Training Comes To Its Senses

The professional Trainer uses professional methodology

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Today, there is increasing concern within the training profession with method. And for good reason. Management and training men alike are realizing that training programs are not always accomplishing their goals. "What happened?" they ask. Well, one clue is that in all forms of training, *ends* can never be achieved without careful consideration of the *means* or *method*.

Increased emphasis on method

Fortunately, there are hopeful signs that more intelligent attention is being paid to method, although as yet not nearly as much as has traditionally been

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devoted to content. Today, more than ever, the wise choice and skillful use of known techniques and tools of our trade stamp the training man as a "professional."

The roots of method in training lie as much in knowledge of the learning process as in knowledge of the subject at hand. Bridging the gap between training and learning is perception, derived from sensory experience with available data in the training-learning situation. This data-bridge theoretically embraces all manner of communication.
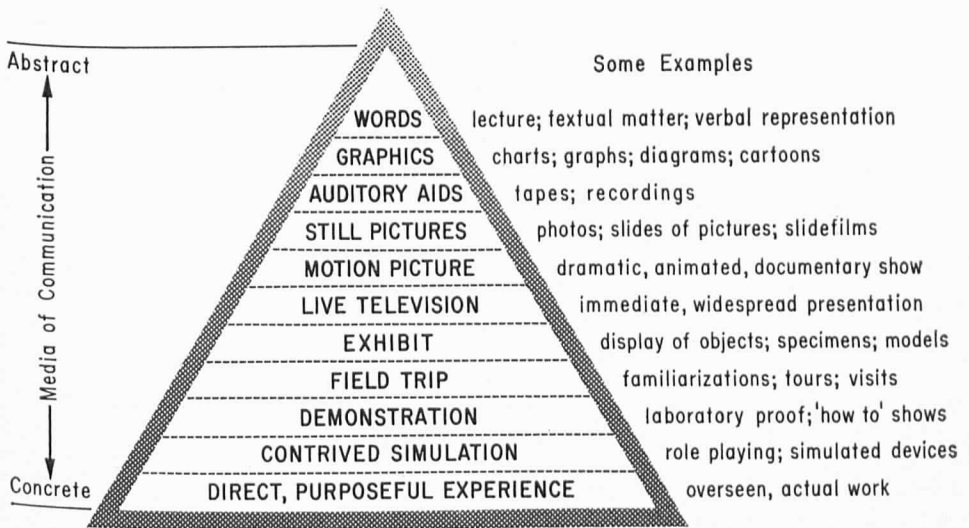
Learning through sensory experience

For purposes of analysis, the setting for learning can contain many forms of sensory stimuli. These can be arranged —if not actually classified—into communicable experience ranging, at one extreme, from the most *concrete*, direct kind to the most *abstract*, symbolic, obtuse representation of experience, at the other. Between these extremes is a very wide range of methods, media, activities and aids to learning which have the catalytic power to make training content meaningful. This array of training resources in tools and techniques can be presented diagrammatically as shown in the illustration.

In seeking better results from our training programs, we have got to place more emphasis on the "how" of training. We can no longer afford to ignore crucial factors in methodology, such as the relationship of learner involvement to hoped-for behavioral change. In the wider selection and application of sen-

THE LEARNING PYRAMID*

	Some Examples
WORDS	lecture; textual matter; verbal representation
GRAPHICS	charts; graphs; diagrams; cartoons
AUDITORY AIDS	tapes; recordings
STILL PICTURES	photos; slides of pictures; slidefilms
MOTION PICTURE	dramatic, animated, documentary show
LIVE TELEVISION	immediate, widespread presentation
EXHIBIT	display of objects; specimens; models
FIELD TRIP	familiarizations; tours; visits
DEMONSTRATION	laboratory proof; 'how to' shows
CONTRIVED SIMULATION	role playing; simulated devices
DIRECT, PURPOSEFUL EXPERIENCE	overseen, actual work

Abstract — Concrete (Media of Communication)

*Adapted from Ph.D. dissertation of the writer, "The Principles, Origin and Early Development of Educational Realism." Boston University, 1942. 278 pp.

sory experiences in the training-learning process, we as training men acknowledge our debt to psychology.

More concrete methods

And we can do an even more effective job in designing programs that have inherently greater learning potential. How? By relying on more concrete activities and aids, such as simulated or contrived experiences, demonstrations, motion pictures, graphic materials, tapes. This reliance, however, does not infer the use of such methods as "gimmicks," "props," "crutches," or "gadgets," but rather, as tools fully integrated into a program, used purposefully in the most professional way.

Frequently, by injecting greater realism into the training situation, the drab, pedantic, verbose program can be transformed into a vital, stimulating, and even exciting opportunity for growth. Left neglected, training will usually lapse into conventional, almost exclusively verbal, forms of communication. Words aplenty—spoken, written, in print, devoid of meaning or misconstrued by the trainee who lacks a basis for these words in his own experience.

Programming sensory experiences of one sort or another does require special knowledge, skills and judgment on the part of the training man. One deterrent to progress in training methodology is that technical or subject competence alone is insufficient qualification for the program developer. Combining talents within a training and management group, plus the use of outside services, is proving a useful way of overcoming this creative deficiency.

Methods selection criteria

In approaching the task of making sensory experiences productive catalysts in the training-learning process, one must consider these among other criteria:

1. In any specific program, which techniques and tools afford the best opportunity for productive training (based on research findings concerning learning outcomes, such as amount, retention, period, speed)?

2. Can we persuade management of the efficacy in establishing sufficient training budget to employ these methods?

3. Are we (or those doing the actual training) adequately equipped to use the techniques selected for a given program?

4. How can we design the program using more concrete sensory experiences as fully integrated aids to learning rather than supplements?

5. To reach our training objective, what degree of group or individual involvement is required (type and amount of sensory experiences) and what provisions should be made for individual

differences and needs (job level, intelligence, or learning rate, previous knowledge or skill, attitude)?

6. What problems should we anticipate in implementing and administering sensory-based programs which necessarily require greater cooperation within the organization and steadfast management support?

Learning as change

These and other questions are raised in the practical application of methods now technologically available and psychologically sound, but they are by no means insurmountable. Almost every worthwhile program, large or small, in the technical skills or human relations fields, uses sensory experiences in some degree. But all of us are still using altogether too much ineffectual means of training, keeping to relatively abstract levels and limits, and frequently missing our mark of effecting *change* in the individual.

If we are to merit the professional status to which many of us aspire, we must review our established training practices—evaluate them on a concrete-abstract scale in terms of training goals and performance results. By strengthening our *learning* practices, judiciously building up our resources for providing more realistic concrete sensory experiences, training will, indeed, come to its senses.