

The Flannel Board As A Training Tool

B. J. SPEROFF

Educational and training programs have become an indispensable and integral part of our industrial milieu. In great part this has come about not only because of the increasing necessity for trained industrial personnel, but also due to the social awakening of industrial management to a realization they must deal with situations part and parcel of their ever-growing obligation to the community as a whole. Toward this end, education and training divisions cope with a variety of problems—whether they be directly related to the work at hand, such as on-the-job training, or indirectly related to the work, such as sponsoring Junior Achievement activities.

Depending on the scope of the problems, the budget, the personnel involved, and other variables, the ways and means of preparing, administering, and presenting such programs find many different modes of expression. The gamut runs from straight lectures to strictly visual presentations with all gradations in between. Regardless of the methods and procedures, visuals, for the most part, have become an

accepted part of training programs. Even in this regard, there is a good deal of latitude, as well as disparity, in the amount of visuals utilized and their uses as part of an overall training program. Suffice it to state at this juncture that each visual method employed has both its advantages and disadvantages, that depending upon the nature of the content, the participants, the conference leader, and a host of other related factors, any one method or combination of methods may be superior to another.

One of the more recent and most versatile of these training aids is the flannel board. A flannel board consists of a napped piece of material, e.g., flannel, velvet, or felt, stretched smoothly and evenly across a wooden frame (the size varies with the needs or requirements). Flannel boards may be permanent, such as the large, mounted kind found in conference rooms, or the portable type, such as the small, collapsible kind.

In the making and preparation of slap-on cards, charts, and the like, each piece of cardboard has a piece of napped material or flocking pasted on its back.

B. J. SPEROFF is Project Director and Research Associate at the Industrial Relations Center, The University of Chicago. He also serves as Psychological Consultant to Advanced Management Research, Inc., a management consulting firm. Holds degrees from Indiana and Butler Universities and the Illinois Institute of Technology. Author of over 35 publications, and frequently participates in meetings sponsored by the AMA, ASTD, and other associations. Member of the American Psychological Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Indiana Academy of Science, among other organizations.

(Some prefer a single piece of napped material shaped to the slap-on card itself, whereas others choose to cut up and paste on strips of material in strategic positions on the cardboard.) To attach the slap-on card onto the flannel board one merely presses it firmly—preferably against the grain of the material—and it sticks without slipping. (It is prudent to brush the flannel board napping regularly to maintain freshness and firmness of the material; and, of course, to keep dust and foreign particles from the napping.) A brush, broom, piece of felt, scotch tape, or dampened cloth can be used to restore the life of the material.

Like most training devices the flannel board has a definite value in visual instruction. It is similar to film presentations in that both vision and hearing are combined in the learning experience. At the same time, for a flannel board presentation to be both meaningful and purposeful to the conferees or participants, the presentation should embody the following attributes:

(1) It should tell a complete story, i.e., another individual who has not witnessed the entire presentation should be able to look at the flannel board and understand what the slap-ons represent;

(2) It should have direction, purpose, and continuity, i.e., the presentation schema should be such that logical sequences or steps of action, involvement, and manipulation of the slap-ons reveal to the listener the rationale and objectives of the presentation and its ensuing discussion outline;

(3) The slap-ons (cards, charts, pictorials, etc.) should be legibly printed, large-lettered, simply phrased,

and be specific in reference to persons, places, and things;

(4) Slap-ons of different size and color should be used to denote similar or dissimilar aspects of the presentation, e.g., large, rectangular, red slap-ons refer to primary worker needs, whereas small, rectangular, yellow slap-ons refer to secondary worker needs. Slap-ons should be shaped to resemble or parallel, insofar as is possible or feasible, the actual model one is describing, as, for example, a shearing machine. Finally, complementary, non-glare paints and cardboard stock should be utilized in making slap-ons.

(5) Both the slap-on presentation schema and the verbal presentation discussion should be thoroughly rehearsed beforehand (preferably before a pilot group to iron out the "bugs").

If a flannel board presentation is carried out embodying these attributes the presentation should prove optimally rewarding both to the group and the leader. In addition, certain other tangible advantages will accrue which will make for mutual understanding among participants. For one thing, the conference leader can vary his pace; he can dwell longer on some aspects if he deems necessary or if the group desires; or, the leader can proceed rapidly to other points if the group shows firm understanding. Thus, the conference leader can gear his presentation to the needs and assimilation or learning ability of his group. Among the other advantages of this method of presentation, for both the leader and conferees are the following:

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(1) A logical, serial outline or topical summary of the discussion is visible and makes following the presentation easier to understand;

(2) Presents a unified and excellent schema for making recapitulations at any point;

(3) Allows the conference leader to talk naturally (unencumbered by notes, guides, or text material)—in an extemporaneous manner—taking cognizance of their reactions, feelings, and other overt cues, and thereby adjust his pace of presentation;

(4) Affords the conference leader a way of manipulating the group to create and maintain interest by building up the flannel board bit by bit;

(5) Provides a sound way for learning and assimilation (and through re-inforcement techniques) by calling upon both the conferees visual and aural senses;

(6) The flannel board type of learning experience proves both interesting and novel as well as being meaningful and practical;

(7) The flannel board is a flexible, adaptable, easily managed learning device which in the hands of competent conference leaders can be geared to the learning level of each group.

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