In Practice

Saving Starfish

At GE Drive Systems, each productivity boost of $35,000 "saves a starfish"—meaning that the plant preserves a job.

According to the April issue of the *Work in America* newsletter, everyone in the plant knows the parable of the boy who aids starfish stranded on the beach by high tide. One by one, he tosses them back into the water. When someone asks the boy why his efforts matter, when so many starfish litter the shore, he tosses another starfish into the ocean and responds, "It matters to this one."
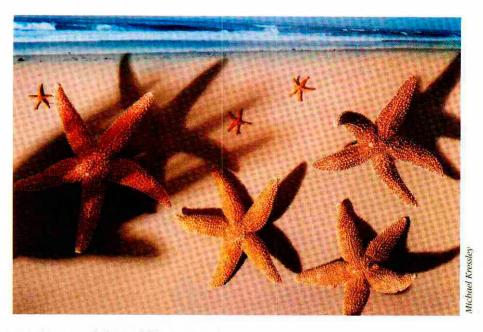
High-Performance Workplace

When the National Association of Manufacturers cited Universal Dynamics of Woodbridge, Virginia, as an example of a high-performance workplace, it was news to Don Rainville, the company's president.

"I didn't know I was a high-performance workplace until...NAM told me," Rainville told *Washington Post* reporter Frank Swoboda.

The 193-employee firm, which makes machinery for the plastics industry, features the high technology and high wages generally associated with high-performance workplaces. But, writes Swoboda in the April 11 *Post*, "If Universal Dynamics is a model for the high-performance workplace, its experience also contradicts conventional thinking about the need for American manufacturing workers to beef up their skills in the face of increasing global competition."

Swoboda reports, "Rainville said that with the increased use of computers to run machines, it now requires much less skill to operate even the most sophisticated equipment. As with the instructions on the machines his own firm makes for worldwide distribution, Rainville said the written word is being replaced by pictures very much like those on the cash register at a fast-food restaurant.

"If anything, Rainville sees less of a need for further education as companies increasingly turn to automation. 'I see the trend going the other way,' Rainville said.

"Rainville concedes that higher education is still very much needed for engineers and other technicians requiring similar skills, but not on the factory floor. 'What I'm looking for is enthusiasm,' he said."

Staffing Snapshot

A recent survey of HRD executives produced the following snapshot of training and development staffing in companies of various sizes. The table shows the

At an electronics plant, a parable drives home the real meaning of productivity improvement.

Michael Kressley

average number of full-time and part-time training and development staff and the average ratio of trainers to staff. The findings are based on 97 responses. The companies represented in the sample employ from 150 to 170,000 employees.

Critical Skills Identified

A new study has identified the leadership skills that enable fast-growing small companies to thrive.

The study by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, is the first to demonstrate a clear link between leadership and entrepreneurship.

Of the skills identified, three were found to be the most critical to small-business growth:
▶ the ability to motivate others
▶ the ability to create and maintain a vision for the company
▶ financial-management skills.

"These findings suggest that leadership is not merely an abstract concept, but a critical determinant in the success or failure of fast-growth businesses," says John Eggers, a program manager with the center's San Diego branch, and the lead researcher on the entrepreneurial leadership project.

The findings are based on a literature review, two surveys of 350 business owners and CEOs, and follow-up focus-group sessions with survey respondents.

For more information, contact John Eggers, 619/453-4774.

Nominations Sought

The Division for Instructional Development of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) seeks nominations for awards recognizing outstanding achievements in the instructional development field. The awards will be presented at the 1995 AECT convention. Award categories:
▶ outstanding practice in instructional development
▶ outstanding book in the instructional-development field
▶ outstanding journal article in the instructional-development field
▶ outstanding practice by a graduate student in instructional development
▶ Robert M. Gagne Award for graduate-student research in instructional development
▶ Presidential Award for outstanding service to the AECT's Division for Instructional Development
▶ Division for Instructional Development Internship Award.

Self-nominations are encouraged. All nominations must be postmarked by October 31. For information and nominating instructions contact Robert A. Reiser, chairman, DID Awards Committee, Department of Educational Research, 305 Stone Building, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306.

Translation Techniques

By Paul J. Guglielmino, executive director of the Stuart-James Research Center, College of Business; and Lucy M. Guglielmino, professor of adult education, College of Education, both at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL 33431.

Your multinational company uses an effective assessment instrument in its U.S. operations. You plan to use the instrument in one of the company's overseas sites as well. You just need to have the instrument translated from English, right? Wrong.

Research and evaluation efforts increasingly encompass cross-cultural, international populations. An inaccurately translated instrument will produce faulty comparisons. Even if the text is translated verbatim, cultural differences among populations can skew results.

International researchers need to consider both the technical aspects of a translation and the cultural implications of the questions they ask in order to obtain comparable data.

Here are some suggestions for ensuring the validity of surveys and other instruments used in comparative research.

Keep the language of the original document simple. This is a good rule to follow whether or not a document will be translated. Even within one country, people's first languages might vary. Express concepts fully and simply. Avoid idioms and complex sentence structures; translators will interpret idioms and complex grammar in different ways.

Don't rely on one translator. A good translation conveys essentially the same meaning or elicits the same responses as the original. Select at least two translators who are highly proficient in both languages and familiar with the content to be translated. Translators must be able to grasp the nuances of the languages and to express complicated and subtle meanings. Have each translator translate the material independently, and then have them jointly compare results and resolve differences.

Check the translation for accuracy. One way is to have the material translated back into the original language. Again, use at least two highly qualified translators and have them jointly resolve discrepancies between their versions. Or, use a bilingual review panel. Each member of the panel should compare the original and the translation. Then the panelists should discuss and resolve differences as a group.

Field-test the translated instrument with a sample of the target population. If an instrument will be used throughout a country, field-test samples from several different regions. Match groups using demographics such as age, sex, and occupation to ensure that variations among groups

are attributable to language and not to other factors.

Keep the effects of culture in mind when designing your instrument. Geert Hofstede, in his classic work *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Sage Publications 1980), demonstrates that cultural norms affect how respondents interpret questions. Remember that you need a translation that is culturally sensitive as well as verbally accurate to ensure valid findings.

Training Veterans

Businesses across the country are taking advantage of a federal jobs program that pays employers up to $12,000 for hiring and training certain recent veterans of the armed forces.

The Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act (SMOCTA) expects to match about 9,000 veterans with jobs before the $75 million appropriated for the program runs out.

The program is designed to help veterans separated from service because of military downsizing to convert their skills to private-sector applications.

Veterans' service organizations in state employment-service offices match employers with qualified veterans. For information about SMOCTA, call 800/442-2VET.

More on the Military

According to American Council on Education President Robert H. Atwell, the U.S. military must overhaul and upgrade its education system to ensure a continued supply of high-quality recruits and to guarantee that veterans can find work in the private sector.

In a keynote address to the U.S. Department of Defense's Worldwide Education symposium in March, Atwell said the armed forces must play a role in the "agenda for lifetime learning" promoted by the Clinton administration.

The growing emphasis on post-secondary training as a prerequisite

THE ARMED FORCES MUST PLAY A ROLE IN THE "AGENDA FOR LIFETIME LEARNING"

for economic success and the expanding array of federal programs designed to increase access to higher education and job skills are changing the recruiting picture for the military.

Young people must view military service as an experience that gives them an edge in the job market, said Atwell. He proposed that the military follow four principles to meet its education challenges:

▶ Embrace the importance of education, not just training, for all of its members.

▶ Focus on the development of "generic employability skills" in addition to job-specific skills.

▶ Enhance the role of civilian colleges and universities in providing education to service members.

▶ Follow the lead of many corporations and other organizations and begin to transform all branches of the armed forces into learning organizations.

School-to-Work

The National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee has released a new publication to help educators link career development with school-to-work transition programs.

According to NOICC Executive Director Juliette N. Lester, *Planning To Meet Career Development Needs: School-to-Work Transition Programs* provides a framework through which states, school districts, and schools can address career development needs identified in the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act, which was signed into law by U.S. President Clinton in May.

The act encourages the development of school-to-work programs for high-school juniors and seniors. The programs would be offered through community partnerships among businesses, schools, and labor

and industry organizations.

"The language in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act legislation makes it clear that there is an expectation that the career development process should be integrated into the educational program from the elementary level through high school and beyond," Lester says.

Copies of the publication cost $2 each. Order them from the NOICC Training Support Center, Oklahoma, NOICC, 1500 West Seventh Avenue, Stillwater, OK 74074; 405/743-5156.

Learning by Doing

Every person's creative energy flows from a different sensory source—some people are inspired by sounds, others by sights, and still others by physical activity.

Professional athletes aside, physical, or kinesthetic, learners often don't fare well in U.S. culture, says Marcia Yudkin of Creative Ways in Boston. In her newsletter, *The Creative Glow*, she gives these examples of artists who throw themselves into their work:

▶ John Denver once experienced a song-writing slump that lasted until he realized his inspiration always came during fast activities, such as skiing. Once he hit the slopes, the slump ended.

▶ Pediatrician and writer Perri Klass knits at medical conferences because it keeps her awake and alert.

▶ Carolyn Chute, author of *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, writes by physically acting out the parts of all of her characters.

Too Much Work, Too Little Time

U.S. workers work too much, according to Harvard economist Juliet Schor.

In a talk at Chicago-Kent College, Schor said families, communities, and society suffer from overstuffed work schedules.

Thanks to productivity gains in the decades since World War 2, the nation could afford to halve time spent at work by all U.S. workers, Schor said. Instead, U.S. workers of

all income levels, occupations, and racial and ethnic backgrounds worked about 160 more hours a year—about one more month—in 1989 than they did in 1969.

The United States has become a nation "rich in things and money and poor in time," Schor said. She called for revision of the Fair Labor Standards Act to guarantee more free time, and she called for the abolishment of overtime.

Human Resource Management News reported on Schor's talk in its May 9, 1994, issue.

A Data Base for the Displaced

Many Californians who lost their jobs during the recent recession won't work in their fields ever again. Military downsizing and the collapse of the aerospace industry have changed the state's labor landscape forever.

Californians casting about for new careers can consult the Employment Research Information Supply System (ERISS), a data base containing information about more than 37,000 occupations, reports the April 25 *Business Week*.

The program, developed by MegaPro of San Diego, uses data from Census Bureau reports, federal employment statistics, college catalogs, vocational schools, and other sources.

Employment counselors enter clients' former job titles or job descriptions to search for career opportunities that suit clients' education and goals.

More than 2,000 California businesses, high schools, career centers, and government agencies use ERISS. MegaPro might propose a national version to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Professional Development for Busy Trainers

By Joanne Polichetti, training consultant for Citibank and adjunct professor, New School for Social Research; and Stephanie Nickerson, assistant professor, New School for Social Research. Contact them at the Graduate School of Management and

Urban Policy, New School for Social Research, 65 Fifth Avenue, Room 106, New York, NY 10003.

Everyone needs regular feedback about his or her performance, but trainers seldom have chances to receive feedback from their peers. In the current economic climate, many training and development specialists must stretch to meet the developmental needs of their organizations, but few have time or resources to devote to their own professional development.

Peer-group coaching for trainers takes little time but produces significant rewards. Trainers develop more confidence, take risks, throw off the effects of burnout, and increase their camaraderie with fellow trainers.

Here's how peer-group training works. Four to seven trainers each design and deliver a short training program to the group. After each member makes a presentation, other group members offer feedback on issues that the presenter has identified as important to him or her. For the group, the entire process can take as little as three hours.

Selecting participants. Do not mix supervisors and direct reports in the same group. Select participants who are peers with good working relationships. Don't try this model in a training department rife with internal political maneuvering; it won't work. Aim for participants who bring a

range of experience to the mix.

If your training department is small, you can run the group with as few as four people. Or, you might invite trainers who work in line departments or others interested in developing their training skills to participate.

Another idea is to invite trainers from outside your organization—for example, from your local ASTD chapter—to participate.

Preparation. A week before the coaching session, participants meet for about 30 minutes. At this meeting, the group chooses one person to facilitate the coaching session. The facilitator will keep time and make sure people give appropriate feedback. (See "Giving and Receiving Useful Feedback.")

Also at this meeting, participants decide what they will work on during the coaching sessions. For example, one group of experienced trainers all decided to work on their "bad habits." Bad habits included using filler words (such as "umm," "uh,"

> PEER-GROUP COACHING CAN PRODUCE RESULTS FOR TRAINERS

Giving and Receiving Useful Feedback

Feedback is information that helps trainers decide whether their behaviors have had the effects they intended. Feedback is not "the truth." It is simply information about others' perceptions and responses.

Here are general rules for giving feedback:
▶ Be specific rather than general.
▶ Be descriptive rather than judgmental.
▶ Make sure the feedback is about something the person has control over.
▶ Speak only for yourself, not others or "the group."
▶ Use "I statements" to accept

responsibility for your own perceptions and feelings.
▶ Make sure you are giving the feedback to be helpful, not punitive.
▶ Try to give positive feedback three times more often than negative feedback.

Here are general rules for receiving feedback:
▶ Listen carefully. Try to be open.
▶ Paraphrase what you hear to make sure you understand what the person giving the feedback means.
▶ Ask specifically for the kind of feedback you want, and describe the behavior about which you want feedback.