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ISSUES

Agreements . . .

I would like to agree with Jack Asgar's comments in his letter regarding adventure learning (July 1987). I especially support his statement that "we learn by doing that which we are doing," rather than adventure learning's creed: "one learns by doing."

At the same time I would like to disagree with Adrienne Gall's response. In the real world of business, trainers do not always have the luxury of "only doing what they feel comfortable doing," as Ms. Gall noted. In addition, though "pressure may be viewed as a negative force" in adventure training, in business it is an everyday reality.

Peter Nowak
Fidelity Investments
Boston, Massachusetts

Thank you Christopher Cannon! Your letter, "Disillusioned, Depressed, and Disgusted" (October 1987) expressed my feelings perfectly.

I no longer read the *Training & Development Journal*—I scan it. And, believe me, that does not take much time. What bothers me the most is that year after year we read about, "how do we justify our training budgets and evaluate our training programs?" The answers are now written in cute and upbeat phraseology, but are still the same old theoretical and, now, "professional" stuff.

When you're in the trench and you've lasted for over 20 years, you know it's by helping to change employee on-the-job behaviors. Share with us how *this* is done, practically and economically.

Dwight Faust
City of Tacoma Personnel Department
Tacoma, Washington

[Editor's note: *We invite you, Mr. Faust, to share publicly your knowledge in an article for the Journal.*]

. . . and Disagreements

I'd like to respond to Christopher Cannon's remarks in his letter to

"Issues" (October 1987). He chastises internal training practitioners for letting consultants dominate as authors of articles in the *Training & Development Journal*. As a practitioner in the technical training area (telecommunications) for a very large financial institution, I can say first hand that some companies will not only discourage but actually discipline their employees from authoring outside works.

Employees at all levels of management read and depend on industry literature to keep informed on important business matters. What a paradox it is that a very few high-level decision makers can somewhat arbitrarily (and questionably) ban article writing—even when it is written on personal time and does not take away from job task performance. In my company this paradox even applies to generic (nonproprietary) subjects.

I always thought that a company would be proud to have people interested in earning "good press" for their organization—regardless of its size. Noncontroversial articles support the individuals and their work and can provide valuable "advertising" for that organization.

So, Mr. Cannon, it may not be a question of having the time to compose; I have written this while en route to work. It very well may be the feat of gaining permission from *five* or more upper management levels to clear a harmless, but perhaps informative, work. This is one thing an independent consultant probably does *not* have to endure. Imagine if every company had this kind of policy! We wouldn't have a journal to read!

The legality of this restrictive practice is not certain, but to play it safe here I'm asking anonymity—only because *my* job would be out the window.

Anonymous

This Thing Called Excellence

Have you ever noticed how we have a tendency to find a new idea or concept, embrace it with all the ardor of a 16-year-old, and then discard it? The idea doesn't even have to be new. A

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dusted-off version of an old one will do. Did you ever watch chickens in a barn yard? At feeding time, they will scramble for the tidbits and run in all directions at once. Sometimes I think we're like that. We chase after new concepts like those chickens do. It seems as though it's just one fad after another, like quality circles and hula hoops.

So what is this thing called "excellence"? Certainly the word's been around long enough. Anything with the word "excellence" in it sells like hot cakes now. Are we going to burn up this subject like we have so many others? Will it become another hula hoop? Probably! But let's see if we can capture its essence, and salvage the best parts, before we tire of excellence and toss the whole thing aside.

In their highly successful book, *In Search of Excellence*, authors Tom Peters and Robert Waterman strung together the "Eight Attributes of Excellence" with some of the best stories from American business: Frank Perdue, F.G. "Buck" Rodgers of IBM, Ren McPherson of Dana Corporation, Mary Kay Ash, the great folks at Disney and Frito-Lay. They literally burned through the pages into our subconscious mind as we devoured the book. Will the book start a revolution? I think not. But it has set in motion a ripple, like a stone dropped in a pond, that will touch every shore of this great nation of ours. It is already woven into the fabric of our organizations, including private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

In Search of Excellence talks about the macro environment of the aforementioned eight attributes. Some bright, young consultants in a firm named Keilty, Goldsmith and Boone (KGB), talk about five key commitments to excellence that managers *as individuals* can make. It seemed so simple, once they made this distinction. They discovered a practical way to explain the attributes.

Take for example, "commitment to customer." Unless your managers (and ultimately all employees) understand *who* their customers are, you could be living in the past. For example, when you make a long-distance call and charge it to your credit card, what does the operator say after asking for billing instructions? Audiences quickly respond with "Thank you for using

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In our article "Interactive Videodisc—Then, Now, and Minutes from Now" (October '87), we inadvertently created the impression that our fictional interviewee, "Ben Duffy," was a "mythical character" in Wilson Learning's Counselor Selling Course. In fact, as many of our readers know, Mr. Duffy was president of the BBD&O advertising agency. His skill in anticipating a client's unspoken questions and then providing the answers raised him to "mythical" stature among many conscientious salespeople. We regret that in using Mr. Duffy's approach as a model for our "interview" we also mistakenly gave him a fictional role in the annals of successful salespeople.

*Stephen Cohen,
James L'Allier,
Douglas Stewart
Interactive Technology Group,
Wilson Learning Corporation.*

AT&T." Why? Not surprising, any audience will respond, "Because they have competition for customers today." Are customers important? If you don't believe it, don't read any further. Just remember, *everyone* has customers; even internal ones, and they are harder to find.

Next on the list is "commitment to people." As Peters would say, "People, people, people—that's what it's all about." I had the opportunity of working with him on a one-hour video for IBM's Excellent Manager program. When he got to the part about people, his eyes began to get a faraway, intense, burning look. His voice took on a new, more fervent quality that pleaded with you to heed his words. I wouldn't have been surprised to see him levitate a few inches off the floor at that point. I have shown this video to more than 50 classes at IBM and, especially at this part, you can hear a pin drop.

The "commitment to task" is an interesting one. KGB designed a questionnaire that measures others' perceptions of a manager's commitment. It also measures that manager's perception of his or her behavior and *compares* it to the feedback. Managers then have the opportunity, many for the first time, to "see themselves as others see them." To some, it's a real shock. When a manager scores a high while others perceive a low, you've got a real problem.

A manager's "commitment to the organization" is critical to the organization's survival. In the excellent companies that I've studied, the excellent manager *always* has a high score in this area. The manager knows the mission of the organization, discourages destructive comments about organization and, in general, is a strong advocate of the organization and its value system. The organization desperately needs those committed souls who oil the machinery of progress with such loyalty and dedication.

Finally, there is "commitment to self."

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Excellent managers have a reputation for standing up for their personal beliefs. They take responsibility and ownership for their decisions. They are the risk takers of the organization—the not the guardians of the status quo. They show a high degree of personal integrity in dealing with others. An excellent manager with a high commitment to self is willing to admit his or her own mistakes, and encourages and accepts constructive criticism.

This thing called excellence is also about balance, a balance of the five key commitments. No single commitment holds precedence over another. Some people seem born with both an ability to balance and a keen understanding of all the pieces. Others of us must keep our wits about us as we ply our trade. We work hard to keep the balance, and sometimes we fail. We have such high commitments to customers that we give away the store. We have such high commitments to task that we make virtual slaves of our people. Or we have such low commitments to self that our

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people don't take us seriously as managers. But those that are born with balance and those that learn balance are called upper-level managers and executives. Throw in vision, and you have the ingredients of a president.

This thing called excellence can't be the flotsam of our organizational world, something to be forgotten, to be cast aside in favor of some new gimmick. It can't be the scraps in our chicken yard. Instead, it must be the anchor in our organizational behaviors; our Rock of Gibraltar in this stormy sea of organizational change. How else can we set the benchmark by which the rest of this great nation measures itself?

J.D. Wallace
Wallace Consulting Group
Roswell, Georgia

Tell Us What You Think

AIDS. It screams across the headlines almost every day. Rumors abound on how you contract it, how to stay safe of it. Clear, concise education about AIDS is needed not only in our schools and through our media but also in the workplace. What is the trainer's responsibility? Should trainers be merely a source of information or should they take a more active role in teaching employees all the facts? Should counseling be made available, particularly if an employee becomes infected? How much *can* the HRD department do? How much *should* they?

We'd like to hear your opinions. Send your viewpoints to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal* 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA, 22313.

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