

"TODAY, MANY FIRMS ARE STILL GRAPPLING WITH THE DILEMMA
OF HOW TO USE TV EFFECTIVELY
IN ORDER TO ATTAIN TRAINING OBJECTIVES!"

BETTER TRAINING WITH TV

BY KEITH A.
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Over the past couple of decades we have seen the increasing use of television in business and industry as an important part of training programs. Unfortunately, however, this proliferation of TV has not always produced a commensurate amount of improved training or learning.

If TV has not completely lived up to expectations as a training tool, it isn't necessarily TV that's to be blamed . . . but neither does the blame lie with those who have so enthusiastically endorsed its use.

The blame, if blame must be levied, can more appropriately be directed at the lack of understanding of the role TV should play in our training efforts. As the new medium became available in business and industry, we had no clear-cut guidelines for fitting it into existing and planned training programs. Initially we thought it might be an excellent tool for role-playing exercises. When it didn't pan out as we had expected, disil-

lusionment set in. We often groped. We fumbled. And at times we had great successes. Often, though, the equipment was set aside to gather expensive dust or it was used sporadically as it seemed vaguely suited for some facet of training. Today, many firms are still grappling with the dilemma of how to use TV effectively in order to attain training objectives.

We can best attack this problem by first realizing that the application of television to training may have been partially frustrated as the result of certain "myths" surrounding motion pictures that were carried over to TV. We should secondly understand just what TV *can* and *cannot* accomplish in terms of our training objectives. TV has strengths, but it has weaknesses, too. And only by knowing these strengths and weaknesses can we employ this medium as an effective educational tool.

Success vs. High Budget

It is, for example, a misconception that we can equate a high-budget television production with

success in our training programs. The same applies to films made for TV use; slick films don't necessarily ensure that training will be enhanced. Nor does expensive TV equipment, such as special-effects generators, high-cost cameras and monitors ensure that employees will receive more effective training. It is a myth that TV possesses some sort of special quality that puts it in a unique position in our training programs. And simply because a TV program is beautifully done with name actors, special sound effects, and a great musical score does not guarantee that such a program will contribute measurably to our training objectives.

It is, perhaps, easy to understand why such myths exist. Like motion pictures, there is a kind of mystique about television that suggests a special potential and capability that does not necessarily reside in this medium. The making of a TV show is to most laymen shrouded in a certain amount of mystery. Television jargon itself, such as fades, wipes, dissolves and cuts, seems to exclude the uninitiated. And our unfamiliarity with

the secrets of television production conspires to foster the notion that TV is in a way something quite special. The result is that we get the impression that TV can somehow present information more effectively than other types of presentations, such as printed matter, lectures, tapes and slides.

How, then, can we make use of TV without inadvertently diminishing the effectiveness of our training efforts? The answer is that through the *discriminate* use of TV we can make the most of the strengths TV does possess as a training tool.

The initial consideration is whether or not TV is really the most effective medium for achieving particular training goals. Would it be advantageous to use a single TV program or perhaps a series of programs? We should also determine whether TV is going to be used as an additional instructional tool or whether it may form the core of the training process. However, TV should *never* be simply

an adjunct to any learning situation.

Too often TV is introduced for a number of reasons, none of which bears directly upon the learning objectives, except, perhaps, in some vague sort of way. It is better not to use TV at all than to arbitrarily subject trainees to it, regardless of how relevant the subject matter is to a particular phase of training. In this regard we need to consider TV in the broader context of education and instruction.

Education may, in general terms, be referred to as the guiding of an individual's learning and socialization in order that he develops into a productive citizen. This may include institutional learning as well as planned or unplanned personal experiences and human interrelationships. Ultimately, these encounters may produce some changes in the individual's knowledge, understanding, beliefs, attitudes and values.

On the other hand, we may refer to instruction as a more specific form of education. It is usually preplanned, specifically arranged, and scheduled. The intent of the instruction is to produce on the part of the learner a particular set of responses or behaviors delineated in advance by the person responsible for the instruction.

TV, as an instructional aid, falls into this latter category. *If TV is not selected in terms of its ability to elicit specific, preplanned responses, it can very well hinder, not help, the instructional process.*

This is particularly true in view of the fact that TV content requires a certain amount of specificity, because the photographic (if films are used) or electronic content of TV is itself specific. The perceptual experiences of the viewers are, therefore, specific rather than general. Broad general effects do not usually result from the viewing of a single TV program, and general effects should not be expected by the training instructor. One should not anticipate, for instance, a general appreciation for or understanding of marketing strategies as the result of viewing a broad treatment of the subject. The point is that *the*

effectiveness of TV depends upon how closely the program content is related to the specific learning objectives established by the instructor. At the risk of sounding redundant, there is nothing, *per se*, in TV that guarantees better learning or more effective training.

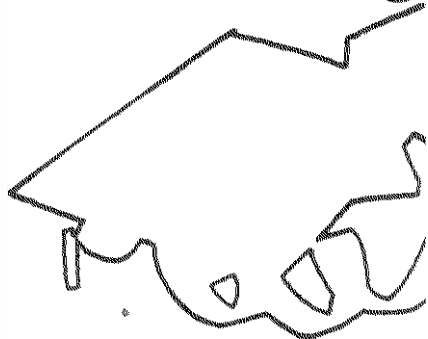
Therefore, if TV is to be effective in terms of established learning objectives, its content must be directly related to particular viewer reactions or behaviors expected or desired by the instructor. Any material that is extraneous to the specific learning objectives will make little or no contribution to those objectives. For example, if, in a TV presentation aimed at demonstrating a particular sales technique, there was included material about the history and the benefits of selling, such material would be irrelevant. An instructor who selected the presentation because he or she found the material appealing to him or her might inadvertently expect the program to meet objectives of which it is incapable.

Audience Differences

Often, however, caught up in our excitement over a particular TV presentation, we overlook a very important variable — the differences among our viewing audience. The content of TV is generally accepted differentially by our trainees. Factors such as age, sex, intelligence, education, predispositions and TV literacy greatly influence reactions to a program or presentation. Thus, if a TV presentation is to be effective in terms of desired trainee responses, we must be aware of those viewer characteristics that influence TV response.

We should realize that persons of different ages react differently to both content and treatment of a program. Older people, for instance, can tolerate a slower-paced presentation than younger people. Older persons also have a greater number of experiences that assist them in the assimilation of the content. The education and intelligence of the viewers influence what can be readily understood without additional explanations, and the sex of the viewers deter-

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mines response in terms of the way males and females regard various situations.

We must be aware of the trainees' predispositions; that is, their beliefs, values, attitudes, and biases that influence their receptivity of TV material. We must take into consideration TV literacy, which is the ability of the viewer to learn from TV and to understand the content of the TV presentation and the treatment of that content.

With regard to the above, it is essential, if we are going to use TV in our training programs, to have some insight into the trainees' prior experiences, knowledge and motivations. This is important because TV has a tendency to influence viewers when its content reinforces such experiences, knowledge and motivations. A person responds to TV content in terms of what he or she already knows, has experienced, or is motivated to do.

The selection or the creation of a TV presentation with regard to learning objectives must also involve a consideration of whether or not the intent of the training is to

extend or reinforce behavior or to reorganize and redirect behavior. Such efforts will be successful to the extent that the TV presentation is appropriate to these intentions and is part of a cumulative experience on the part of the trainee. This suggests that a selected or created TV presentation should adequately fit into the instructional package and not be expected to influence independently.

Another consideration in our selection or creation of a TV presentation is the way in which the TV camera is used. Viewers generally respond to instructional material better if the camera angle represents their own point of view; that is, their own eye positions. But this does not imply that the use of a principal character — the prestige role concept — is not effective. The point is that, depending upon the type of instructional content, the TV camera angle should be considered in terms of the viewers' subjectivity and identification with the principal character or actor.

Instructor's Role

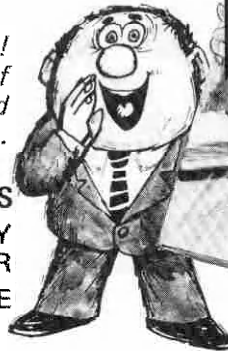
Another concern that we may inadvertently overlook involves the role of the instructor in the viewing of a TV program. While it is generally accepted that the instructor plays a vital role within the lecture process, in terms of providing leadership and motivation, we may carelessly assume that the TV presentation can stand on its own merits. However, the leadership and motivation displayed by the instructor *are* important with the showing of a TV training program, if the learning objectives are to be realized. The instructor's responsibilities, therefore, include planning, arranging and managing the instructional situation. He/she must do more than simply announce the TV presentation; he/she must make any appropriate explanations and interpretations regarding the TV's content and purpose . . . and must integrate the TV presentation with the learning objectives.

We may or may not have any control over the content of a TV presentation, depending on whe-

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ther we create the TV program or purchase it already made. In either event, we should be wary of TV programs that tend to cram as much information into the shortest viewing times. There is, unfortunately, a tendency to cover as much ground as quickly as possible, because of the economics involved. The author had the misfortune to witness the pressure to overload training films with so much content that their effectiveness was drastically reduced. The film's content could never be assimilated in one showing, but there was not enough time in the training program to permit multiple showings. Thousands of dollars worth of film now lie unused in the company's production studio. Hind-sight strongly suggests that the firm might have had a more flexible and adaptable training aid if it had used TV.

Despite the presence of background music, dialogue, sound effects and narration, many persons assert that TV, like motion pictures, is primarily a visual medium. This notion may or may not be true regarding both film and TV. *It depends upon the objectives of the producer and/or director.* One or the other may be emphasized according to the particular effects desired. But if neither the visual elements nor sound is made the primary communication vehicle of the message, then there should be a meld of the two. *The visual and the sound should complement one another so that a unified and coherent production emerges that is compatible with our training objectives.* What is important with regard to learning or training objectives is that the action and the dialogue (or narration) are developed within the context of these objectives. These objectives must be identified and exist within the content of the presentation . . . and whether the visual or sound medium or both are used in developing these objectives must be taken into account.

Significant Programming

We must also be concerned, whether we create the production or purchase one already made, that the program have built into it

the context of action that is familiar to the trainees and is significant to them in terms of their predispositions, beliefs, attitudes and values. It is not necessarily the action itself that determines the perception and retention of certain scenes, but the *meaning* of the action in those scenes. It is not the close-ups that are important, but the significance of the object shown. And it is not the performance of a task *per se* that contributes to the learning objective, but the meaning of the task to the viewers. What our trainees see and hear in a TV production depends on what meaning the visual and sound content have for them — what personal needs are met by this content.

From the foregoing, a number of corollaries may be stated pertinent to the efficacy of TV in terms of our learning or training objectives.

- *Factual learning:* TV can be an effective communicator of factual information or knowledge, provided that such information or knowledge can best be presented via this medium. Included are information about people, places, conditions, and interrelationships. But we must not fail to understand that TV can also distort some facts, such as time and space relationships. Incorrect information may be accepted by the TV viewers if that information is presented in a plausible context.

- *Retention:* One force inherent in TV presentations used in learning situations is that it can influence retention of factual information in a positive way. The influence of factual information may persist for longer periods than may be attributable to other methods of introducing information, such as lectures, printed materials, and recordings. Although there is always some forgetting of learned information, the learning may be evident up to two to three months after the viewing, even though the production did not expressly present the facts or information as instructional material. However, the retention of TV-presented information may well vary among individuals within a given audience of trainees.

- *Specificity of TV content:* As mentioned earlier, the photographic or electronic content of TV is pretty much specific and, therefore, the perceptual experiences of the viewers are also specific rather than general. As a result, broad general effects do not normally result from a single viewing of a TV production as a medium of instructional communication.

- *Specific Attitudes:* Some specific attitude change can result from a TV presentation whose content is closely related to the object of the specific attitude. If the training objective is to create a favorable attitude toward a particular operation, the content of the presentation must directly and specifically relate to that operation and its advantages and the need for adoption of it. But if the TV content strongly contradicts social norms or well-established beliefs, the result may be a reinforcing of the original attitude rather than a change in attitude.

- *General Attitudes:* Because the influence of a single TV presentation tends to be specific, rather than general, we should not expect general attitude changes. However, general effects may occur if (1) the TV presentation is biased in some direction consistent with the trainees' predispositions, (2) it is exhibited within a context that supports and reinforces the particular bias, and (3) several similar presentations are shown over a period of time.

TV can, of course, play a vital role in our training efforts. What is crucial, however, is how big a role and what that role is. When TV first appeared on the training scene, some felt that it could supplement the usual training methods and that it would prove to be a sort of panacea of our training ills.

"No Guarantee"

While TV can somewhat speed up the learning process and increase retention of factual information and concepts, TV by itself is no guarantee that better learning is the end product of its use. An appropriate presentation may be just as effective as a poor or average instructor, but it must be

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re-emphasized that the showing of just any TV presentation, even though related to the training material, will not necessarily enhance learning. As previously stated, the content must be specifically and explicitly integrated with the training material to be learned.

In comparison with other training methods, such as slides, tapes, lectures and printed matter, TV can hold its own, but it is not necessarily superior to these. There is nothing to gain from indiscriminately tossing into the training program a TV presentation to replace a lecture or some other teaching method. In fact, simply tossing in a TV presentation may hinder, not enhance, the training.

A Noteworthy Contribution

Why, then, bother to use TV at all? Because TV may not be the final answer to all our training needs, doesn't mean it isn't a valuable and flexible training tool. TV can make a noteworthy contribution to our training, provided it deals with material that can best be presented visually.

Another advantage of TV is that a videotape can be re-edited to meet changing training requirements. It can be completely erased and used again. It is far less expensive to send a videotape into the field than to send an instructor, particularly if extensive traveling is involved. And videotape can bring into the classroom scenes, material, and circumstances not possible in the usual lecture approach. Because TV can be as effective as an average instructor, it can be employed in those instances in which instructors are not available.

There is no reason our equipment should gather dust or that it be used ineffectively. Like other training methods, it has its limitations, but it also has its unique strengths. These can be summed up as follows:

1. People learn from TV, partic-

ularly factual information, concepts, motor skills and attitudes.

2. If appropriate and effective TV presentations are used, trainees tend to learn faster and better retain what they have learned.

3. Instructional TV may stimulate other learning activities, such as discussions, voluntary reading, investigations.

4. TV presentations may facilitate thinking and problem-solving, particularly when new concepts must be learned, or new patterns of thought or new ideas must be assimilated.

5. Good TV presentations are as effective as a good or average instructor, and may even equal an excellent instructor insofar as the instructor's function is communicating the facts or demonstrating

the procedures presented in the TV presentation.

6. TV possesses a flexibility not found in many other methods of instruction, and can bring into the classroom features that no other medium (except film) can.

7. TV can be readily adapted to changing training needs and situations, and it can be brought up to date quickly and simply.

8. TV eliminates the need for expensive centralized training. Videotapes can be easily shipped to field locations for use, so that personnel do not have to travel to a firm's home office or other central location for training.

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