

Are Trainers Growing Up?

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Trainers tend to be introspective. As officers in a new professional field, it's good for us to look at ourselves every so often. And a look today reveals distinctly that we are growing up.

How do we know we're growing up? There are at least four major indications. We've cut the camouflage from our jargon. We're behaving as though we know our jobs. We openly display professional pride. And what's more, we're now accepted and respected by production managers and workers. Yes, in twenty years we as trainers have matured. Our fearfulness and confusion are disappearing. Our confident purposefulness is increasing.

Cutting the Camouflage

There's no doubt that twenty, and even ten, years ago trainers resorted to all sorts of camouflage to hide the job they were trying to do. Taboo was the use of any "strictly educational" term. We held "conferences," few of which were genuine consultations. At their best, some were straight lecturing or teaching situations and some were very

directed discussions. Many meetings called "conferences" were little better than crude attempts to manipulate employees into thinking they had taken part in policy and decision making. Toward the end of a meeting, the trainer would summarize: "We have decided - - -." And all the time he had had *his* conclusion memorized! Yesterday's trainer even acted out "canned courses" (prepared for some mythical "average" group of employees or supervisors) and fooled himself into believing that exposure to his acting was a cure-all for production or supervisory problems.

Why did trainers feel camouflage was necessary? Perhaps because adult education in the outside community was less popular. Perhaps because of the halo around the self-made man who had had little formal education. But probably because trainers themselves weren't sure that they were educators. Maybe trainers in industry thought that learning in a work situation had little similarity to learning elsewhere.

Well, whatever was its cause, the trainer has now cut the camouflage. He

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gives a lecture, directs a school, chairs a meeting, or manages a conference according to the need to be met. If desirable, he expresses his opinion as an individual and unapologetically says, "I believe - - -." Only when he feels a reasonable and willing consensus does he summarize, "We have decided - - -." He uses textbooks, assignments, tests and other educational techniques.

Today, the trainer knows he works in a specialized area of adult education and is not ashamed to use educational terms. To a fellow trainer who still shies away from breathing such words as class, blackboard, and student, 1958's progressive trainer can say, "Look out, your age is showing!"

Knowing Our Jobs

A second indication of our developing maturity is precision in goal, method, and evaluation.

There was a time when workmen and supervisors were merely "trained." The trainer's goal was often "to increase production," "to reduce accidents," "to improve supervision." Now, training needs are identified more precisely and goals defined specifically. For instance, a new worker remains in an induction group until he can "meet a minimum production standard of so-much acceptable work in such-and-such time." Individual coaching or refresher training is given to a particular worker who needs it so that "rejects" are reduced to such-and-such percentage and waste is eliminated." A group of supervisors meet to "discuss their supervisors' meetings (planning, conducting, accomplishing) and contrast autocratic leadership with

consultative supervision." Again, more mature supervisors meet with a trainer or their own senior supervisor to "analyze our use of supervisors' meetings for communication."

Determining training goals, moreover, is a co-operative task for production (line) supervisors and the training (staff) officer. In some organizations training is so well accepted as a line responsibility, that line management itself identifies training needs and plans specifically to meet them with the help of the (staff) trainer. Slowly, line management is discarding the idea that organized training programs are something imposed by staff officers on overworked production men.

Our skill in using and knowing when to use various training methods is also becoming more certain and less accidental. We are beginning to distinguish between individual and group methods. If we are developing a senior supervisor's ability to assume a top management job, we probably plan an individualized program for him. We take account of his individual strengths, weaknesses, experience and of the particular needs of the establishment. On the other hand, if we have to demonstrate and teach the use of new equipment to fifteen operators, we probably do so in a class (group). Or again, if twelve senior supervisors each need to increase their sensitivity to the feelings of junior supervisors, we probably supplement individual counselling with group considerations of human relations. And the type of "group consideration" would be indicated: for instance, as lecture and questions, open or free discussion, directed or determinate discussion, case

study, incident study, role-playing, or workshop.

Evaluation of training, though it will always be difficult to measure, is also becoming more exact. To isolate training as the one factor causing improvement in production, behaviour, or attitude is seldom possible except in experimental laboratories. Yet, we are progressing in measuring training values and we are not afraid to use the evaluation techniques available.

Every day, we trainers are behaving more and more like skilled educators. A school teacher would not just teach mathematics to pupils. He'd teach, for example, long multiplication to pupils who had already mastered multiplication tables and addition. He'd carefully prepare his demonstration, practice, and testing examples. He'd continue drill until he could measure mastery by individual pupils. We trainers are moving toward equal precision in setting goals, using methods, and testing results. If we use a distantly prepared training "outline" or "guide," we carefully adapt it in content and method to meet our own particular needs. More likely, we prepare (or help the line supervisor prepare) a special plan to meet each individual training need.

Boasting a Bit

We used to be very apologetic and defensive. We were overly concerned with "selling ourselves" and "selling training." True, we had a fine missionary zeal. But this was hardly appropriate to a sound professional position. Possibly we too much wanted the satisfaction of "doing" and for this we felt it necessary to apologize.

Most trainers today are learning to enjoy the vicarious satisfaction of helping others do. We assume comfortably a non-directive counselling attitude to line management. And when we meet together, we even "boast a bit" about our professional accomplishment in helping others do.

Winning Our Way

As a matter of fact, our boasting to one another is becoming a reflection of acceptance by production management at all levels. It is becoming less common for trainers to approach line management with proposals for training programs. It is more common for trainers to be invited to give guidance to line managers in *their* training program. Thus, trainers are assured that they are wanted and needed by all levels of management. Mutual respect between training and production departments is increasing.

Growing Up

Growing up professionally is a slow and often painful process. Librarians, welfare workers and others tell us so. We know it, too, from our own limited experience. No one enjoys confusion about function, apparent failure of action, doubtful status in an organization, and insufficient recognition (monetary and otherwise) for effort.

However, pictures of ourselves twenty years ago and ourselves today dramatically prove that training is maturing professionally. We've outgrown childish secrecy and mystery. We've developed a man's stature and we're learning to use a man's tools. Yes, we as trainers are growing up.