

# In Practice

## Teamsters Versus Teams

For years, quality gurus and other experts have praised worker-participation programs, and many organizations have successfully taken their advice. Now, after a recent ruling by the National Labor Relations Board, some organizations may think twice before organizing teams.

Last December, the NLRB ruled that by organizing a team to handle employee compensation and attendance issues, Electromation, a small electrical-parts maker in Elkhart, Indiana, violated the Wagner Act—the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

The intent of the Wagner Act is to prevent companies from setting up sham unions that undercut legitimate ones—a common practice in the 1930s. Unfortunately, the law seems to prohibit some team activities.

For instance, the law states:

- ▶ It shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer to dominate or interfere with the formation of any labor organization or contribute financial support to it.
- ▶ A labor organization is any organization or employee-representation committee that exists for the purpose of dealing with employers concerning grievances, wages, hours of employment, or conditions of work.

The trouble for Electromation began in 1988. After suffering heavy financial losses, the company dropped an attendance bonus program and a wage increase for its 200 workers. When employees objected through a petition, Electromation set up committees—each consisting of up to six hourly workers and one or two managers—to deal with problems such as absenteeism and pay scales for skilled workers. The company says it wanted employee feedback about workers'



Chris Gull

concerns through the committee members. But the Teamsters union—which did not represent Electromation employees at the time—filed a complaint with the NLRB.

The union claimed that Electromation was trying to establish a union of its own and undercut the Teamsters. About the time that the teams were set up, the Teamsters attempted to organize within the company. The employees rejected the Teamsters at that time, but the union later successfully organized within the company.

In 1990, an NLRB judge ruled that Electromation had violated the Wagner Act. The company appealed the decision and, after a long battle, lost.

The ruling board found that the committees established by Electromation constituted a labor organization and were not simply employee-communication devices, as the company claimed. By ruling that the committees constituted a labor organization, the board concluded that the organization dominated and supported

*The National Labor Relations Board rules against a labor/management team.*

*Also, here are some tips on spicing up role plays, training when your voice fails you, and learning about customer needs.*

the committees—an act that the board said violates the Wagner Act.

NLRB ruled that Electromation developed the idea for the committees, created written purposes and goals for the committees, developed a rule that said each employee could serve on only one committee, and appointed management representatives to serve on the committees.

The committees' "only purpose was to address employees' disaffection concerning conditions of employment through the creation of a bilateral process involving employees and management in order to reach bilateral solutions on the basis of employee-initiated proposals," wrote the board in its ruling.

Some would argue that modern

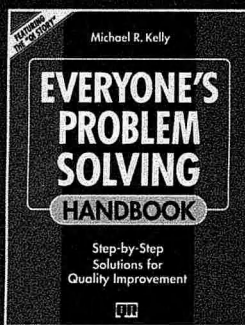
worker-participation programs are hardly a threat to labor unions. But many unions believe that such committees step in the way of unions' rights to be the exclusive representatives of employees.

"We already have a way to establish healthy relationships between workers and management," said Teamsters President Ron Carey to the Associate Press. "It's called collective bargaining."

But businesses feel otherwise. In the *Daily Labor Report*, Don Zimmerman, a labor attorney and former NLRB member, said, "If there was ever an area that cries out for some clarification from the board, this is it." He believes that the language in the Wagner Act provides enough flexibility for NLRB to accommodate the changes that are occurring in U.S. workplaces.

The NLRB says the Electromation ruling will not be a test of whether the board will endorse manager/worker teams. According to Dennis Devaney and Clifford Oviatt, Jr., the NLRB members who wrote the majority opinion, the violation was based on the particular facts of the Electromation case and will not determine generally that labor/management committees operating under other circumstances will be ruled illegal.

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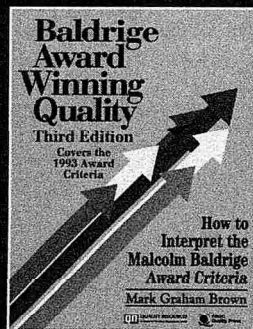
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Nothing else has brought quality to the forefront of American business like the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. And nothing else has helped organizations understand and implement the award criteria like *Baldrige Award Winning Quality*.

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## The Silent Approach

**H**ave you ever woken up on the morning of a training program you had to conduct, and found that your voice had disappeared? It happened to this author.

Did I cancel my session? I wanted to, but I remembered having to cancel a course a few months before for the same reason and felt it was my duty to stick this one out. I set my mind to thinking of the best ways to use my facilitation skills without the benefit of a voice. It turned out to be an interesting day.

I facilitated a six-hour course on effective writing, speaking, and organization communication and never spoke a word. When someone posed a question directly to me, I looked around the room with an expectant expression and open hand gestures,



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to invite answers from participants. Once a participant provided an answer, I indicated agreement or disagreement and sometimes gestured for more contributions. If I needed to make a particular point, I wrote on a flipchart or an overhead projector.

That session was one of the most open and participative training sessions I have ever facilitated. I was amazed to discover how much can actually be gleaned from participants.

The group I taught that day left with a feeling of team spirit and a sense that it had achieved something. The feedback I received after the course was noticeably more positive than feedback from other sessions.

Many times, instructors are tempted to monopolize the conversation during a training session. My experience suggests that instructors could benefit greatly by occasionally enforcing silence on themselves.

— **Martin Horan**

*section head, management training  
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## Putting Customers to Work

If you're searching for a way to get inside your customers' minds to really understand and meet their needs, you might take a lead from Motorola.

Looking to improve on the total customer satisfaction program that helped the company win a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, Motorola decided to involve customers and suppliers in brainstorming ideas for better customer service.

Each year, Motorola's Communications and Electronics Group holds a customer-satisfaction competition in Fontana, Wisconsin, in which teams of employees try to develop the best ideas for improving customer satisfaction. The latest competition had a twist—it also involved some of the company's customers and suppliers.

Some of the customers and suppliers became team members during the competition; others judged the event. Twenty-three teams competed. Each team had to identify and implement improvements to the

business processes that are unique to the team's area of responsibility. For the competition, teams presented their solutions and documented the results before a panel of judges. The winning teams—four of them—were sent to Hawaii to compete against 16 other teams from around the world.

One winning team developed a plan to reduce cycle time and improve quality in producing and distributing materials that Motorola uses in training adults with learning disabilities. Another team worked with Federal Express to create a computer system that allows the companies to track packages sent by Motorola within Japan. And another team developed a process to reduce cycle time within a region, resulting in 95 percent of all service calls being handled in less than one day.

Shapour Arami, vice-president of quality for Motorola's Communications and Electronics Group, said involving customers in the competition helped employees to listen and react more effectively to changing customer requirements. And, he said, it made the company more able to "define problems and change our production and service processes quickly to maximize the quality of our products and services for Motorola customers."

## Tag, You're It

Role plays are an effective way of involving people in the learning process. But they take valuable time and generally don't allow total participation. A technique that can help improve the value of participation is tag-team role plays.

Here's how they work: Divide your class into two or more groups. Give one group a short scenario describing a situation from the viewpoint of a manager or sales representative. Give the other half the same scenario, described from the viewpoint of an employee or potential customer. Each group member should have time to read his or her group's scenario.

Ask a volunteer from each group to begin role-playing the scenario, each from his or her own group's

assigned perspective. Explain that within three to five minutes (depending on your time constraints) each person in the role play must raise a hand to signal another member of the same team to "tag into" the role play (take the first participant's place).

Participants can raise their hands at any time during the exercise. The instructor, as moderator, should call for a tag if someone goes beyond the allotted time.

The two groups do not need to "pass the tag" at the same time. Once the group has begun the process, it will almost take care of itself. Most participants will be engaged, involved, and entertained, and sometimes will even feel threatened, but they will clearly be stimulated.

After each participant has had a chance to participate, ask some key questions:

- ▶ Did you "tag out" because you felt you had appropriately dealt with the issue?
- ▶ Did some tension, fear, or difficulty cause you to tag out of the role play?
- ▶ Is that difficulty something that you might want to work on further?
- ▶ In a real-life situation, what could you have done to prepare yourself better so you wouldn't have felt a need to tag out?

Participants tag out for different reasons. Because people know that they can quit whenever they are ready to, they tend to feel more comfortable participating in the role play. They don't have to worry about being publicly embarrassed about demonstrating their weaknesses.

Because more people are involved than in typical role plays, participants have more opportunities to pick up positive tips and ideas from watching their colleagues. Participants will also notice unfavorable styles, techniques, and phrases and resolve not to use them.

Participants also experience a physical "lift" when they get up, move, and stand in the tag lines with their teams.

— **Ted Voelker**

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## In Practice

### Career Killers

**W**hat mistakes do managers make that cause them to lose their jobs when their companies undergo organizational change? Karyl Innis of EnterChange says that managers in the midst of change often make one or more of the following "career killer" mistakes:

◆ They let their performances slip. Frozen like deer in the headlights of an oncoming car, some managers in an acquired company act as if all of their responsibilities ended when the new team came on board. They wait for specific instructions before tackling any project.

◆ They don't understand their value to the new organization. Managers who have been laid off tend to be those who could not describe how their experiences, skills, and talents could have helped the new organization to be successful.

◆ They don't make friends. Managers who are unsuccessful in an acquired company often act like vanquished soldiers who are not equal to the victors. They wait to be asked to lunch or coffee.

◆ They cling to old habits. Managers in the unemployment lines are still humming the old tunes—"We've always done it this way," or "We'd never do that."

◆ They believe the evaluation process will be objective. New organizational leaders make decisions on who stays and who goes based on observations of performance, behavior, and attitudes in the first few critical weeks.

◆ They ignore their own feelings that the new organization is not right for them. Managers who ignore the signs that a new organization is not right are only postponing the inevitable. Even if they survive the first cut, the mismatch will show up eventually.

### Leading Questions

**L**eadership development is a high priority in nearly half of U.S. companies, according to an American Society for Training and Development National HRD Executive Survey. The survey gathered

information from 144 top-level HRD people.

Forty-five percent of the respondents said that leadership development is a high priority in their companies. Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported that their companies offer leadership-development programs. Forty-four percent said leadership development is offered to executives, 62 percent said it is offered to top managers, 74 percent offer it to middle managers, 63 percent to supervisors, and 24 percent to nonsupervisors.

Fifty-four percent of respondents reported that their companies have sets of recognized leadership values. Half of those respondents said the values are defined in writing. The following eight words or phrases were most commonly cited in the responses: quality, teamwork, customer focus and satisfaction, integrity, ethics, trust, respect, and honesty.

The survey also asked respondents where their leadership-development courses are designed and delivered. In 50 percent of the respondent's companies, the programs are designed in-house. In 26 percent, the programs are designed by outside suppliers or consultants; 19 percent of respondents said they buy them off the shelf; and 5 percent said they use university programs.

Sixty-two percent of respondents said their programs are delivered in-house, 18 percent said consultants deliver them, and 20 percent have delivery provided through some other source.

When the survey respondents were asked to project the content of their leadership-development programs over the next three years, the following categories emerged:

◆ Teams. This includes the importance of teamwork, self-directed teams, resolving team conflicts, negotiating with organizational teams, and cooperation.

◆ Quality. Many respondents said that TQM continues to be a major focus of leadership-development programs.

◆ Strategic planning. This includes developing the skills needed to carry forth the goals and visions of an organization.

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## In Practice

- ▶ **Visioning.** This involves establishing and communicating a company's or work unit's vision and revising work processes around the corporate philosophy.
- ▶ **Competencies.** This category includes basic leadership skills. It looks at specific models, management styles, presentation skills, analysis and planning, interpersonal and communication skills, and mentoring and coaching techniques.
- ▶ **Organizational issues.** Issues such as employee empowerment, training, turnover, job rotation, succession planning, organizational values, and business ethics and practices fall into this category.
- ▶ **Diversity.** This includes leading a culturally diverse workforce and using that workforce diversity to strengthen an organization.
- ▶ **Change.** This involves managing change in the workplace and being a catalyst for change.

## Relief From the Symptoms of Fear

When you have to speak in public, do you suffer from a dry mouth, perspiration, red skin splotches, and the shakes? If so, you might be experiencing a nervous disorder common among those just about to make presentations.

It's called stage fright, and all the preparation in the world won't help your presentation if you can't manage the physical symptoms of nervousness. But there are some cures. Marjorie Brody, president of Brody Communications, offers the following tips to help alleviate some common stage-fright symptoms.

To prevent dry mouth—when your tongue is pasted to the roof of your mouth, hindering your speech—Brody suggests avoiding dairy products, soda, coffee, and alcohol before a presentation. Instead, she says, drink water that is at room temperature. And she suggests using petroleum jelly on your teeth to keep your lips from sticking to your pearly whites. To promote salivation, she suggests biting the tip of your tongue. (Bite it gently. Talking with a sore tongue will not help your presentation, either.)

For those unsightly red skin splotches, Brody suggests using humor to release endorphins, which she claims will help make the splotches disappear. She also suggests camouflaging splotches by wearing pink and red clothing or a high neckline.

To control perspiration, she suggests putting talcum powder on your body and hands. And don't forget that handy handkerchief.

If you find your hands and legs shaking uncontrollably, Brody says to make a lot of gestures and to move as you speak. To control a shaky voice, she says to project your voice as you speak. And she suggests breathing deeply to slow down your heart rate. (We suppose you don't want to do that too deeply or too loudly. You don't want your audience to get the wrong idea.)

Finally, Brody advises against drinking caffeine on the day of a presentation. She says that it increases your adrenalin, speeding up your heart rate and causing you to shake.

## Heard in Passing

Training is "the best investment we can make. A long-term commitment to human-capital development should give businesses a substantial investment-tax credit for all training and offer individuals tax credits and low-cost loans to encourage lifetime training for all. With more and more workers becoming less and less attached to any given payroll, shifting the training focus from the company to the individual is a must."

— Tom Peters  
from *Quality Digest*  
November 1992

"In Practice" is edited and written by **Craig Steinburg**. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.