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## Issues

### Tell Us What You Think

It's August. It's hot. You wish you were at the beach, tanning that body, making eyes at the beautiful people, taking a dip. Instead, you're reading the *Journal*, as you should. Possibly, you're at the beach *and* reading the *Journal*, and if that's the case, then we've got you where we want you.

Anyway, you're probably thinking about training in the month ahead, when all those vacations end. But you've got the time to think about larger issues, right? Let's look a lot further down the road, to 1992, when the nations of the European Community (EC) have become the world's largest free-market economy. How is the economic unification of Europe going to affect your organization?

For the general public, it is, relatively speaking, a sleeper issue—we seem to focus all our energies on the Japanese and

their current power and practices. But for American corporations with business in Europe or with plans to expand to Europe, it is an important issue—1992 is just around the corner. They'll be faced with a host of new trade regulations and competitive approaches, and they will have to strategize and jockey for position.

What is your organization doing to prepare itself? How does your HRD department fit in with those plans? Are you concentrating on language and culture training? Certainly, there's more to it than that—what other programs are you devising? How are you coping with new training needs for 1992?

We'd like to hear from HRD professionals whose organizations will be affected by the EC. Send your letters to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

### The Highest Service

I enter the "training zone" [see "You've Entered the Training Zone," May 1989] when I remember to serve the participants. Out of that service comes the blending of my personality, my training skills, the program itself, and the participants. That blending, springing as it does from the context of service, creates the training zone for me. And it is always available and fairly easy to attain—when I remember to serve the participants.

*Jon A. Barb*  
*Olin Training Services*  
*Stamford, Connecticut*

### Workplace Diversity

I was pleased to see "Four by Four" [February 1989] address the management of diversity in the workplace. It is a critical issue for the future of American businesses and our success both at home and abroad. But it is also in danger of becoming a new fad that HRD practitioners may be too quick to promote.

Some of us have been addressing the issue worldwide for more than 30 years. There are no simplistic solutions, no one set of materials, and no one approach that will meet the complex needs and expectations of businesses by meeting the needs of their workforces. The preparation of people and organizations to manage

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## Issues

diversity is a multilevel endeavor that involves simultaneous efforts.

Some of the immediate factors that are affected by a culturally diverse workforce are the health and safety of workers, and quality-control issues. In California (where 15 percent of the workforce is made up of recent immigrants and where employers may manage workers from more than 35 distinct ethnic groups), a major insurance group recently felt it was necessary to alert its industrial clients' safety professionals to cultural-diversity issues. It felt that many foreign-born, entry-level workers might be handling hazardous materials without appropriate preparation.

A story (perhaps apocryphal) illustrates the issue of diversity and its impact on quality control. A manager for a ball-bearing plant told a Vietnamese-born X-ray technician that he didn't want to see any X-rays that showed flawed ball bearings. While the manager never saw any X-rays of bad bearings, many flawed bearings were shipped.

The changing workforce means that to be successful, we need to address the basic issues of values, perceptions, cultural differences, human similarities, and communication styles from the perspectives of the organization, its traditional employees, and its nontraditional employees. We need to examine such issues as ethnocentrism, missed opportunities due to cultural ignorance, differences in social styles, various psychologies and views of reality, the role of physical distance, different epistemologies, the processing of information, language restraints and limitations, class differences of other societies, and varying preferences for inductive and deductive reasoning.

Such issues need applications in culturally specific training-and-development situations within the workplace. It is not an area for the unprepared trainer, the quick-study supplier, or the well-meaning HRD

professional. Effective change in the workplace calls for cross-cultural subject-matter specialists with professional training and organizational-development skills.

It is not a question of whether such programs need to be instituted. Rather, there is a clear-cut need for immediate action in order to ensure the success of American enterprise, its management, its workers, and our economy.

*David C. Wigglesworth  
D.C.W. Research Associates  
International  
Foster City, California*

## Morality Through Education?

With all the recent scandals and crimes in business and government, there is a renewed clamor for our schools—elementary through graduate—to increase course offerings in ethics and morality. But is academic coursework the answer? Will the investment in ethics education provide a good payback?

For other social problems, education has always been an option. Can't we eliminate speeding on our highways by teaching people the importance of obeying speed limits? Can't we eliminate thievery by offering classes that teach people—especially first-time offenders—that stealing is wrong? Can't we eliminate the use of drugs by showing that drugs can be harmful?

Possibly you think that education as a solution is naive. There is, of course, some value in teaching people right from wrong, but mere knowledge of right and wrong does not always result in responsible behavior. Most believe that those who lie, cheat, and steal do so because of moral ignorance.

In the corporate and public world, there are five factors, unrelated to academic knowledge of morality, that contribute to dishonest behavior.

# Issues

■ **The law of significant gain or loss.** The probability of unethical behavior increases as the potential for gain or loss increases. An otherwise decent person may break the law for a promotion, for example, or do something dishonest to save a failing business. The very nature of the profit motive frequently tempts the morality of even the finest people.

■ **Opportunity.** Most people, wherever they are in an organization, have some opportunity to do unethical things, but the opportunity grows as one moves further up the organizational ladder—higher rank usually provides more freedom and power.

Organizations usually use measures other than education to mitigate opportunity. Corporate education (usually in the form of lectures or memos) does little to stem the theft of office supplies, for example. What reduces pilferage are limits to opportunity—locked files and equipment check-out systems, for example.

■ **Risk.** The greater the risk of being caught in, and punished for, an unethical act, the less likely a person will be to commit one. An organization can increase risk by using TV security systems, auditing systems, and the like.

■ **Personality.** Some people, because of their upbringing or unhealthy environmental forces, develop a deep-rooted belief that they have a license to lie, cheat, steal, or commit any other form of amoral or antisocial behavior if they see it as necessary to personal gain. Such severe sociopaths aren't often seen in the workplace, but people with a moderate level of sociopathic or Machiavellian traits frequently achieve success in the business or public sector. They achieve that success by unethical means, because they believe that the ends justify their means.

Ethics training for the Machiavellian is usually counterproduc-

tive and in fact can increase his or her ability to manipulate and deceive.

■ **Organizational culture.** While espousing morality and ethics in their written policies and public statements, some organizational leaders tacitly condone and encourage unethical behavior in their employees. Indeed, some organizations find unethical behavior necessary because of excessive competition and preoccupation with the bottom line—good ethics and morality often cost more than potential gain in the short-term. Poor ethics often enhance short-term profits, though the long-term price may be high. Unfortunately, some managers show concern only for the short-term; in most cases, the structure of executive-level evaluation and compensation is to blame for such short-sightedness.

Here is a four-step plan for an organization that wants to create a moral and ethical atmosphere.

**Step 1.** Senior-level executives should determine that ethical behavior is a key element of the organization. By the same token, they should realize that it does not come cheap—for the short term, their investment may not show a payback. Also, they should realize that paying lip-service to good ethics, while condoning poor ethics, is a dangerous game.

**Step 2.** The organization should appoint a full- or part-time ethical-conduct manager. He or she should report directly to the CEO on matters involving moral or ethical conduct. The human resource manager is an excellent candidate for that position.

**Step 3.** There should be an ethics-management program. Some elements of such a program:

■ A credo and general policy statements relating to morality and ethics. They should not be bureaucratic or legalistic—excess complexity can be confusing and even counterproductive.

■ Case-studies of past ethical problems that can provide guidelines for future conduct.

■ A system for early detection of problems, using critical-incident reports.

■ Systems and procedures that encourage and protect whistle-blowers.

■ Data-gathering and auditing systems that are sensitive to gain-and-loss situations, the opportunity and risk factors, and the presence of managers who are furthering their careers by Machiavellian means.

■ Sanctions against ethical violators and rewards for those who practice good ethics and morality.

**Step 4.** I am dubious about training that is based on the simplistic extolling of virtue. I am also dubious about the value of external, school-based ethics courses—they are usually too removed from the real world of organizational behavior to be effective. I endorse ethics training, however, if such a program meets certain criteria. First, it must be an in-service program. Also, it must

■ reflect the genuine commitment to ethics and morality of people at the executive level;

■ be conducted by an ethical-conduct manager;

■ take into consideration the five factors of unethical behavior.

Perhaps some will think that I have a negative, jaundiced view of both people and organizations. But we must face the realities of human nature and organizational function if we are to achieve a high level of ethical conduct.

*Alfred R. Schaub  
Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania*

## Debunking Competition

In a factory-oriented society, focused on manufacturing and products, competition seemed a viable concept—everyone wanted to make a better mousetrap.

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## Issues

In the 21st century, our focus will move away from manufacturing; consequently, we will change our approach to competition, though we can't seem to agree on the right approach.

Perhaps we should decide to do the best job possible, regardless of our products or services. Why should we lower quality simply because there is little competition? We have a long tradition of maximizing profit and merely optimizing quality. Today, however, we are looking critically at our priorities and asking, "Why do we have to make so much money?"

After more than two centuries of emphasis on industry, our assumptions about it are automatic; they are a way of life. Maximizing profit is such an entrenched assumption that most people consider it silly to question it. Obviously, to change the way we look at such things is a great task.

The first part of the task is to reeducate ourselves. Before organizations and individuals shift their focus from making as much money as possible, we should examine all points of view. After all, the priority of making money has long been associated with having the best life possible. To persuade people that it doesn't have to be a priority, we must paint a compelling picture.

The 21st century will demand that people be informed and self-educated. What can training do about that? First, trainers should be the first to become educated. They must learn to be cultural anthropologists for their own culture, identify hidden assumptions, and determine their effects on organizations. They don't need to be hyper-motivators—we don't need motivation for the workforce as much as we need understanding, and that requires collaboration.

Trainers should create such courses as "Skills for Thriving in the 21st Century." Current training tends to help people learn how to cope

with things they cannot change, and training professionals have done an excellent job of it. But the next wave of training must be different. As people read about companies that manage by consensus and that have employees who are proud of high quality, training professionals must take those ideas into account, or attendance at their training courses will dwindle.

To focus on becoming more competitive is to look at the future with blind eyes—we need to go back to the drawing board and determine what we believe and where we want to go. We must acknowledge local and global interdependence and identify that interdependence in terms of unifying principles.

Where is competition in that? It will always be an issue, but it most likely will not be as high a priority as it has been. For individuals, organizations, and economies, the world has become interdependent, and we cannot afford to ignore the effects of our actions; in our planning, we must take those effects into account.

Books such as *The Third Wave* and *Megatrends* can provide the framework for developing new assumptions. Making changes takes time and requires that we communicate with more people and possibly lose our place in the spotlight. But everyone should be interested in learning how to take care of both individuals and the planet.

*Edryce A. Reynolds  
Tacoma, Washington*

"Issues" is compiled and edited by Eric R. Blume. Send your views to Issues, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.