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# IN MEMORIAM

## Robert R. Blake

1918-2004

"What are the objectives of HRD? Sensitivity, sharing, tolerance, courage, competence, character development, achievement, leadership, team work, organization transformation and development, conflict resolution, wellness training, human potential, and spirituality training for business?"

Yes, it is all of those, but always more. Whatever the specifics, the general category and focus of HRD seems to center on human betterment, wherever and in whatever domain of life HRD is centered."

Dr. Robert R. Blake wrote those words as an opening to a 1995 *T+D* (then *Training & Development*) article entitled, "Memories of HRD."

A pioneer in the field of HRD, Blake published some 45 books, 115 chapters in anthologies, 214 articles, and half dozen monographs stretching back to 1945. But Blake is best known as co-founder of the renowned Managerial Grid Theory, a leadership theory published in 1964 that remains core reading for any MBA candidate.

Blake's professional life seemed to extend over two quite different careers. First, he was a teacher and researcher, concentrating on the study of social psychology. His work started at the University of Texas in Austin, where he received his PhD in 1947, and led to a post-doctoral Fulbright Scholarship that took him to the Tavistock Clinic in London, where he spent time studying psychoanalytic group dynamics.

While working at Tavistock, he learned that National Training Laboratories was being established in Bethel, Maine, for the purpose of



studying group behavior. Blake served on summer faculties at Bethel and as a member of the NTL Board of Trustees for a decade. At NTL, Blake formed one of his most pivotal partnerships with Exxon employee Dr. Herbert Shepherd. The two joined forces to conduct a 10-year study of leadership and group dynamics at the Exxon Corporation, which served as the building block for many of Blake's theories.

For Blake's second career, he formed Scientific Methods, Inc. in 1961 with long-time collaborator Dr. Jane S. Mouton. Together, they co-authored nearly 140 articles and several books, including *The Managerial Grid*. Using a three-dimensional model, their goal was to help people see themselves and those they work with more clearly, to understand their interactions, and to identify the sources of disruptions, delays, resistance, and conflicts.

Blake's and Mouton's breakthrough approach combined an empirical theory of behavior with a learning methodology that truly effected fundamental change, promoting excellence in organizations through and with individuals.

As a researcher, author, and consultant, Blake set out to bring behavioral science applications into everyday use. In the process, he uncovered behaviors and detailed theories that distinguish the human side of business leadership. Blake left an indelible mark by constantly exploring how human effectiveness emerges and how it might be enhanced.