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Voice Mail

Emergent Groups

I thought that the series on workplace learning (October 1993) was outstanding. I've been given the opportunity to learn by doing at J. Crew. I am a living, breathing example of the research done by the Institute for Research on Learning. It's thrilling to anticipate the positive impact the studies will have in the workplace.

I love my job, I love training, and I love *Training & Development!* The following words are from my heart:

At J. Crew Retail (a clothing firm), the work environment is rich with the "poetry of work," as described in Patricia Galagan's report, "The Search for the Poetry of Work," in the October issue. IRL found that people who work together tend to organize themselves into smaller "communities of practice." Such communities engage in a shared interest or activity, develop ways of doing things to get around barriers, and ultimately gain valuable knowledge.

One kind of community of practice is an "emergent group"—an informal group that operates outside boundaries on the periphery, where innovation, work, and learning occur. J. Crew Retail's training department is such a group.

Within three months of being hired, Director of Training Michael DeMartini formed a cohesive team consisting of himself and three employees who had no formal education in training. The employees' interest in training and love of learning by doing has defined the training department's mission and inspired its success.

The new trainers came from dif-

ferent job positions at J. Crew: operations coordinator, assistant store manager, and sales leader. In those jobs, they realized they wanted to do training, so they tried it. The learning took place because the company gave them the opportunity to do research and come up with ideas for implementing training, not because they were taught how to train. They learned how to train by just doing it.

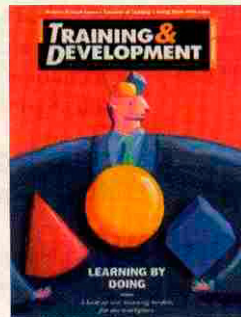
J. Crew was ready to invest in training, so it allowed the community of practice to form naturally. The company did the following:

- ▶ supported and nurtured tacit learning by letting interested employees explore ideas and put them into practice
- ▶ designed for training by hiring a director to identify interested and qualified employees to join his team
- ▶ enabled the emergent group to exist by generating a training budget that provided the means to develop programs and conduct training at store locations.

The result was that the learning became "transparent." In other words, the new trainers got together, synthesized their ideas, designed a comprehensive program, and began to anticipate future training needs. In less than six months, J. Crew trained staffs for eight new stores, created formal training programs and manuals, and developed a train-the-trainer seminar for its managers and sales leaders.

And the four people in the training department have continued to uncover and nurture additional emergent groups of willing trainers from every organizational level.

J. Crew's approach has fostered tacit learning throughout the firm.



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Doer's Profile

The Doer's Profile was created to give you a way to expand your networking capabilities, and to let you know about the interesting and exciting things your colleagues are doing in the field.



Kirstin Austin

Amy Titus

Titus Austin Inc., Washington, D.C.

This month's profile features two doers, Amy Titus and Kirstin Austin.

Amy is president and Kirstin is vice-president of Titus Austin Inc., a women-owned human resource development consulting firm in Washington, D.C. TAI specializes in needs assessment, organization change, instructional design, and human resource studies.

Most exciting new development: "We're currently applying performance technology to our clients' real-world problems. It's exciting to apply a rigorous model that includes a lot of elements: front-end analysis, task analysis, the design and development of performance-based instruments, and performance-management systems."

Biggest problem: "Sorting out the jargon. Many companies use different terms to refer to the same things. The challenge is to learn new lingo for every project. But it's most important to focus on goals, not faddish terminology."

Most recent accomplishment: "Achieving a collaborative work relationship with a small, high-performance government agency. We took a hard look at its mission and helped translate it into action."

Last book read: *A Guide for the Perplexed* by Jonathon Levi (Kirstin). *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* by Lyle Spencer and Signe Spencer (Amy).

Best training tip: "Give reluctant participants some outrageous opinions to react to. That usually gets things going."

Off-hour pursuits: "Dog training." (Kirstin) "Sports and playing with my new baby." (Amy)

Is there anything unique about working with mostly women? "The freedom from gender discrimination. And the types of jokes that get told! When we started the company 10 years ago, we were interested in a special collaboration between two women working toward a common goal. The staff is mostly women and a few men. When hiring, we look for the most qualified candidates. It just happens that there are many outstanding women in human resources. Still, we work with clients of both genders; we don't feel we're working in a 'women only' environment."

The learning enables the sales associates and the training team at J. Crew to continue learning by doing and to reap the rewards of learning in the workplace.

— **Maureen Mebarg**
J. Crew Retail
Silver Spring, Maryland

Experiential Model

As president of Vancouver University Colleges, a world consortium, I thought that fans of "learning by doing" might be interested in our experiential model for adult education.

Our format consists of collaborating, hands-on programs that work in conjunction with distance-learning services. When the programs end, diplomas or degrees are awarded.

The format began 10 years ago when the Vancouver Arts Club Drama Centre joined forces with the

university in offering performing arts and technologies. Now, we have a program of leadership and environmental studies (BREFAS) as a result of the collaboration of the Jasper Institute, the Whistler Institute in British Columbia, and the American Alpine Institute and North Cascades

Institute in Washington. Other programs include management studies conducted in 11 countries.

We use some Montessori materials in second-language training and adult basic education. Montessori is usually thought of as a method of early-childhood education, but its philosophy inspired our experiential model for adults.

The programs are listed in the Canadian government's *National Guide to College and University Programs*.

— **Raymond S. Rodgers**
Vancouver University Colleges
Vancouver, B.C. Canada

The Work of Poetry

Here is a poem sent in by a reader.

Every classroom session
is a learning occasion.
For both the faculty and the audience,
it is a means of sharing experience.
Lectures of long duration
dull the edge of concentration.
Lack of attention creates only tension,
resulting in very little retention.
Post-lunch session, the less said the better.
Unless the teacher knows how to operate the trigger
to shoot at sight the invading slumber,
for the audience it is all boring and bitter.
Here are a few tips to make the session lively and brighter:
Whatever may be the topic,
a little bit of fun and frolic
provides the session the vital tonic
and drives away the boredom tragic.
Question and answer portion,
being the backbone of interaction,
is one sure solution
to improve audience power of attention.
Lively examples here and there
have to be part of the teacher's software.
To a great extent, this will ensure
that audience diversion is very, very rare.
A quiz at the end of the session
helps the audience in their recollection
and reinforces their knowledge acquisition.
For the faculty, it confirms the level of absorption.
Voice modulation and use of quotation
from persons of great reputation
lend power to communication
and make a long-lasting impression.
Each teacher has his or her own pattern,
like the glow of light from a different lantern.
If the audience gets a bit of inspiration,
the faculty has served the cause of illumination.
When the eyes of students glow,
the teachers surely come to know
that what was taught has been caught.
For students, it is a moment of great fantasy.
And for teachers, a moment of sheer ecstasy.

— **B.N. Jagadeesh Prasad**
Bharat Electronics, Bangalore, India

Correction

Author Catherine M. Sleezer ("Tried and True Performance Analysis," November 1993) was incorrectly identified in that issue as the winner of an OD research grant from ASTD. Sleezer won the ASTD Donald Bullock Memorial Dissertation Award, which recognizes an outstanding dissertation in HRD. The November article is based on Sleezer's research and dissertation.

In addition, we omitted some important information from the article. It describes a study that involved the development and validation of the PAT model. The model incorporates perspectives from the literature and practitioners regarding training needs assessment. The PAT model consists of a graphic of the concepts that affect decisions about training needs, a list of the phases and steps in determining training needs, and a set of worksheets.

Implementing the PAT model in an organization showed that the model is an effective tool for analyzing performance needs and opportunities. It further showed that training needs are determined through the interaction of three elements: the organization, the decision makers, and the analyst.

"Voice Mail" is compiled and edited by **Haidee Allerton**. "Voice Mail" welcomes your views. Send your letters and comments to "Voice Mail," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043; fax them to Allerton at 703/683-9203; or call them in on the "Voice Mail" line, 703/683-9590.