

IN THIS ARTICLE

*Downsizings, Mergers, and Acquisitions*

BY MARK S. CARLEY

# How To Survive a Corporate TAKEOVER

*So, now you're alone in the training department  
and must face the demands of new management.*

*Scary, but also a great opportunity. Here's how to make the most of it.*

**E**arly in 1995, my employer was purchased by a larger company with a very different corporate culture. As the only trainer who survived the takeover, I had to make many adjustments in how I did my work. In particular, I had to get through a difficult transition and rebuild a training program that met the needs of the new management and still retained the integrity and quality of our previous programs.

The training department is not a comfortable place when your company is the target of a merger. The new management undoubtedly will have different training priorities, or training may be a low priority.

Wait a minute. Did I say *merger*? Forget it. There is no such thing. There are acquisitions. There are takeovers. There are armed incursions, vertical insertions, and carpet bombings. But there are no mergers. At least not be-

tween the cultures of management and business. When two organizations merge their tangible assets, their cultures don't immediately mesh. If you're on the receiving end of a takeover, you're likely to encounter a swift and deliberate effort to replace your company's culture with that of the folks who signed the check.

That can mean new rules, new procedures, and new product lines; layoffs and early retirements; and executive buy-outs. The carnage may leave you in a state of shock. Mergers can be painful, especially if your company isn't performing to the standards of the new regime. All sorts of difficult changes have to happen in order to form a unified new company. Having just gone through it, I advocate making the changes quickly and decisively. Intense suffering in the first year is better than lingering pain that can last a decade.

## **Holding the training bag**

Let's get back to training and the takeover process. When my company was purchased, the new management completely reorganized the training department so that there was only one managing trainer instead of five. I didn't lose my job like the others, but the shake-up did affect me.

Here are a few tips in case you're ever left holding the training bag.

**Get on with it.** Watching colleagues leave is tough, but you can be better off afterwards. When the old team was still around, it was easy to cling to past approaches and make little progress.

**Stay in touch.** Maintain a relationship with your former colleagues. Now that they are on the outside, they are part of your training network. You can provide moral support during their job searches, and they can add to your list of contacts in the field

once they have new positions.

**Take advantage of networking opportunities.** Surviving a layoff makes you realize that no job lasts forever. This is a good time to get to know your training suppliers and make contact with peers at other companies. Attend association meetings and seminars.

**Don't be shy.** Meet with the new managers as soon as possible, and often. Tell them your priorities and learn theirs. Stay visible.

**Be useful.** My first mistake with the new management was to present an ambitious list of training activities. Though employees would have benefited from the programs, they didn't solve the immediate crises. The new bosses didn't listen. So, I went back to the drawing board and took a careful look at the company's immediate needs and developed a new curriculum around the critical problems: customer service, corporate vision, and employees' knowledge of

how the company makes money.

**Be a cheerleader for change.** Examine the changes being made. You may find that what seems harsh on the surface is actually needed for the company to survive. If you can't abide the changes (you think they are stupid or immoral), start looking for another job. It's fine for a trainer to foster thoughtful skepticism, but cynicism is deadly. Look for aspects of the new plan that you like and become an advocate.

**Become the internal communications manager.** The company that acquired yours may have problems getting its message across to the troops. The old guard think the new guard are bullies; the new guard think the old guard are wimps. Someone has to bridge the gap. You're a natural candidate to take a leadership position.

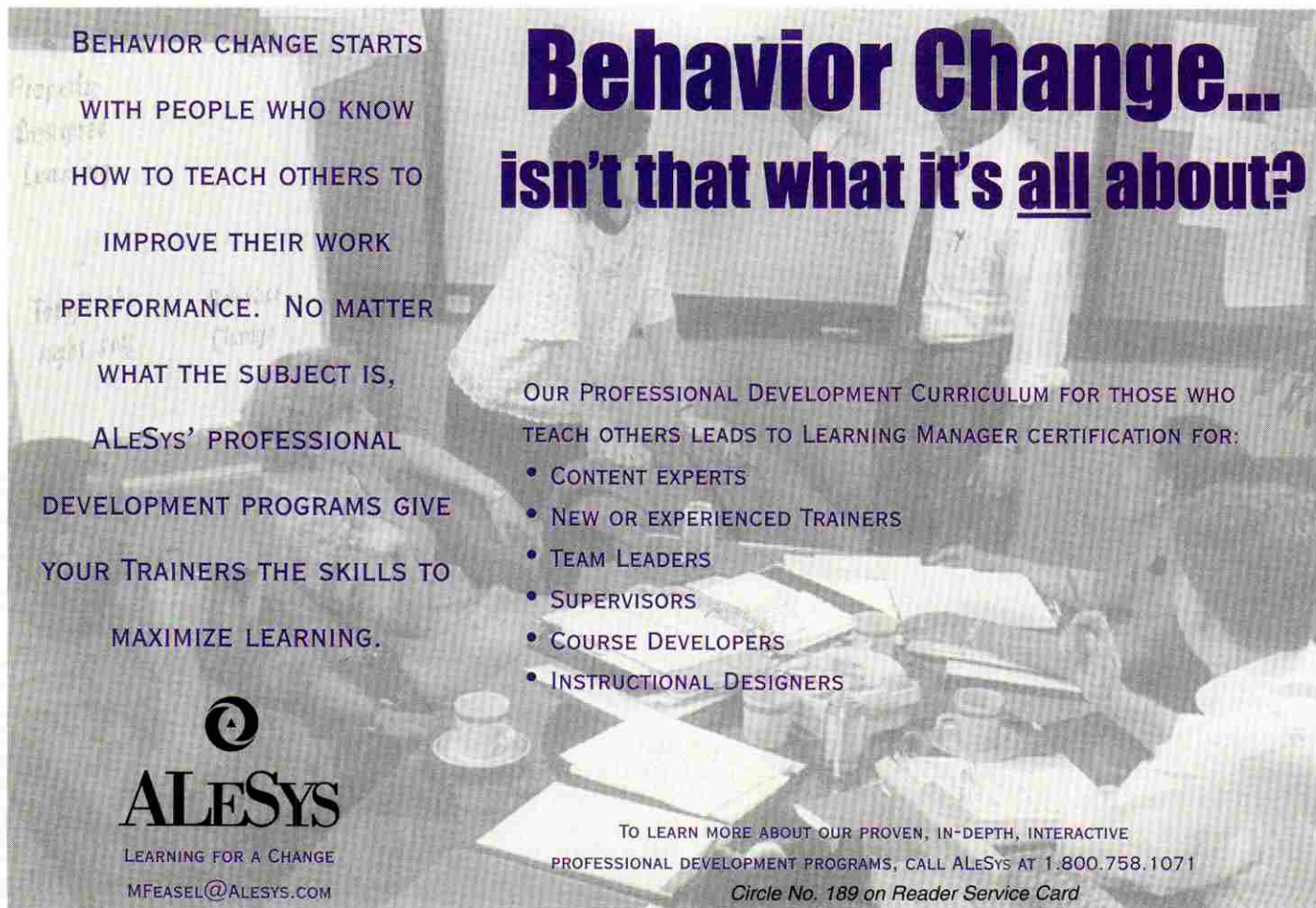
**Treat your job as a new job.** I told myself that I was changing jobs—starting over with a new company

that just happened to occupy the same space as my former employer. That attitude helped me cut ties to the past.

Corporate takeovers are never easy. Sometimes the survivors envy the people who were displaced. But many find that once the worst is over, they have exciting new opportunities that never would have been available without the change.

The two most important rules for survivors are to get on board with the new program as quickly as possible and figure out how to make themselves useful to new management. Scary as it is, change can be exciting. ■

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