

The Role of Training at Harris Bank of Chicago

William F. Murray, chairman of the board
and chief executive officer, discussing the training function

By his own definition, William F. Murray, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of the Harris Bank, Chicago, is a "meat and potatoes" man when it comes to his appreciation of the training and development function within the bank.

"I can readily relate to the fundamentals of good technical skills and supervisory training, but the 'gourmet' aspects of training and development such as transactional analysis and Cleaver management techniques, are more difficult for me to understand," he said, "But that doesn't mean I don't support the full program of our training and development division."

The training and development function plays an integral role in the bank by helping upgrade employee performance, and the "from hire to retire" approach provides continuity in the developing process of bank personnel, Murray be-

lieves. "While we can't measure the absolute results of training programs, our record as an organization indicates we're doing something right," he commented.

"Is There a Payoff?"

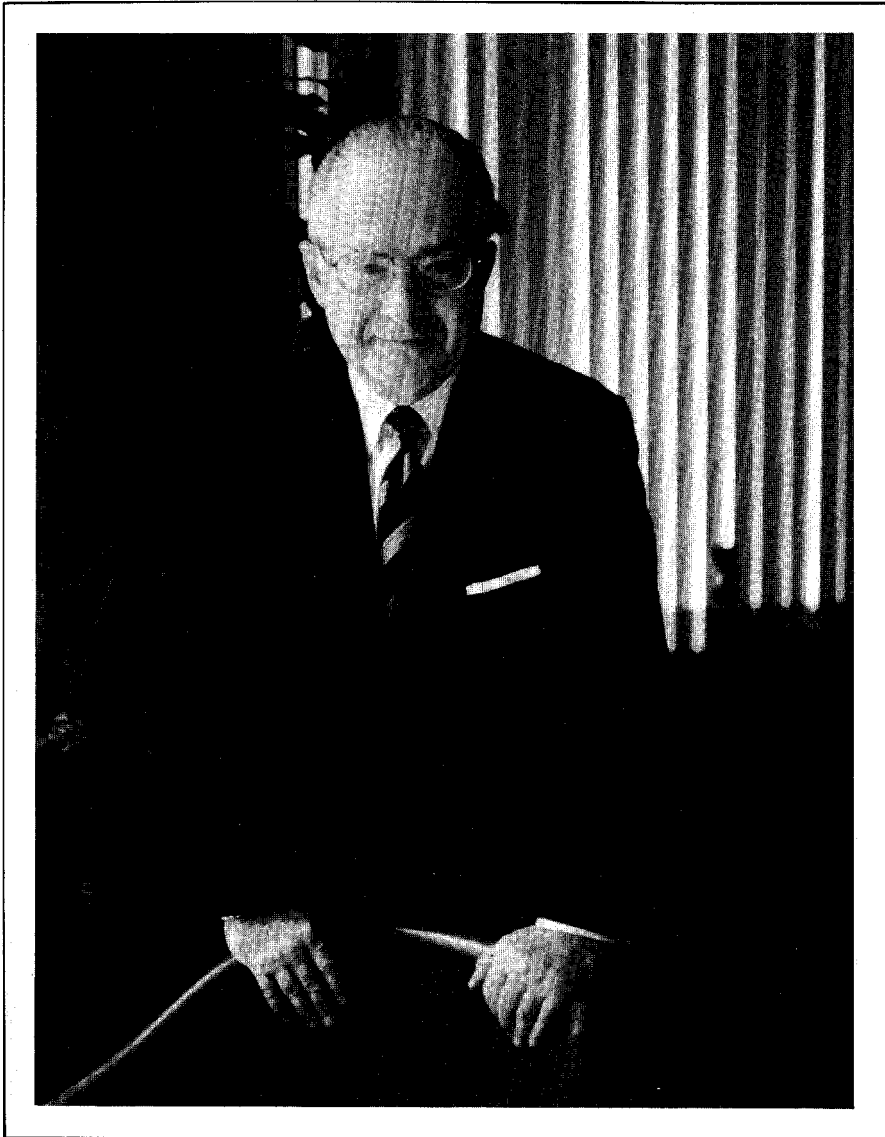
"Still, I am sometimes concerned about the amount of time our people take from their job to attend training classes — is there a payoff?" Murray's apprehensions are allayed by reports of training's impact. For example, after the bank's tellers completed a 10-hour "customer-contact" course in transactional analysis more than a year ago, Murray was impressed by a customer's letter of endorsement. Noting a particular teller's exceptional courtesy, the customer wrote, "I don't know if you've started something new around here, but I think it's wonderful."

Murray cited two other kinds of endorsements that have enhanced the credibility of the training and development division. First, the

bank has been able to market five training seminars to its correspondent bank customers and other smaller banks. The seminars include the "Executive Workshop" course aimed at senior-level and executive officers and designed to aid them in their planning, policy-making and other duties. Another management course, "Results Through People," highlights management functions and style and emphasizes delegation and motivation. Other seminars are "Teller Training," "Transactional Analysis for Bankers," and "Teaching You to Train Others" (for employees assigned to training departments).

Executive Training

"In addition, 75 per cent of our vice presidents and above, including a board member and executive vice president of the bank, regularly take time out from their busy schedules to take the management-level courses offered by the bank's training and development



division. This support by senior officers indicates value received," he said.

"Because a great number of officers and supervisors take courses, an efficient scheduling procedure was developed," Murray said. He explained that a computer list of courses scheduled for the coming year is distributed to each bank division, along with individual lists that tell an employee which courses he or she has already taken and which courses are needed to complete a particular sequence of study.

"Last year the course 'catalogue' included 134 different courses, and 469 individual classes were con-

ducted. The training and development division reported that 287 bank officers took courses, and 90 per cent of all supervisors attended courses as well," Murray said.

Recounting a recent meeting with Tom Sloan, director of the bank's training and development division, Murray spent a half day talking with the training staff. "I was impressed with the way they relate their goals to the general directions and goals of the bank as a whole. They are concerned with solving the major problems of the corporation — our meeting was more than just an update on volume and activity figures."

Murray points out that the

training and development staff has three functional areas — skills training, managerial and professional development and organizational development. The "pure" training function has been a part of the Harris Bank over a number of years. About 15 years ago, their managerial development activities began and "our managers became involved not only with behavioral science theories but took part in managerial skills development," he said. "This early background stood us in good stead when our training and development staff started to move out of the classroom and became involved with line problems."

"For instance, as the *Training and Development Journal* has reported, 25 per cent of the nation's employees are apathetic about their jobs. Our training division has labeled employee apathy as an internal challenge and is combating it through a wide variety of organizational development activities," Murray explained.

"Our job-enrichment program began as a pilot program in the bank's corporate trust operations' division in 1971. The program involves a survey of the working climate in a particular bank division and includes cross-section interviews (from management to clerical level), as well as a work-flow analysis for the purpose of redesigning jobs to expand responsibilities, eliminate areas of conflict and avoid unnecessary repetition. In some instances, job redesign might include an evaluation of management practices as well."

Along these same lines, organizational development programs begin with a series of surveys designed to provide management with information on employees' attitudes toward their jobs, supervisors' management practices and internal communications. Managers and employees participate in joint sessions to examine and evaluate the survey results

and determine action-oriented plans for improvement.

"This approach allows our employees to have a part in reshaping the environment in which they work. In reality, our training and development staff members are internal consultants," Murray said.

Job Satisfaction & Motivation

Commenting further on training and development's work in the areas of job satisfaction and motivation, Murray noted that the bank is employing a better-educated work force. "They enter the bank with high expectations and they seem to have a greater need for responsibility, recognition, meaningful participation, advancement and growth. Furthermore, they expect things to happen more quickly than employees did in the past."

"The training and development staff is also attuned to the fact that college graduates entering the bank are cognizant of behavioral science and organizational development concepts. With this understanding, they expect their organization to be in concert with these concepts; they expect to see the theories they studied put into action. They quickly realize when they are being mismanaged.

"Therefore, it behooves our management team not only to be conversant with the behavioral sciences but to make practical applications of them," Murray said.

"At the clerical level, the trend indicates the need for more emphasis on skills training than in the past. So, Murray said, "I have asked our training and development division to address these problems using the tools of training, managerial and professional development to meet the challenges represented by increased technology, employee apathy and disenchantment. These conditions lead to low production rates, high turnover and loss of competitive advantages, and, in turn, result in lower profits.



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"Poor management at any level can make or break a corporation's organizational strength. I'm convinced that poor interpersonal relationships cause more on-the-job problems than technical incompetence ever created," Murray added emphatically.

"Our program is not just a series of courses. It is an integrated process to maintain a growing healthy organization — an organization that seeks to optimize the values of its human resources through good management practices.

"Over time, a large number of guidelines, procedures and check lists have been incorporated in our spectrum of management develop-

ment courses. These have been tied together in a notebook titled *Mnemonics (memory improving techniques) for Managers*," he said. These management aids have been separated into three general categories — planning and problem analysis, interpersonal relationships, and administrative skills, Murray explained. The categories have been clustered functionally under such topics as motivating, counseling, problem-solving and planning. "While we do not believe people can be managed from sets of formulas, managers are encouraged to periodically review this reference book."

Murray concluded, "The continuing nature of our program became apparent when I saw that many of our senior vice presidents entered the management-development program at its inception as junior officers and have continued to attend courses over the years up to the present. Their understanding and application of good management practices has helped foster and implement many of our organizational development programs.

"Although I'd classify some of the things I've discussed under gourmet fare," Murray commented, "I'm satisfied with the results. Our customers seem to be pleased with our services and I can only conclude we must be doing a lot of things right! It may be difficult to measure the payoff of the education process, but its effect may mean the difference between mediocrity and greatness."

William F. Murray has been chairman of the board of Harris Trust and Savings Bank, one of the country's 25 largest banks, since March 1971. He also serves as chairman of the bank's parent company, Harris Bankcorp, Inc. A member of the bank staff since 1934, he joined the banking department in 1946 and was appointed assistant cashier in 1947, assistant vice president in 1949, and vice president in 1951. He was elected president and a director of the bank in 1968.