includes tips on locating material in ERIC and other databases, an annotated bibliography, descriptions of innovative programs, lists of organizations that serve as resources on workplace literacy issues, and information on federally

funded National Workplace Literacy Program projects.

Workplace Literacy: A Guide to the Literature and Resources costs \$7 plus postage and handling; quantity discounts are available. To order, contact the Center on Education and Training for Employment, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210; 614/292-4353.

Call for Training Policy

Citing profound structural changes in the world economy, the Business Roundtable has issued a statement calling for the United States to establish a workforce-development system as a way to enhance U.S. competitiveness.

The groups says that a national

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workforce training and development policy should

- ▶ view workforce training as an investment in human capital
- ▶ recognize investment in human resources as an urgent priority for U.S. international competitiveness
- ▶ be based on the principles of TQM
- ▶ foster partnerships among business, labor, education, and government
- ▶ consolidate government training programs and anchor their administration in local communities
- ▶ recognize that businesses should play a leading role in workforce-development policies.

The Business Roundtable comprises the CEOs of more than 200 major corporations. For more information about the statement, "Workforce Training and Development for U.S. Competitiveness," contact Dick Anthony at 212/682-6370.

Training and the Fourth Estate

A recent survey indicates that journalists crave more training, but that most newspapers take a sink-or-swim approach to professional development.

As part of its National Project on Newsroom Staff Development, the Freedom Forum, an independent, nonprofit foundation, surveyed 652 journalists at 123 daily and weekly newspapers about their papers' training programs and practices.

- ▶ Eighty percent of respondents said they want writing training; only 41 percent said their employers regularly offer such training.
- ▶ Forty-four percent said they would like to attend weekly or monthly seminars; only 14 percent said that their employers offer such regular opportunities.
- ▶ Four percent said their newspapers offer regular training in each of seven basic skill areas: writing, reporting, editing, photography, graphics, design, and management; 36 percent said their newspapers offer no training at all in those areas.

Many journalists reported that their frustration with the lack of professional development might drive them from the field.

According to an article detailing the study, published in *The Forum* magazine, newspapers that do offer training report that the costs are low and the payoffs substantial.

A training specialist at the *Tampa Tribune*, which offered 24 training courses in 1992 to its 400 staff members, reported that "Ninety percent of what we do costs us nothing."

Staff turnover, in contrast, costs from 20 percent to 30 percent of a lost staffer's annual salary, the article reports. Other hidden costs include the loss of readers and potential readers who do not find the newspaper's coverage satisfying.

According to the article, "The message to editors and publishers: Spend a little now [on training], or pay a lot later."

Middle Managers Redux

In the 1990s, corporations have come to view middle managers as so much fat to trim in order to streamline operations and boost productivity.

Now, a six-year study from the Center for Creative Leadership finds that much-maligned middle managers play a critical role in boosting an organization's productivity, quality, and service.

Instead of depleting the ranks of middle management, senior executives should be training them to serve as "working leaders"—savvy bosses who combine knowledge of their business with an ability to negotiate with senior management and across departmental lines, says Leonard R. Sayles, a senior research scientist at the center, and author of the study, *The Working Leader: The Triumph of High Performance Over Conventional Management Principles* (Free Press 1993).

Such skills are particularly important as companies seek to introduce new technology or become more customer-focused, says Sayles. Only middle managers, with broad contacts across functions and access to senior management, can make the tough decisions that assure coordination among the many aspects of a new product, quality, or service initiative.

Using Voice Mail

Voice mail is a boon gone bad in far too many offices. According to Nancy Friedman, "the Telephone Doctor," that's because people forget to treat voice mail as a tool they need to practice using well.

In her newsletter *The Friendly Voice*, Friedman offers these tips for getting the most from voice mail, no matter which end of the line you're on.

When using your own voice-mail system:

- ▶ Record your own message, identifying yourself and your department.
 - ▶ Be specific. Tell where you are, when you will return, and how callers can reach someone right away rather than wait for you to call them back.
 - ▶ If you check your machine for messages, let callers know.
 - ▶ Practice your recording until it sounds natural. Smile while speaking; it will come through in your voice.
- When you are making a call and reach a voice-mail system, consider these suggestions:
- ▶ Try "0" if you want to bypass a recording and speak with a human operator.
 - ▶ Leave detailed messages, including the reason for your call. This will save time on callbacks.

The Write Stuff

Thomas Jefferson did it standing up. So did Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes. And so did Virginia Woolf.

These renowned wordsmiths all stood at standing desks to write. If you find yourself stuck on a writing project, standing up might work for you, too, suggests Marcia Yudkin, a Boston-based writer and writing consultant. Yudkin, author of *77 Ways for Writers To Get Unstuck*, also offers the following hints for blasting through writer's block.

First, claim your strengths. Complete this sentence: "I can write only when..." Use your answers as clues to the conditions that enable you to write. For instance, if you can write only when it's quiet, go to the office early or stay at home to write.

Consider what motivates you to

act in other areas. If you're artistic, try doodling or drawing your ideas first. If you work best with others, find a collaborator.

Pay attention to subtle signals. You might find you do your best thinking about writing assignments in the shower or while washing dishes. Learn to listen to subconscious messages you send yourself.

Try experimenting with unconventional ways to write. Novelist Carolyn Chute acts out all of her characters' parts as she writes—could you write your speech by pretending to be Steve Jobs, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, or Lee Iacocca? Think about how a change of environment, tools, position (remember Thomas Jefferson's strategy?), or even aromas might inspire you.

Managers as Survivors

What can managers learn from "resilient" children about coping with stress?

A lot, says one researcher. Resilient children are those who survive childhood abuse and neglect without showing signs of serious disturbance, either as children or as adults.

Good managers also are survivors, says Maurice Vanderpol, a Levinson Institute associate, in the July 15 issue of the *Levinson Letter*.

According to Vanderpol, who has studied resilience in both children and managers, resilient qualities include the following:

A resilient person has a realistic grasp of the problem at hand. He or she sees what can and cannot be changed and adapts to the circumstances.

A resilient person sets clear boundaries between her- or himself and others, knowing which thoughts, feelings, and reactions are his or her own and which are someone else's. A manager, for example, must remain clear about which problems are someone else's responsibility, and must resist pressure to "absorb" the problems of psychologically needy subordinates or bosses.

A resilient person is aware of and tolerates her or his own feelings. When resilient people feel sad, angry, ashamed, or afraid, they can

admit those feelings—at least to themselves—without resorting to drinking, taking drugs, becoming violent, or engaging in other damaging behaviors. Such behaviors only mask problems without solving them.

Resilient people take responsible action to solve problems, without self-pity or manipulation. When they need help, they ask for it from those with the necessary skills or power.

Resilient people have the ability to "let up" on themselves. They find ways to play, to relax, and to be nurtured and refreshed, despite their troubles. Nonresilient children who are abused and neglected build emotional walls between themselves and others. Managers who can never lighten up tend to burn out and abuse subordinates.

Resilient people believe in the future. Resilient children believe that, despite current difficulties, better things will come their way. For managers, this is part of what's called vision.

In addition, resilient people have the ability to attract help and support without becoming passive or excessively dependent. Managers who can attract the attention and support of mentors and co-workers enhance their capacity for survival.

According to Vanderpol, managers can help subordinates maximize their resilience by

- ▶ modeling resilient behavior whenever possible
- ▶ fostering mentoring relationships with subordinates
- ▶ encouraging exposure to a wide variety of work situations
- ▶ treating instances of resilient or nonresilient behavior as significant incidents to be discussed and included in performance appraisals.

Presenting to the CEO

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that a presentation to your company's chief executive officer differs substantively from any other presentation. Writing in *Personnel Journal*, Peggy Stuart offers these tips garnered from HR professionals:

Know your audience. Find out as

much as you can about your CEO's background, interests, priorities, and style. Keep in mind that, in general, most CEOs focus on organizational strategy and vision.

Know your business. Show how your program supports business goals; remember to address how much it will cost and what benefits it will produce. Avoid HR jargon.

Keep your perspective. Even as you champion your program, others in your organization also are vying for the CEO's attention and support. Your CEO might have other priorities besides yours.

Anticipate questions. Brainstorm all the questions that might come up during your presentation and plan your responses. Prepare to answer potential criticisms of your plan.

Cut to the chase. Your CEO is busy; chances are, he or she is looking for basic information, not entertainment. Focus on the most important points and stay within your time frame. If the CEO wants more information, he or she will ask for it.

Are You Game?

HRD specialists use games effectively for many purposes, but justifying games in terms of dollars and cents spent can be tricky. Theodore B. Kinni, writing in *Quality Digest*, suggests citing these "soft" rewards from training games:

- ▶ Games raise people's awareness and make them more open to learning.
- ▶ Games foster interactive and collaborative learning.
- ▶ Games persuade people to drop their guard and become engaged in learning.
- ▶ Games are fun, an element that's too often absent from the workplace.

"In Practice" is edited and written by Erica Gordon Sorohan. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.