

# FYI for your information

## Teleconferencing Effective for Certain Training Aspects

Video teleconferencing is as effective as face-to-face meetings for sharing information, said 90 percent of the participants in a new survey from the International Association of Business Communicators.

Respondents said video teleconferencing is appropriate for training and professional development (89 percent) and status reporting (83 percent). It was judged less effective for negotiating (64 percent), solving conflicts (63 percent) or convincing (47 percent).

"The key variable is whether two-way, face-to-face communication is considered necessary," said IABC President Tom Ruddell. "Negotiating, solving conflicts and convincing others all require some give and take. They are processes in which parties are likely to have a high stake. Teleconferencing—by removing the personal element—tends to be less effective."

Survey respondents also expressed a nearly unanimous need for on-site local resource experts to answer questions and handle audience responses to the televised portion of teleconferences—audiences want to interact with presenters of information.

Generally, however, the effectiveness of video teleconferences surprised even the architects of the survey, Minker-O'Connell Associates (Tysons Corner, VA), who studied attendees at an IABC teleconference held last year.

The survey identified three areas of concern to communicators contemplating the use of new communication technologies:

- Nearly 86 percent of the respondents believe new technologies will change the nature of their jobs as well as the way we communicate; 85 percent believe that new technologies will improve their productivity.

- Teleconferencing capability calls for more intensive analysis of the basic communication requirements of a situation—the information people

have versus what they need, appropriate formats and the need for mastery of the tools, both the hardware and the processes.

- The respondents were closely divided on whether they thought new technologies "dehumanized" the work place (36 percent) or not (44 percent).

The purpose of the survey was to determine: whether teleconferencing is an effective communication tool, what teleconferencing format works best and for which communication purposes teleconferencing is effective.

According to Sandra O'Connell, president of Minker-O'Connell Associates, several guidelines emerge from the IABC survey data that will help communication planners who are considering the use of teleconferencing:

- Determine whether one-way or two-way transmission is best by knowing the degree of interaction you require;
- Keep transmission time under two hours;
- Punctuate the presentation with discussion and questions at each viewing location;
- Choose speakers who are comfortable with and skilled at TV presentations;
- Focus speaker time on just a few topics—favor intensity over diversity;
- Provide supporting printed materials;
- Design a format that encourages interaction—limit the number of sites, provide a local resource/discussion leader and encourage discussion among presenters.

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## New Study Reveals Growth in Use of Packaged Training Programs

A new study by The National Conference Center reports packaged training programs are used in increasing numbers for developing human resources. A survey of 3,000

professionals in personnel, organizational development and training reveals that packaged programs supplement staff-developed training among large corporations as well. The study examined programs developed in management training, sales training and supervisory training.

The advantage of packaged programs for individual self-paced study are also receiving increased attention, but the new study reveals a preference for group training. Users prefer group settings over self-paced training, though each is used, because trainers can mold discussions to specific group interest, tap diverse experiences of the group and discover individual problems quickly. The group mode offers immediate feedback and learning reinforcement and encourages greater trainee involvement.

Users who prefer the self-study approach point out that trainees can take the programs anytime and anywhere and that the self-learner can proceed at his or her own learning level. Proponents say the self-instruction mode saves trainer time and costs less money.

Concerns about self-training packages include inconsistent results, incorrect use by participants and cheating on self-quizzes. Trainees require a high degree of motivation, and the trainer has little or no control.

Packaged programs will increase in number in the future, and a number of professional companies will enter the field, producing a significant influence on the human resource development program, predicts The National Conference Center president, Coleman Finkel, who headed the study. "Everyone in management and human resource and organization development should follow closely the work being done in

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the packaged training field. Many of the future breakthroughs in affecting people's behavior will emanate from its research," he adds.

For free copies of the complete 12-page report, "The Growing Importance of Packaged Training in Human Resource Development," write Coleman Finkel, president, The National Conference Center, East Windsor, NJ 08520.

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## To Terminate or Not to Terminate—Whose Problem?

In the current difficult economic period, managers must face up to firing individuals, the most difficult managerial task, according to a recent survey of middle and executive management conducted by The Goodrich & Sherwood Company, a New York-based human resource consulting firm.

According to Andrew Sherwood, senior partner of the firm, cutting off the livelihood of another human being, particularly one that the executive may have recruited for the job, raises uncertainty concerning how effectively (or ineffectively) that individual was managed. Questions surface that involve the manner of training, how priorities and objectives were set, whether lines of responsibility and authority were clear and whether the identification of paths toward goals were clearly defined.

These and other basic management questions cause many managers to delay the decision to terminate. Instead, they address the problem by ignoring it, by transferring the unsatisfactory employee to someone else to manage, or worse, creating a negative environment so that the unsatisfactory employee resigns.

Managers who yield to this approach do a great disservice to the company, the employee and themselves by not addressing the issue promptly. When the possibility of termination arises, approach the subject objectively. Sherwood advises:

- Build and present the case based on facts;
- Check with former supervisors to compare your assessment of strengths and weaknesses;
- Check corporate policy regarding termination, severance pay and medical coverage;
- Approach the termination in a

cool but compassionate businesslike manner;

- Deal openly, candidly and fairly with the terminated employee, offering to be of help as the job search progresses.

Finally, share the responsibility for the unsatisfactory relationship you both have encountered. The decision to hire was based on your evaluation of needs at the time and possibly your incorrect assessment of the individual.

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## MBO Works in the Office, Not at Home

Professional employees with non-working spouses often experience more marital stress in retirement than other couples, a recent survey of retirees indicates.

"Over the years, non-working spouses develop networks of friends, a variety of social outlets and outside interests that supplement family responsibilities. They establish a pace or rhythm in their lives that balances work with leisure in a satisfying pattern," says Diane F. Roth, director, Retirement Education Services in Chicago.

In contrast, their working spouses, especially the highly motivated super achievers, often neglect the development of good leisure skills. Instead, they concentrate on business objectives. For them, retirement is a dramatic break from all those activities that provided status, recognition, power and self-esteem.

Marital conflicts occur when retired professionals try to compensate for their losses by imposing themselves and their business techniques on the daily routine of their spouses. One solution is for both partners to develop complementary interests and areas of expertise.

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## Employing the Older Worker

In its new publication, *32 Million Older Americans*, the National Urban League has provided prospective employers, social service agencies and other institutions with a concise and timely summary of the trends, issues, laws and strategies pertaining to the use of the older worker.

The aged are the fastest growing population in the country. By the year 2000, the number of persons over 65 is expected to reach 32

million—a significant portion of whom will be members of minority groups.

The handbook is the result of research and information gained from a series of seminars on hiring older workers held for employers under the auspices of the National Urban League and sponsored by League affiliates in various cities across the country.

The handbook provides an overview of employment and retirement issues, including implications for social security. This section notes that minorities have a lower life expectancy than the population as a whole. Therefore, any fixed social security retirement age—especially a raised retirement age—unintentionally discriminates against minorities who statistically have fewer years in which to reap their benefits. Other aspects examined include when and when not to retire, private pension plans and the special problems of the employer and the employee.

Important issues also include the myths of ageism and stereotypes, job reassessment and retraining, career counseling, management and union cooperation, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and two sections devoted to strategies to assist the employer and employee in dealing with these major issues. Strategies for using senior workers offer scheduling options, phased retirement options, expansion of part-time work suggestions and examples of how and where to use these approaches.

The handbook is available from: Seniors in Community Service Program, National Urban League, Inc., 500 East 62nd St., New York, NY 10021.

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## Technological Revolution May Eliminate Millions of Jobs

We are about to see an influx of robots into American industry, according to labor and manpower specialist Eileen Appelbaum, an associate professor of economics at Temple University.

"Although United States management may be slow on the uptake at times, it's safe to say that once they've learned their lesson, they remember it well," says Appelbaum. "Management has been studying Japanese methods, and robots are now being introduced into American

production lines. This development could eliminate up to 7 million jobs, industrywide, over the next two decades, causing unemployment figures to soar."

Robots are the harbingers of a technological revolution, which will be accomplished by innovations in microprocessors, computers and telecommunications. Many feel confident that these new developments will serve as a firm basis for economic growth, creating new jobs and new opportunities.

Unfortunately, however, for many unemployed blue collar workers, they will be of no help. Skill and education requirements in the new technology differ from the standards of the old, heavy industries, where there was a high percentage of labor with a high school education or less, and who had learned their skills on the job.

"Many of the jobs in the new technology require at least four years of highly technical training. Some require a college degree," Applebaum notes. "There will also be some assembly line jobs in plants producing semiconductors, but these will be low-paying jobs and will be among the traditionally poorly paid, unproductive, dead-end jobs.

The plight of these dislocated, older, blue collar workers poses a serious problem. Although the labor market will probably not reabsorb them, these workers are capable of making a productive contribution. The government should develop viable, extra-market mechanisms for employing them and should offer the opportunity to develop new skills.

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## **\$25,000 Investment Expands BDP Company Training Facility**

Hands-on training awaits Day & Night and Payne heating and air conditioning service representatives at the newly expanded BDP Company Training Center at the company factory in City of Industry, Calif. BDP Company manufactures Day & Night and Payne products sold in the western United States and Bryant products sold in the eastern part of America.

The 1,680 sq. ft. facility provides western service representatives in training with the same experiences previously available only in Indianapolis, the company headquarters, according to Chris Ogilby,

BDP company manager, training and development.

"Our \$25,000 investment, which does not include the cost of the Day & Night and Payne products used in the Center, is proof of our belief that training is profitable. Profitable for the distributor, profitable for the servicing dealer and certainly, a money saver for the consumer," he says.

BDP now offers the hands-on training in several courses at both Indianapolis and City of Industry. Each course examines theory, troubleshooting and basic servicing procedures. The popular classes are limited to 16 persons per course. Courses also take advantage of unique electronic teaching aids, in addition to hands-on work. The company offers furnace training boards which it programs for up to 11 problem situations. The service student must then correctly analyze the situation and correct the problem.

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## **Overhead Projectors Still Popular**

The overhead projector (OHP) continues to be one of the most effective and preferred presentation devices despite the incredible proliferation of other sophisticated audio-visual equipment in the nation's boardrooms, schools and training centers. This fact was recently brought to light by Ted Wheelock, U.S. director of sales and marketing for Schwan-STABILO, the West German manufacturer of fine writing instruments and OHP materials.

According to Hope Reports of Rochester, N.Y., there are an estimated 1.3 to 2 million OHP units in use in the United States today, and these units generate annual retail sales of more than \$85 million in accessories.

A recent Wharton School study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania has convincingly shown the overhead projector to be a superior vehicle of communication. Tested for effectiveness against a host of other audio-visual media in a series of trial business meetings, the study showed that overhead projectors had a positive influence on the outcome of the meetings. In particular, the presenter using the overhead projector more frequently achieved a favorable group consensus and also experienced a marked shortening of meeting length resulting in a great savings of time and money.

## **Elliott Training Center Honored By National Alliance of Business**

The Elliott Training Center, a welding and machining school in Greensburg, Pa., received an Award for Distinguished Performance from the National Alliance of Business (NAB) at the NAB annual conference in Dallas.

The center is sponsored jointly by the Elliott Company, a United Technologies subsidiary and federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) programs. As the winner for the Mid-Atlantic Region, the Elliott Training Center is one of 11 programs throughout the United States given an NAB award.

Designed as a mini-industrial plant, the Elliott Training Center provides high-technology job skills in welding, machining, numerically controlled equipment operation and programming. In nine years, nearly 1,800 unemployed men and women from Pittsburgh and its nearby counties have been trained at the center, which boasts a 95 percent job placement record.

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## **Thoroughly Modern Milling**

Two modern milling machines worth a total of about \$105,000 have been acquired free of charge through a donation and a trade by the Machine Shop Program in the Idaho State University School of Vocational-Technical Education.

"With both of these machines we're able to upgrade our program to near state-of-the-art capabilities in metal manufacturing," says Bob Simmons, head instructor in the machine shop.

Donated by Hewlett-Packard in Boise, the larger machine is worth about \$75,000. To add to the training benefits, one of its features is a 20-station automatic tool changer.

Because of its high value, the school would not have been able to acquire it without the help of industry.

"Both these machines make parts to closer tolerances than is possible for the ordinary machinist on conventional machines," Simmons notes. "Students are trained on these machines and have already programmed, set up and manufactured parts that would normally require many hours of manual work."