

# TRAINING'S

The Organization Man of the 1950s has retired and moved to a warm climate to play golf. In his place, you're likely to find a team, or a woman. The last gray flannel suit—that icon of corporate regimentation—has been packed up and given to charity. Business practices that were hot just 10 years ago—quality, for instance—seem like artifacts of an ancient civilization. So swift and far-reaching are the changes in the workplace that there's hardly time to chronicle them before a new idea or a new way of working pushes aside the one you were sure would be the next big thing. And technology—forget it. Some new development in the move from atoms to bits will take place before you've finished reading this sentence.

So, how has all of this change played out for training? Who are the men and women leading the learning revolution in the new economy, the smart economy? Who gets that the stand-up trainer of yesteryear who just wanted to teach you something is an endangered species? Who understands that what you call yourself—trainer, performance specialist, knowledge manager, learning officer—isn't the point? It's what you can help a company achieve that makes the difference these days.

So, who is in the new guard? We looked for people who embody what's new and promising about the profession as it's evolving. People who are fast, of course, and friendly with technology. People who are entrepreneurial and successful. People who have made the leap from training (What can I teach you?) to performance (How can I help you perform?). People who are passionate about their work.

You won't find our new guard exemplars in anyone's hall of fame—yet. None of them has a publicist or a book agent. These trainers are just doing it, and doing it differently. Many of you are probably just like them—trying to get in sync with the innovation, the change, and most of all the possibilities opening up for people who think and act like training's new guard.

You can test your new-guard quotient by taking the quiz on page 38. Development Dimensions International designed it for us as a self-assessment of some of the competencies of training's new guard, including breaking boundaries, keeping abreast of trends, and pioneering new approaches or technology.

Now, turn the page and meet training's new guard.

# NEW GUARD

Here's a look at who's doing it differently.

To find out how you stack up next to training's new guard, see page 38 for our quiz.

# Training Isn't the Point

The light dawned for Cindy Baerman about a dozen years ago. She was involved in a series of greenfield plant startups for Anheuser Busch, where she saw for herself that when people and work processes were aligned, profits followed. As a technical and operations person with academic degrees in industrial management, she'd been skeptical about the benefits of effort on the "soft side," turning down opportunities to work there because she couldn't see how it produced business results on the technical side. But her greenfield experience fueled a professional crusade to maximize the use of technical systems by aligning with human systems.

## Cindy Baerman

Director of  
Organization Development  
and Performance  
Kraft Foods North America  
Northfield, Illinois  
Age: 36

What she calls her "role change" from training manager to performance technologist began at Miller Brewing Company about eight years ago. "People wondered why I'd come to meetings about production management. I was there to learn what kind of performance issues line managers were having."

Moving to Kraft Foods, a sister company to Miller Brewing, two and a half years ago, she began working with a large staff that had outstanding business credibility. "We developed a vision of organizational performance that linked our work to business needs. We had lots of good ideas for helping the organization with its agenda. When people came to ask for training, we'd switch the conversation to performance goals and then offer to help with those.

"We're not afraid to say no to a request for training. It's often the first thing people think of for improving performance, but it shouldn't be. Ideally, you should have an analytical process to see whether there's a skill deficiency. If there's not, then training isn't the answer."

Baerman and her team of internal consultants are responsible for leadership, development, succession planning, training, selection, organization

design, job performance technical systems, assessment, and performance management processes. They're prime movers in taking Kraft's work systems from autocratic to high-involvement and high-performance. The goal is to integrate 26,000 people, with all of the different cultures and behaviors that have come to Kraft through several mergers and acquisitions, into a high-performance work system by 2001.

Aggressive goals and a geographically diverse client base make it challenging for Baerman and her team to keep work and life in balance. A 60-hour work week is typical. "I'm not a poster child for balance, but I haven't missed a single one of my two kids' soccer games in the last year," she says. Her coping strategies include answering email at 9 p.m. after the kids are in bed. She has also learned when to say no and to prioritize.

Baerman's inspirations include her parents, whose impact as teachers is still praised in their hometown of Kokomo, Indiana. Bob Mager is another hero. "If I have trouble reaching managers, I walk them through Mager's performance analysis flowchart. I model his style. He cuts to the chase."

Looking ahead 10 years, Baerman sees the performance specialist's skills being absorbed by line management. "I believe you'll see fewer of us, and we'll be in the role of thought leader. Performance improvement will be more research-based and will be challenging the fringes of financial science. The lines between people issues and technical issues will be very blurry. As Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines, says, 'We love our people and use our tools, not the other way around.'"

*Reported by Patricia A. Galagan*



"We're not afraid to say **no** to a request for training.  
It's often the **first thing** people think of  
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but it **shouldn't be.**"

# Push Comes to Shove

“I probably would have left if this project hadn’t been created,” Debbie Cone says of The Business Advisor. “I’d been here 13 years and needed a new challenge.”

## Debbie Cone

Senior Vice President  
Primerica Financial  
Services University  
Atlanta, Georgia  
Age: 42

And a challenge it is. Cone and her team were charged with creating a turnkey electronic solution that would enable Primerica Financial Services’s 80,000 independent consultants to set up and run their businesses. “It had become a real pain point for us,” Cone explains. Each PFS regional vice president must run his or her own office and administer to numerous regulatory issues. PFS had found that its consultants were spending up to 65 percent of their time on administrative duties. After a recent merger with Citigroup, the consultants’ jobs were complicated further by cross-selling a lot of different products as the PFS and Citigroup product lines were combined.

Cone’s team created The Business Advisor, an “electronic office” that not only provides a literal visual representation of a PFS office, but also guides consultants through computer-mediated tasks such as creating a business plan, tracking submitted business and flagging action items, creating and prioritizing goals, and so forth. In creating The Business Advisor to be useful to consultants, Cone found herself simultaneously creating a knowledge database that can be used across contexts and organizations. She describes the product as a “cookbook” with best practices already built into it.

“We tried traditional training,” says Cone, “but it was too expensive. We also tried providing information through print and our own satellite TV network, but the Type A personalities that are our consultants don’t read the information they’re sent. They weren’t pulling, so we had to push.”

Cone has always pushed herself. A former high school English teacher and stand-up trainer at Macy’s, she describes herself as an “explorer.” “I don’t have the answers, but I’m lucky to work in a context that allows me to work with people and get good guidance. People like different

phases of projects; I like to solve problems through prototypes.”

When she was 15, Cone saw people solve problems a little differently: She worked in her uncle’s justice of the peace office. “Everyone who came in was either swearing out a warrant or getting married,” she says. Married for 20 years to her husband Jon, a software engineer, Cone is an avid gardener and has just taken up snow skiing. Her 13-year-old daughter Erin wants to be a consultant when she grows up “because she wants to boss people,” says Cone.

Cone describes her relationship with her bosses as part of the reason the current project is such a success. “In a lot of companies, teamwork is talked about but not really done. This project touches every area of the company,” she says, “and has strong upper-level support.” How strong? Well, when asked about the estimated return-on-investment of The Business Advisor, Cone replies, “Our CEO doesn’t feel that it needs numbers put to it. With 65 percent of people’s time being spent on administration, the ultimate goal is to shift that time to activities that generate revenue.” She did say that PFS has spent about \$1.5 million on the project, and that figure will ultimately reach about \$3.6 million. The real savings will be in time, however. What formerly took a new PFS consultant three years to get up to speed, he or she should now be able to do from day 1, says Cone. “The user does not need to be trained to use this product,” she says.

So, what about the 10 in-house trainers Cone supervises? “They’re delighted with the product,” she says. “We were formerly doing training by the pound, just trying to reach as many people as we could. Unfortunately, the field force wasn’t using what we created.” Cone describes PFS’s trainers as now feeling much more aligned with the business and that their work has better value. “They’re becoming much more involved instructional designers,” she says. “They’re really knowledge engineers. They’re working to re-



“People like different phases of projects;  
I like to solve problems  
through prototypes.”

design their jobs and their roles, and they’re increasing their earning potential.”

Working on The Business Advisor project has taught Cone a valuable lesson: “People need to

recognize opportunities to make transitions for their companies and to up-skill themselves. We have to align with corporate strategy.”

*Reported by Jennifer J. Salopek*

# Substance and Style

A seamless mix of functionality and aesthetics has garnered praise for her firm's multimedia training applications. But Caitlin Curtin, president and CEO of Luminare, a developer of innovative multimedia applications, has received equal admiration for her ability to harness new technology tools quickly for the benefit of learners.

## Caitlin Curtin

President and CEO

Luminare

San Francisco, California

Age: "Thirty-something"

That ability has propelled her San Francisco company, which she launched in 1986 at the age of 26, to the forefront of the custom multimedia arena. And Curtin, who never thought she would one day be lauded as a "Wired Woman"—a plaudit bestowed by *Working Woman* magazine—is as surprised by her success as anyone.

"I was fortunate to begin my career at a lucky time and in a lucky place," says Curtin, who earned a masters in education with a concentration in instructional design and began her career developing training components for software applications for such companies as Bank of America and Pacific Bell. But witnessing the stirrings of a telecommunications revolution, the ascendancy of the personal computer, and California's reputation as the hot spot for computer technology spurred her to strike out on her own less than two years out of graduate school.

"It was a very exciting time—computer technology was opening up so many possibilities," she says. "I found myself coming up with ideas that were far bigger than I could put together on my own and decided to set up a consulting shop to pursue them."

Curtin unwittingly established what today would be called the very model of a virtual organization—outsourcing everything from programming to administrative services. She assembled a core team of some half-dozen technology-savvy instructional designers and business strategists that has remained largely intact to this day. A network of more than 40 programmers with various specialties found its way into her contact database. And Luminare was soon pursuing groundbreaking EPSS and multimedia projects, including a much-lauded EPSS for some 2,200 customer service representatives of the California State Automobile Association

(which won a Best Successful Practice Award in Training and Performance Improvement from the American Society for Training & Development.) "That project really helped open doors for us, especially in terms of EPSS applications," she says.

Far from settling into a specific technology niche, Curtin has pushed her firm to harness newly minted technologies as they are unveiled and others still at the demonstration phase. They include innovative applications of Web-based training; intranet-based training; and, most recently, modular content approaches such as the Reusable Content Objects strategy on which Luminare has collaborated with Oracle.

"We function as an Internet technology company with a heavy background in performance support and instructional design," says Curtin, who balks at being described simply as a multimedia training provider. "The business entity is something I've created to serve my clients, but it's secondary to my view of myself as a craftsperson," she adds.

Indeed, while mindful that functionality comes first, Curtin prides herself on the aesthetic appeal of Luminare's multimedia creations, which she says serve a purpose in appealing to learners. "We're always thinking in terms of how we can develop tools that are appealing, creative, and engaging," she says. "In my opinion, if the heart is touched, the mind is opened."

Her current passion is an intranet project Luminare is developing for Charles Schwab & Co. that will provide an "online daily journal" to several thousand branch representatives U.S.-wide. The concept is unique in that it provides a blend of company news, access to important Websites, job aids for existing and new products



**“In my opinion, if the heart is touched,  
the mind is opened.”**

and services, and training information including online enrollment for company courses. “It helps break down silos between training and other functional areas and integrates them, and it provides one-stop shopping for company information,” she says.

The project is as different from her past work as her next assignment will be from this

one—the only common thread being innovative application of computer technology.

“I consider us a boutique shop, and we like to pick and choose our projects,” she says. “Most of our clients approach us needing something unique. I enjoy the challenge of each project and immerse myself in them.”

*Reported by Tom Barron*

# Broadening the Impact of EPSS

Gary Elsbernd saw the writing on the wall soon after joining Payless ShoeSource in 1989 as a training documentation specialist.

## Gary Elsbernd

Manager

Stores Performance Support

Payless ShoeSource Inc.

Topeka, Kansas

Age: 32

The computer system used by the company's 2,000 retail outlets was becoming more complex. The user population was diverse and dispersed. And employee turnover was as high as any retail operation—100 percent or more for part-time employees. Training employees on using the system would be an ongoing, expensive headache.

Fresh out of college, where he had earned a bachelors of public administration, Elsbernd began chipping away at the problem by working with the company's systems developers to improve the consistency of the user interface of its retail computer system. That early partnership with the programming staff led Elsbernd in pursuit of more substantial remedies for Payless's training challenges, the fruits of which are evident in the Retail Performance Support System, one of the most ambitious efforts to date in the EPSS arena. The system, which Elsbernd says provides powerful embedded tools that aid the performance and learning of store associates, is being rolled out in pilot form this spring.

Its release culminates an eight-year odyssey by Elsbernd into territories seldom charted by in-house trainers.

"I started thinking in terms of built-in software support and attended a conference in 1991 where I heard Gloria Gery describe EPSS principles," says Elsbernd. "I immediately recognized the situation she was describing—that we weren't going to be able to continue building software applications separately from training."

Elsbernd began pursuing development of online reference and learning tools in partnership with in-house programmers, but he also saw the need to lobby senior management on the value of the performance support approach. Together with his boss, Tamara Jarrou, he prepared evidence on the need to shift to a performance-centered approach to help meet the surging training demands of

the fast-growing company.

Though he won some key adherents in the top ranks, Elsbernd and his staff faced ongoing competition for resources as Payless made several acquisitions and expanded into new regions, pushing the number of retail stores to more than 4,000. While his group struggled to stay on management's radar as they developed an initial prototype of an EPSS, Elsbernd says the system met stiff skepticism when managers reviewed an early prototype in 1995.

"Management wasn't convinced the system was going to solve the problem," Elsbernd says. At the same time, he realized he had drifted somewhat from his original objectives. "I personally got too caught up in gee-whiz technology. We hadn't tied what we were doing closely enough to business objectives; we were too busy showing what was technically feasible."

The team regrouped, renamed itself Retail Performance Support & Development and called in such EPSS luminaries as Gery and Paul Johnson of Ariel PCS to help make the case to management. The prototype system was reengineered to emphasize performance effects and subsequent management reviews met with growing admiration. The pilot system, currently being tested by more than 60 stores, provides an integrated package of applications that Elsbernd says a brand-new sales associate can navigate and learn from. The applications include "modular nuggets" of information in performance-support format, some CBT-style "teach me" modules, and online reference tools. A conversational "agent" introduces the system to new users, whether they speak English or Spanish, as the entire system





“We weren’t going to be able to  
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separately from training.”

is multilingual. A French version is currently being prepared to support Payless stores in Canada.

The move to EPSS has allowed the training function to focus its instructor-led initiatives on people issues rather than “how to use the computer,” Elsbernd notes.

The experience of pushing the project past many formidable obstacles has served to harden Elsbernd’s resolve in the value of the EPSS approach. “I have become a firm advocate of de-

signing systems and software so they reflect the way people work and think, instead of requiring people to change because the software was designed around another set of criteria.”

He also admits that his passion has little to do with what he originally envisioned himself doing: stand-up training. “EPSS is a perfect marriage between technology and training,” he says. “I guess I’m a geek at heart.”

*Reported by Tom Barron*

# Forging Labor-Management Training Ties

The divide between labor and management is a familiar and comfortable arena to Marshall Goldberg, who has found fertile ground for collaboration between them in the area of training and development. He has been highly successful in convincing various industries of that fact.

## Marshall Goldberg

Director

Association of Joint Labor/  
Management Educational  
Programs

New York, New York

Age: 59

“Whatever the company and whatever the labor union, whenever you have both stakeholders working to support workers, you achieve a synergy that is tremendous,” says Goldberg. “I learned early on that including both parties in such initiatives results in far more successful training, retraining, and job-placement programs.”

The concept of labor-management training partnerships that Goldberg champions didn't appear out of the blue. Rather, it has been built incrementally through collective bargaining agreements dating back to the massive restructuring of the auto industry in the late 1970s. Fueled by a track record of success in that industry, the concept has since grown to encompass a broad swath of industries. More than a million American workers now enjoy the fruits of such partnerships in terms of training opportunities, and the approach is beginning to be copied abroad.

Goldberg has had a hand in guiding the concept's adoption from the beginning, but it's not what he originally set out to do.

“My academic background was in psychology, and my first career involved working with disturbed children,” he recalls. “Then, the facility closed, and I got to feel what it's like to be a displaced worker.”

A few civil-service exams later, Goldberg was hired as a county planner for one of the first federally funded employment and training programs targeting Detroit-area workers affected by auto-industry downsizing. Results from the Downriver Community Conference Demonstration Project were later incorporated into the Job Training Partnership Act. In his role with the project, Goldberg began learning the language of commonality in dealing with em-

ployer and union representatives.

“Early on, I was in a position of trying to find a common understanding among divergent stakeholder groups. I learned that one area of common interest involved training programs for existing and displaced workers.”

In 1982, Ford Motor Company and the United Auto Workers established the National Development and Training Center, based on the success of initial partnership efforts. Goldberg was tapped by the center to design and implement training and placement programs to aid workers affected by a major restructuring underway at Ford.

Other industries began taking an interest in the concept. In 1987, Goldberg became founding director of a joint labor-management training partnership between the telecommunications giant AT&T and its two largest unions. The Alliance for Employee Growth and Development won national recognition in 1990, in the form of an award from Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole for its training programs, which now serve more than 100,000 workers at AT&T and Lucent Technologies.

During that period, Goldberg tirelessly promoted the collaborative training concept to other industries, serving as an advisor on many similar projects—including initiatives in Britain, Brazil, and Australia. As more such programs have been established, he saw the need to share practices among them, and last year initiated the formation of an umbrella organization, the Association of Joint Labor/Management Educational Programs. The association, headquartered in New York, serves as a clearinghouse of best practices, a forum for discussing use of new learning technologies, and as an advocate of the joint labor-management approach.

“We have to promote this model as a bottom-



“Whenever you have both stakeholders **working** to support **workers**, you achieve a **synergy** that is tremendous.”

line, valued-added process,” he argues. “The company benefits by gaining a more highly skilled, committed worker, the union has a more educated member, and the community gains a more secure economy.”

Vice President Al Gore, a firm believer in the approach, highlighted partnerships--including the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development--as a mechanism for bolstering worker skills, at a January 1999 summit on the issue.

Goldberg says he has been inspired by lead-

ers from businesses and labor unions who have embraced the approach but is moved most by workers who participate in training programs created by the partnerships.

“It’s obvious how important it is for them and how interested they are in taking advantage of opportunities to increase their skills,” he notes. “One woman I spoke with told me, ‘It’s time for me to invest in myself.’ I can’t tell you how much that has continued to motivate me.”

*Reported by Tom Barron*

# Radical Mentor

Cindy Novotny believes she was drawn to training by a passion she couldn't ignore. She had a degree in business, but she also knew she was good at helping salespeople perform. Westin Hotels hired her to do sales training, but she felt something was missing. "We'd bring people in and sing *Kumbaya*. No one got that they had to increase revenue by 60 percent or they wouldn't have a job."

## Cindy Novotny

Managing Partner

Master Connection Associates

Rancho Santa Margarita,

California

Age: 42

She moved up to marketing director and was even named Westin's marketing director of the year, but she knew there was more waiting for her. The year her daughter was born, 1988, she decided to start her own sales training company, Master Connection Associates. In preparation, she loaded up on classes and consulted her father, who'd done training facilitation for Shell Oil. "I thought I'd be able to spend more time at home," says Novotny, who now travels 50 weeks out of 52.

"My passion for what I do keeps me going," she says. "The day I don't love it is the day I'll be done." Her husband joined the firm six years ago and travels with her on certain accounts. She takes her daughter out of school to travel with her three to five days a month and most of the summer. "I signed an independent study contract with the school. We do homework, and when she goes back to class she uses her experiences. Besides that, she can set up a training room in no time, and I've heard her giving fashion tips to presenters. 'Those earrings...,' she'll say."

Eleven years later, Master Connection has offices in three countries and an envied list of clients in the hospitality field, including Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Walt Disney Attractions, and Novotny's former employer, Westin. "My father told me I'd never make it if I just stood up and told stories about how it used to be in the hotel industry, so we're always customizing and creating new training. We have a research team that interviews the customers of the people we train so we can train them to do the things their customers want. We even

invite customers into the classroom."

Master Connection uses live client calls during sales training. A self-described radical mentor, Novotny loves to get on the phone and show trainees how to close a sale. MCA trainers prepare for classes by doing research on their trainees' accounts. "When we get to proposals and negotiations, we use that information to give them a different look at their own clients. It blows them away."

To keep trainees sharp after a workshop ends, Master Connection provides video and audio reviews and is putting the finishing touches on an Internet-based system that will let graduates revisit lectures and test their skills. "I don't want anyone walking out of one of our workshops, putting the binder on the shelf, and going back to old behavior," says Novotny.

Master Connection also provides customer service training for Ritz-Carlton, often considered the pinnacle of service in the hospitality industry. With Ritz and other clients, Novotny insists that senior leadership provide the objectives for training and get agreement from middle managers. She's not afraid to turn down business from hotels where management groups can't agree.

"Once we take a job, we'll do whatever it takes to make the training work. We have a 100 percent money-back guarantee. If a trainee says something won't work, we change the training."

*Reported by Patricia A. Galagan*



**“I don’t want anyone walking out of  
one of our workshops, putting the binder  
on the shelf, and going back to old behavior.”**

# Intellectual Nomad

Sooner or later, you or someone you know will learn something from Nancy Pollak. Perhaps it will be a senior citizen or a disabled child developing digital literacy at Digital Clubhouse Network, of which Pollak is chairperson. Perhaps it will be an upper-level executive at a company that's retained Hamilton Partners's portfolio management system for intellectual capital. Perhaps it will be a girl or a woman you know exploring interactive multimedia through leovision.com, the Website for Leovision, a company Pollak founded in 1996, which researches how girls and women use emerging technologies. Or maybe it will be you in a training class of the future that takes its form and content from Pollak's upcoming Ph.D. dissertation on learning modalities.

ton Partners, and Leovision. And did I mention that she teaches life-skills classes to youths age 14 to 21?

What's fascinating is that each of Pollak's projects insinuates itself into her other efforts and forms the warp and weave of a life that is as colorful and textured as a tapestry. For example, a team of young adults who met and learned at DCN's New York location are now working with Pollak to redesign the Leovision Website to allow universal access. At Hamilton Partners, Pollak works with clients to develop innovative methodologies to meet business challenges. These projects are learning experiences for Pollak as well, who then applies what she learns to the business challenges at DCN.

And some things are just serendipitous: When Tandem Corporation offered to donate a bunch of unused round tables to DCN's California location, who would have known that three seats are the ideal number to help learners work together, or that round tables were so ideal for users in wheelchairs?

Pollak is modest about her varied accomplishments. She cites her heroes as Warren Hegg, Mary Ellen Locke, and Jennifer Douglas, the executive directors of DCN. She also credits DCN's hundreds of volunteers for teaching her: "They're the linchpins who make DCN what it is today. I've just had the privilege to participate and learn from their endeavors."

Pollak believes in learning wherever you can find it. She has established an eclectic mentoring network that she uses to explore various learning topics that she finds exciting. And she finds all of them exciting: "The accelerated rate of technology evolution coupled with access to knowledge and information is providing a unique window of opportunity to question old assumptions and

## Nancy Pollak

Chairperson

Digital Clubhouse Network

Reston, Virginia

Age: 41

Those projects are only a few of the things that occupy Pollak, along with her writing, painting, and piano lessons. As the single mother of a teenage daughter, you have to wonder how Pollak fits it all in—and how she keeps track of who and where she's supposed to be on any given day. Hamilton Partners's office is in Westport, Connecticut. The two Digital Clubhouse Network locations are in New York and California. Pollak lives in Virginia. This is a woman whose career is restricted by neither time nor space—nor by any amateurish attempts to box her into one professional category. A friend and associate sums it up well: "It all makes my head spin!"

Pollak describes herself as an "intellectual nomad," and was a citizen of Free Agent Nation and believer in Project: You—long before *Fast Company* was a twinkle in its publishers' eyes. Pollak received her college-level training in nursing and worked in the health-care field in cardiac telemetry and long-term care. That was before she developed an interest in technology and interactive television and went to work for Sprint, Bell Atlantic, and Tele-TV. Which was before she got interested in how people learn and got involved in DCN, Hamil-



Each of Pollak's projects insinuates itself into her other efforts and forms the warp and weave of a life that is as colorful and textured as a tapestry.

explore new learning modalities," she says. Furthermore, Pollak wants to make learning easier for others to find. Her ambitious plans for Digital Clubhouse Network include a location in each of the 50 states by 2002 and linking the U.S. net-

work over the Internet. Pollak and other DCN board members are working currently to establish a DCN in Annapolis, Maryland, and continue to seek sites and donors for other locations.

*Reported by Jennifer J. Salopek*

# Vision Control

Don't bother calling the offices of The Redmon Group on May 19, 1999; you'll only get the answering machine. Emails will go unanswered. Visitors to the office will be greeted with a *Closed* sign and a locked door. What's going on? A staff retreat? A personal tragedy? A big training event?

**John Redmon**  
**Veronica Redmon**  
Principals  
The Redmon Group  
Alexandria, Virginia  
Ages: 34, 33

Nope, it's the premiere of *Star Wars I: The Phantom Menace*, and the owners and employees of The Redmon Group have been planning this day off for months.

Having fun is an integral part of working at The Redmon Group. Employees average 43 work hours per week—80 percent are expected to be billable—and everyone gets at least 20 vacation days a year. Unused vacation time can be turned in for cash on a quarterly basis. The office kitchen is painted with murals inspired by Looney Tunes cartoons, and art from *Star Trek* movies adorns the hallways. Furthermore, salaries are competitive, benefits are comprehensive, and the office coffee is Starbucks.

When John and Veronica Redmon started the company in their apartment nine years ago, they wanted to create more than a startup; they wanted to create a culture. Although neither Redmon has ever been a full-time employee of another company, each knew exactly what kind of employers they wanted to be. That employees should “excel and have fun” is part of the corporate vision. The Redmons' goal is to be the top multimedia firm east of the Mississippi by 2005, but they have a unique definition of that goal. Although most companies would define *top* by gross revenues, John defines it as “being the most desirable place to work in the multimedia industry.”

This focus on employees sets The Redmon Group apart from many young, aggressive firms that accept any and all projects and burn their employees out with 80-hour work weeks. Yet, the youthful idealism is edged with hard-nosed business savvy. “We have a company to run,” says John. Each hour a staff member spends on nonrevenue-generating activities costs the company \$45. Therefore, the Redmons created a system that allows profitability to drive expenditures for staff training and development.

For each billable hour an employee works on

a project that comes in within budget, three dollars is put into a pool account. For each unbillable hour worked, 50 cents goes into the pool.

“When a staff member wants to take a class, buy a book, or attend a conference, he or she must come before the staff, explain the need, and show how it supports our corporate vision,” says John. Then, the whole group votes on whether to approve the expense. If it's approved, the returning employee must share the new knowledge with the rest of the company. Annually, the pool is expected to average \$5,000-6,000 per employee for training and development activities. A timesheet program John wrote tracks the pooled money, benefits, vacation time, and so forth automatically.

Another part of the corporate vision is that clients be full partners in the project-development process. Clients retain ownership to all source code, and the applications are driven by a database engine that gives clients a tool for updating content constantly. Doesn't that put future business at risk? “Maybe so,” says John, “but if we do a good job, clients will come back to us.” Training applications account for 60 percent of the company's work; other projects include CD-ROMs, kiosks, and Websites. Current multimedia training clients include Arthur Andersen, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Land Rover, and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. John's timesheet program, as well as online storyboarding tools used to develop the applications, enables clients to view up-to-the-minute project progress, budget status, and hours billed through the company's Website.

How does a married couple live and work together, 24 hours a day? “We've never known anything else,” Veronica says simply. They say they're opposites in many ways: John is the big-





## How does a married couple live and work together, 24 hours a day? "We've never known anything else."

picture type, Veronica handles the details. Certainly, their shared ambition draws the pair together. Their seven-year plan sets goals of \$20 million in revenue and 80 staff by 2005. John wants to explore DVD technology, which he thinks is "the next big wave." Stay tuned.

*Reported by Jennifer J. Salopek*

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# How Do You Stack Up Next to Training's New Guard?

Training is dynamic; jobs are not the same as they used to be. If you are not changing and developing, chances are you are not stacking up. This short, self-scored assessment will help you determine how you measure up against some of the competencies for training's new guard.

For each statement, rate yourself in two areas: experience and feedback. You should NOT be evaluating your skill level, just your experience and the feedback you have received. It might be easiest to complete the experience column first and then the feedback column.

Experience: quantifies how frequently you have demonstrated this action.  
0= no experience, 1= limited experience, 2= some experience, 3= much experience

Feedback: quantifies the amount of relevant feedback you have received specific to the actions below.  
0= no feedback, 1= limited feedback, 2= some feedback, 3= much feedback

	Experience	Feedback
1. proactively building positive relationships with multiple internal partners (supervisors and staff)		
2. finding common ground among several groups when there seems to be none		
3. offering knowledgeable or articulate responses to spontaneous, difficult questions that arise outside of the classroom		
4. finding ways to meet challenging internal or external customer requests (consistent training across geographic boundaries)		
5. describing goals or future states in a way that provides clarity and excites interest		
6. making complex decisions that require input and involvement from others		
7. encouraging boundary breaking in how we conduct training		
8. championing a project that violates the status quo		
9. overcoming major resistance to an initiative that I am trying to implement		
10. generating a long-term strategy for meeting training and development needs		
11. implementing an innovative training and development project that has not been done before		
12. keeping abreast of current trends		
13. implementing or expanding projects or initiatives on a global or international basis		
14. managing a critical initiative that has significant impact on the company's or employees' performance		
15. planning for and tapping into internal, external, and capital resources to manage a complex project		
16. seeking and using insights from culturally diverse sources and individuals		
17. working under extreme pressure (time constraints, conflicting priorities, lack of resources)		
18. establishing and implementing measurement systems to evaluate the initiatives I undertake		
19. maintaining enthusiasm and focusing on the positive, after disappointment or rejection		
20. acting as an entrepreneur to uncover opportunities others do not see, and then applying my decision-making skills to determine which possibilities to pursue		

## How to Score:

Add up the total for each column, and review the feedback in the appropriate cells below.

### LOW Under 30

To meet the "new guard" threshold, seek opportunities to broaden your experiences. Look carefully at the areas in which you rated yourself a 0 or 1, and volunteer for those types of initiatives. In your performance management plans, set goals around leading new and innovative projects that challenge existing assumptions, require you to think and work differently than you have in the past, and broaden the types of people and problems you typically encounter.

Seeking feedback on how you have handled a breadth of experiences is a must for effective development. Consider building a feedback loop into all projects of a specific size or time commitment, regardless of whether your company's performance management system requires it. Encourage others to provide you with objective, accurate information on their perceptions of your strengths and development needs.

### MEDIUM 31 to 45

By rating yourself in the medium range, you need to focus more closely on certain specific activities in order to round out your experience base. In addition, you should plan to build upon those areas in which the number of experiences seems low. Each new experience should be deliberately pursued to help you grow, expand your skills, and broaden your comfort zone.

You are moving forward in obtaining feedback, but there are opportunities for improvement. At the start of each significant project, explain that you will be seeking feedback, and ask those who will be providing it to agree to do so. Set up a realistic feedback plan—perhaps at key milestones or by using formal feedback instruments. Work with those that will provide the feedback to develop the plan so that all of you learn from the process and agree on how the feedback loop will be implemented.

### HIGH 46 to 60

Congratulations for putting yourself into situations that broaden your experience base and challenge you to think and work in new ways. Recognizing and adapting to changing business scenarios are crucial to develop competencies in the domains of leadership, interpersonal skills, management skills, and personal traits—those domains are critical for training's new guard.

By obtaining feedback on a variety of different initiatives and activities, you should have an understanding of your strengths and areas for improvement. Continue to solicit this feedback especially for new and different projects. If you are getting feedback in just one manner (for example, orally with an anecdotal flavor), consider establishing a more formal feedback process to enhance the information you are gathering.

## Are you new guard?

Tomorrow's leaders are engaged in challenging work experiences today. The pace at which business, and indeed training and development, is changing requires new ways of being successful. Leaders in this environment must be able to adapt quickly to changing customer needs and specifications. Developing this agility is gained by engaging in a diverse and challenging array of experiences. Further, it is essential that as emerging leaders you receive frequent, focused feedback on your development against future demands. Examine your experiences and the feedback you received carefully to make your own assessment of where you currently stand against training's new guard.

## One step further

As a follow-up exercise alongside the formal feedback column, you might want to complete a performance self-appraisal to provide an overview of how you see your skills versus the people who provided feedback. Where your performance self-appraisal is lower than the feedback you received, seek additional experiences and feedback in those categories so that your confidence increases with this experience. Where your self-appraisal is higher than your feedback, meet with your managers to structure more frequent and formal feedback so that you understand how others see your strengths and development opportunities. If the scores are consistently high, keep up the good work!