

THE GREAT BALL BALANCING ACT

*how to make top training
program billing on a budget
of peanuts*

How rich I would be, and those around me, if every time a training director started a sentence "if only" we could claim the equivalent, training director style, of Western Airlines' \$1.00 flub stub. For here is where dreams are made, fantasies take hold and reality passes quickly from the scene. "If only I had more financial support for a training program" "if only top management were truly committed to a training program" "if only I had more training staff" "if only we had all the resources Joe Blow at Company Z has." We allow ourselves to be seduced; "If onlies" become the pavement of our inaction, and we tend to hem ourselves in with constraints of our own making.

Such is the life of a training director. Or so it seems. Yet the challenge of accomplishing a creditable training job, in the face of obstacles as great as, or even exceeding these, is the reason so many of us stay in business and the reason why some truly innovative and creative things happen. How this happens, how training directors are able to keep so many balls in the air, no one quite knows. Perhaps it's magic.

Or perhaps it's what happened to me one day in a dream when I found myself in a circus surrounded with sawdust and peanuts and animals and excitement. The banners strung across the tent heralded in bold big letters.

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Somehow I knew this was me. The trumpets beckoned me on, I doffed my hat and bowed. At first I felt panic, then when that subsided, I recalled the wisdom my mentor, the Great Superbo, had shared with me, and I went on to perform great feats of glory. His words were these:

"To balance balls you must be clever and quick and well coordinated. Balancing only two or three balls is really out of style. To make the grade you must be able to handle more. But don't worry

about this. I'll help you and besides, the more balls you have going, the more other people will help you keep them up, understand if you fumble a little, appreciate your efforts, praise your accomplishments, and spread your fame."

"But in no case should you overload yourself with more balls than you can handle, start a balancing act without steady nerves, good endurance and a fast recovery time, or even enter the game if you really prefer to play with one ball at a time."

"Practice to build these special skills:

Keep the ball going occasionally by some creative flourish, like kicking it deftly with your right foot. It's amazing how often you can come up with one if you don't let yourself be hemmed in by tradition or unnecessary constraints. It will astound both you and the audience and give everybody a nudge to be creative and inventive too.

Hang loose so you can slip in easily and do what seems indicated. Know the variety of tricks you have in your bag to keep those balls going but don't over program. Part of the fun is doing something spontaneously or on short notice. This way you can adjust on a moment's notice to meet a new need.

Give amateurs a little orientation in ball balancing and let them play with a few. Who knows, you might develop a whole new act.

Let them take over as many as they are willing to handle, but stand ready to help and to pick up any in danger of falling and move them into your own orbit. And be willing to give special coaching.

Keep an eye out for a friendly face in the audience, one you can toss a ball to for temporary relief. He may end up having such fun that he'll want to keep up with the act on his own time just for kicks.

Always keep a few extra balls in reserve. You may find some promising talent you could instruct if you can give them an exciting task right away.

Try to have a mirror around so you can see how well you're doing and smooth up the rough spots.

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Recognize the limit of your capacity. Resist the temptation to add more balls unless you can figure out a short-cut for handling them. (One has to keep one foot on the ground).

When you've created demand for your ball balancing act, (more than you can handle) don't get stuffy and arty and figure you're the only one who can do the job. Either expand the act into a team or furnish acts for other circuits. After all, the more juggling acts the public wants, the more you've got a career ahead. Who knows, you could even become an impresario some day!"

"Watch out for these pitfalls:

The biggest pitfall of all is feeling you're the only one skillful enough to keep those balls in the air. With that attitude don't be surprised if a ball hits you on the head or you fall flat on your face.

Don't assume that amateurs don't have feelings about what they're doing. If you really want their help, and heaven knows, you'll need it, consider how to make their participation worthwhile. Who wants to eat a sack lunch inside when the birds are singing and the sun is shining, unless ideas and skills are shining, even more.

Remember, peanuts are not that attractive, nor do they go very far in establishing a balanced diet. It's going to take more besides. How can you get people to take vitamins before they come if they really aren't sold on the whole business. Peanuts won't sell them, words won't sell them, but a chance to find out what fine jugglers they are and to hear the sound of applause, well, that's what it's all about. And if you haven't learned this by this time, you'd better stay away from the circus - you simply won't get the booking."

9 MILLION IN USOE VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Wilbur J. Cohen has announced an estimated 9.2 million students will gain job skills in State vocational and technical education programs during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1969.

The U. S. Office of Education has made State allocations of more than a quarter-billion dollars for these programs. States and local communities must match Federal funds at least on a dollar-to-dollar ratio. Actually, the States and communities are expected to expend more than three dollars for each Federal dollar on vocational-technical activities during the current school year.

Secretary Cohen said, "Vocational and technical education programs are of growing importance in our technological society. They can dramatically improve the quality of life for millions of our young people."

The \$255.4 million in State allocations is some \$10 million less than was available last year, although enrollments have increased by a little more than one million for the country as a whole. Appropriations for the regular vocational programs remained the same as for the previous fiscal year, but expira-

tion of the special work-study program for vocational students last June 30 resulted in the \$10 million drop in the total funds allocated.

The Office of Education has mailed allotment tables to the States showing a breakdown of funds for each State and Territory under three operating vocational education Acts — Smith-Hughes of 1917 (\$7.2 million), George-Barden of 1946 (\$50 million) and the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (\$198.2 million). Formulas set up in the Acts determine the allotment of funds to the States on the basis of general population, population by age groups and per capita income of the States and territories.

The allotments announced for the program as a whole are as small as \$33,977 for American Samoa and as large as \$18,005,856 for California.

Although a new Act was passed in the closing days of the 90th Congress — the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 — it came too late for any appropriations by the same Congress, so the program will be operated for the time being under funds already made available under existing legislation.