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Issues

With Help from My Friends

[In response to the January 1988 "Tell Us What You Think" question on dealing with AIDS in the workplace.—PLF]

Trainers must take an active role in teaching employees the facts about AIDS. Unfortunately, an employee who is concerned about AIDS on a personal level is unlikely to seek information openly because of the stigma associated with the disease. Learning about AIDS in a training session is much more comfortable and less self-revealing. Another important justification for AIDS training is to educate employees who fear contracting AIDS from a coworker and those who worry about the quantity and quality of health care provided to AIDS victims. Job security in the face of AIDS is another issue that should be addressed.

Counseling should be made available to all concerned employees but especially to those who test positive for the virus. These counselors must be trained to respond, in a worse-case scenario, to someone who feels their life has been destroyed by this infection. The human resource department must reassure employees that both the rights of the victim and of coworkers will be protected.

The employer who cares enough to actively educate employees about AIDS is not admitting to a problem, but is demonstrating that the employees are an important and valued asset. Such a message encourages productivity in the face of AIDS, a real crisis in today's companies.

Pat Williams
McH Associates, Inc.
Garland, Texas

Watchwords

[Responses to the issue of competitiveness discussed in the "Tell Us What You Think" question for April 1988.—PLF]

Almost every corporation as well as most hospitals and health-care organizations in this country place great emphasis on the need for effective competitive strategies. Competition and strategic thinking are the watchwords in the executive suite. Training and development play a critical role in any organization that is serious about implementing an effective competitive strategy. Top executives are aware of the importance of human resource development.

I conduct executive strategy retreats with top executive teams in many corporations and hospitals. I have found that every group identifies training as an important ingredient in their strategy. These top executives show a great deal of enthusiasm and support for training. At the same time, however, human resource development professionals in these same organizations often are unaware of the specific training needs identified by their executive team. This suggests that an important factor in implementing strategy is to improve communication between the top executives and the HRD professionals.

I've also observed that executives often are unaware of the total cost—in dollars, time, talent, and energy—required to produce the training they envision in their strategic thinking. Often they believe training is needed only as a quick fix rather than as an ongoing commitment to develop the capabilities of their people. This is another indicator of the need to improve communication.

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Issues

One way training professionals can create a significant impact is to *focus* their training efforts. You must work hard to clearly understand the business that you are part of. That includes the mission and philosophy of that business. You must understand the competitive strategy that has been developed: What will your organization focus on in order to gain and sustain a competitive advantage in the marketplace? Once you understand this strategic focus, then design training programs that will help develop the capabilities necessary to put the strategy into action.

There are three critical ingredients to an effective strategy:

- the strategy statement,
- the people who have the capabilities to implement the strategy,
- the systems and procedures that allow people to serve customers.

Training and development professionals can play a role in all three areas. Be involved in creating the strategy. Provide the training necessary to develop "people" capabilities, and be involved in the development and implementation of successful systems and procedures to help serve customer needs.

I suggest that every training program be tested against the corporate strategy. Does this program support the implementation of the strategy? If so, in what way? If not, then perhaps you should consider replacing that training program with another that is more focused on the implementation of the strategy.

I have seen numerous examples of companies that have focused their training and development efforts on the implementation of strategic focus. The results have been highly significant in terms of competitive advantage. The opportunity for HRD professionals to contribute to this competitive advantage is unlimited.

Stephen C. Tweed
Tweed Corporation
Oil City, Pennsylvania

Can America compete? No. The morals and morale of Americans are fading, and that is the real issue at hand. The effect of this trend will result in a reduced standard of living for Americans—dramatically worse. What is happening to the U.S. isn't isolated to us. Sadly, our cousins in Australia, Britain, Canada, and other countries are experiencing similar problems. It's no coincidence that history's great empires collapsed after a moral regression. America is no different.

It takes 18 years, more or less, to instill the attitudes and knowledge that will prepare a youngster for work, marriage, and, possibly, further education. A generation of our workforce has been lost because of both the disintegration in the family unit and the practice of "modern" education. We don't have 18 years, *nor* the will to prepare another workforce. Business and industry will be able to patch holes here and there for a while using education and training partnerships, as well as other training programs. But we will continue to lose our ability to provide products for a competitive world market. Unfortunately, the problem is too severe to solve only through training.

The decline will be accelerated by a rise in competition from an unexpected source. Work and travel overseas has helped me understand some political realities. Most eyes are on the Orient, but we must watch what is going on in Europe as well. In addition to economic barriers being lifted within the Common Market is the formation of a loose political alliance in Western Europe. A young and broad-minded Soviet leader is sending overtures to Western European countries. One of the responses will be increased East-West European trade. America will not be able to compete in this marketplace. Although none of this will happen overnight, we can expect to see a clear pattern in five to 15 years. In any event U.S. competitiveness will decline.

Am I a pessimist? No. We are witnessing an historical moment. In the meantime, I do the best I can to help people do their jobs.

Paul Anderson
Norwest Technical Services
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Time, Gents, Please!

As both a training executive and a marketer of training consulting services, I've purchased *and* sold time-management tools and techniques. Therefore, it wasn't a new experience to find a new debunking—or updating—of Lakein and Mackenzie by an individual or organization that just happens to market today's panacea for the "new and improved time management."

In his article, "The New Time Management" (April 1988), Steven Phillips writes accurately of the need for "values and goals clarifica-

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tion" and an effective calendar process for improved time management. But he is on thin ice when it comes to critiquing the work of both Lakein and Mackenzie.

Lakein and Mackenzie need no defense from me. That their work survives as strongly as it does is enough. I believe that when and where effective, that work is *used as the base for working to more effective time management*. A simple check of seminar registrations shows the number of people who are "getting the time message" for the umpteenth time. We train employees, retrain them, and wonder why their time behavior still hasn't changed. Suddenly we realize that employees *know* what is right. The difficulty lies in *doing* what is right.

As an organization consultant, my

first time diagnostic is to look less at the seminar curriculum, but try to consider the state of validation and empowerment in the work environment. People cannot work well toward more effective time behavior unless the environment validates that time. Then managers can make the decision and take the behavioral steps for themselves and, often, their staff, to be more time effective and productive. Training people in a certain behavior—although everything in the organization points in the other direction—is a futile and wasted effort.

Validate the behavior, and then empower the people. Yes, help them identify goals and values, but also help them recognize that achievement only comes when they decisively take action. Too many time-management graduates are waiting for management to tell them what to do next.

Once the individual is validated and empowered, create an opportunity to bring self-awareness, feedback, and, where needed, problem-solving assistance. The result is slow

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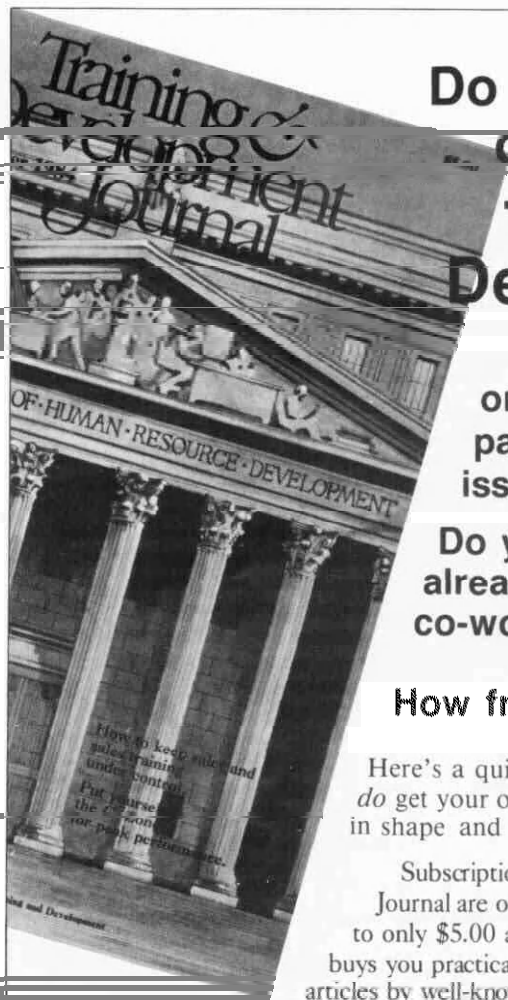
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Issues

but positive movement ahead.

Finally, the time process needs a positive approach. People who spend countless early workshop hours recounting their time-management faults, including their top 55 time wasters, will not be in a mood to learn. They'll be negative, perhaps even hostile. An affectionate, patient, and helpful approach lets talented people build on their positive strengths to improve the time behavior they *want* to improve.

*Paul Sussman
Department of Sanitation
The City of New York*

Tell Us What You Think

The wedding ceremony conducted while skydiving; the man who wanted to be buried with his car; Coca-Cola's formula change after decades of success; the introduction of "Moonlighting" to prime-time television: All of these are examples of fairly bizarre ways of breaking down traditional walls.

Training, too, has begun to move out of classrooms and factory floors and into some strange places. Over the past few years we've used the pages of the *Journal* to describe a few novel approaches to training from team building in the wilderness to tech training on a bus. Now we'd like to hear what you consider the most novel training process you've discovered.

Send your viewpoints to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

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