

Tools for a Changing Workforce

In 1986, ASTD researchers, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, embarked on a 30-month landmark study of training practices among American employers.

The three books reviewed here, along with several booklets published in 1988 and 1989, are a direct result of that effort and are part of the "ASTD Best Practices Series: Training for a Changing Work Force." The books and a related training manual will be available next month through ASTD Press.

There Is No Tomorrow If We Don't Prepare Today

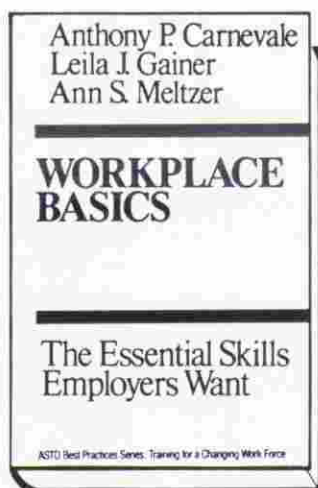
Workplace Basics: the Essential Skills Employers Want, by Anthony P. Carnevale, Leila J. Gainer, and Ann S. Meltzer.

A human-capital deficit of crisis proportions is threatening corporate competitiveness and is blocking personal initiative and opportunity in America. The popular thinking that there are too many qualified employees and too few jobs to go around is just plain wrong. The truth—too slowly becoming clear to employers—is that in the next decade and beyond, there will be more entry-level positions than well-educated and trained workers to fill them.

At the same time, as technological advances and competitive necessities transform the workplace, new employees will need more, not fewer, competencies, adaptive abilities, and basic skills.

"In services," for example, "the secretary is evolving into the information manager, and the bank teller is becoming the financial-services portfolio consultant for individual customers." According to authors Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer, "America's new demographic reality is on a collision course with the notion that employees must be able to understand and acquire new and different skills quickly."

One of the key findings of the ASTD/DOL research is that "the



most effective methodology for providing training in workplace basics is the applied approach, which links learning outcomes directly to job performance." Using this approach, the authors contend, "American employers can begin to fill in employee skill gaps and help build individual competence in workplace basics."

Workplace Basics identifies 16 skills that employers say are basic to success in the workplace. The authors discuss in-depth why each skill is a basic work requirement, its theoretical underpinnings, and its strategic relevance for employers. They offer specific suggestions on how trainers can teach the basic skills and on how trainers can develop training programs that will provide workers with the needed skills.

The authors categorize the 16 skills into the following seven skill groups.

■ **Foundation skills:** learning to learn. "When workers use efficient learning strategies, they absorb and apply training more quickly, saving their employers money and time. When properly prepared, employees can use learning-to-learn techniques to distinguish between essential and nonessential information, discern patterns in information, and pinpoint the actions necessary to improve job performance."

■ **Competence skills:** reading, writing, and computation. "The United States is fortunate in that a majority of its workers are literate

and numerate. Frequently, however, employees cannot use these skills effectively in the workplace.

"Sometimes it is because the workers are 'rusty' and are called upon to use mathematical problems they have not used for 20 years." Or, the workers have learned to read, but have not honed their literacy skills beyond an eighth-grade level.

■ **Communication skills:** listening and oral communication. One source reports that American workers spend "54.93 percent of their time listening." Yet broken down into an eight-hour workday, that time translates into four hours of listening activity, two hours of hearing, one hour of actual listening, 30 minutes of understanding, and 15 minutes of believing what was heard. Ultimately, a worker remembers less than eight minutes' worth of what was said.

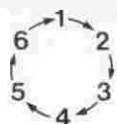
On oral skills, the authors say, "Workers who can express their ideas orally and who understand verbal instructions make fewer mistakes, adjust more easily to change, and more readily absorb new ideas than those who do not."

■ **Adaptability skills:** creative thinking and problem solving. "An organization's ability to achieve its strategic objectives often depends on how quickly it can bring into play the skills of problem solving and creative thinking."

■ **Personal-management skills:** self-esteem, motivation and goal setting, employability, and career development. People who lack solid personal-management skills may negatively affect hiring and training costs, personal and organizational productivity, quality control, teamwork and creativity, and an organization's ability to meet changing needs.

■ **Group-effectiveness skills:** interpersonal skills, negotiation, and teamwork. "Interpersonal skills training can help many people recognize and improve their ability to determine appropriate self-behavior, cope with undesirable behavior in others, absorb stress, deal with ambiguity, structure social interaction, share responsibility, and interact more easily with others."

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■ **Influence skills:** organizational effectiveness and leadership. "Employees need to have a sense of how the organization works and how the actions of each individual affect organizational and strategic objectives. Skill in determining the forces and factors that interfere with the organization's ability to accomplish its tasks can help the worker become a master problem solver, an innovator, and a team builder."

U.S. organizations, the authors say, must be prepared to identify the above skills in their workforces and to fill in the gaps where needed. "Employers are beginning to see that they must assist their current and future workers to achieve competency in workplace basics if they are to be competitive." No longer will employers "enjoy the luxury of selecting from a field of workers with strong basic skills. The demand for labor will create opportunities for those who are less skilled; the disadvantaged will move up the labor queue and be hired in spite of obvious skill deficiencies."

Another key discussion point in *Workplace Basics* concerns the competitive life cycle of any new strategy, technology, product, or service. A competitive cycle usually consists of six distinct stages: discovery, design, development and articulation of the management and production systems and processes, production, service delivery, and the development of new applications.

Employees' basic skills abilities can influence every stage of that cycle, the authors contend. "Good basic skills can mean a shorter production cycle, improved products, and high quality. Deficiencies in such skills can undermine the cycle and cause delays, defects, and customer rejections."

The ASTD/DOL research finds that the United States is strong in the initial stages of the competitive cycle. U.S. managers, supervisors, and other white-collar and professional personnel are good at developing systems for achieving low production costs, distributing products, and exploiting new tech-

nologies. In the production stage, however, the nation does not compete well. "It does not satisfactorily develop efficiency or quality during that phase. It needs improvements in developing applications of new strategies, technologies, and products and services.

"America's inability to sustain competitive advantage argues for better basic skills among nonsupervisory skill and craft employees," the authors continue. "With better skills, this group can participate more effectively in the phases that need improvement."

In comparing the United States with other countries, the research finds that U.S. training policies are elitist, strongly favoring educated white-collar and technical professionals. Managerial and supervisory personnel, who tend to receive more training, are able to compete economically with their international rivals. The other half of the U.S. working population cannot.

That international labor discrepancy, the authors claim, is where the United States is losing the competitive race. "Research shows that in the United States, roughly half the differences in earnings can be attributed to learning in school and on the job. Accidents of geography, career choices, and the selection of an employer account for the other half. Earnings are a function of the skills people have and the choices they make regarding how and where they use those skills. Poor basic skills limit individuals' choices and their potential for learning."

Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer challenge American educators and employers to "stop catering to the development and use of white-collar and technical elites" and instead to "choose a more broadly based mission that is attentive to the noncollege-bound and the non-supervisory employee." They back up their challenge with well-documented statistics, proven strategies, and current practices and applications that work.

The writing in *Workplace Basics* is clear and compelling, and the message startlingly clear: If the United States hopes to stay in the

economic race and hold its head above the raging waters of competition, changes in training practices and attitudes must be forthcoming. The authors do a fine job of convincing the reader of that reality and of showing specific ways to meet the challenge.

Workplace Basics: the Essential Skills Employers Want. 464 pp. San Francisco, CA: **Jossey-Bass**. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: CAWB. \$33 for ASTD national members; \$35 for nonmembers.

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Who Gets Trained?

Training in America: the Organization and Strategic Role of Training, by Anthony P. Carnevale, Leila J. Gainer, and Janice Villet.

"Employers spend \$30 billion on formal training and approximately \$180 billion on informal, on-the-job training each year. Research has already shown that learning in school and on the job is by far the most important factor in accounting for American economic growth and productivity in this century."

Research also shows that human resource efforts have accounted for "two-thirds of the nation's productivity improvements since 1929 and that workers must be highly skilled for productivity to remain high."

Recent years have seen new exploration into many aspects of training, human resource development, and adult-learning concepts. To this point, however, there has been little research on who actually receives training, and how that is training is organized, structured, and delivered.

Training in America provides a general perspective on the size and scope of training practices in this country, economic implications of training, and ways companies can use inside and outside resources to achieve their strategic training goals. This "ASTD Best Practices Series" volume also presents a comprehensive training-and-development policy that integrates the roles of government, industry, and educational institutions on training.

Part One gives an overview of the history of employer-based training, the key players who do training and how they become qualified, and the categories of workers who receive training. "Employers themselves provide 69 percent of the formal training they offer and buy the other 31 percent from outside providers. External education and

training institutions range from elementary and secondary schools to apprenticeship programs."

Part Two looks at the relationships between employers and training providers and how companies can develop "training linkages" that will offer basic training as well as upgrade job-specific training.

"Training linkages do not

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necessarily mean contracting with a provider from start to finish. An employer rarely picks up the phone and orders a complete training program. A provider might offer a comprehensive service, but employers often do not need or cannot afford the whole package. Most commonly, employers use a combination of inside and outside resources; a balanced mix of these resources enhances training programs by providing the best of what is available."

In Part Three, authors Carnevale, Gainer, and Villet explore various corporate models, theories, and strategies for building the role of training in the organization and for positioning training as a key player in high-level decisions and long-range plans.

"All too often training and development are the caboose on the corporate train. Training discussions occur after an important capital or process decision is made. But, just like production or marketing, training is a profit and loss center

Anthony P. Carnevale
Leila J. Gainer
Janice Villet

TRAINING IN AMERICA

The Organization
and Strategic Role
of Training

ASTD Best Practices Series: Training for a Changing Work Force

(although management usually does not regard it as such because it does not directly generate revenues, and it does incur costs).

"The significant sums invested in a company's human capital can be better targeted by understanding its strategic direction and tactical thrust. Training professionals have a legitimate place at the table when strategic issues are discussed."

The authors suggest that training

professionals must first garner a place at the decision-making table and then be prepared to present action plans geared toward the bottom line, such as specific ways training and development can

- increase market share;
- reduce operating costs;
- develop products or processes;
- create or maintain a market niche.

"Adopting a strategic approach requires that managers think in broader terms than those for which their training often has prepared them," the authors write. "It requires that they... think about the big picture and attempt to understand the perspectives of the various stakeholders inside and outside the organization."

In this volume, as in the others in this column, the ASTD researchers include employer "snapshots" of actual corporate training systems and practices.

One such "snapshot" looks at Frito-Lay, "which has undertaken an aggressive effort to concentrate on

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its core products and reduce its operating costs by improving productivity. As the largest snack-food producer in the United States, the company has instituted the Frito-Lay Methods Improvement Program, which asks employees to suggest ways to increase productivity and improve product quality or the work environment.

"Training plays a pivotal role in making this strategy a reality. Frito-Lay designs and develops technical training programs centrally, [and] then delivers and evaluates the training on site. This saves costs because it avoids redundant design and development efforts, while allowing training to be customized to meet individual plant needs.

"Moreover, it enables employees to receive a greater share of experiential training on the job. Actual training programs are geared toward meeting equipment-operator job standards and mitigating quality, waste, and productivity problems that surface during training needs analysis and through examination of

data compiled via computer-equipment interfaces in the production process."

Through other real-life examples and how-to applications, the authors of *Training in America* present concepts that are important to the step-by-step process of establishing a basic-skills training program in the workplace. Their ideas are specific, applicable, and practical.

The intended audience includes executives, managers, and practitioners throughout the field of training and human resource development. The book should be useful for people who conduct training, those who work with training providers, and those who need to understand the decision-making process that precedes training.

Training in America: The Organization and Strategic Role of Training. 254 pp. San Francisco, CA: **Jossey-Bass**. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: CABM. \$33 for ASTD

national members; \$35 for nonmembers.

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Best Practices in Technical Training

Training the Technical Work

Force, by Anthony P. Carnevale, Leila J. Gainer, and Eric R. Schulz.

"Technical workers represent about 18 percent of the American work force, and it is generally believed that they receive a significant share (roughly 30 percent) of the \$210 billion that employers spend on training annually," write authors Carnevale, Gainer, and Schulz in *Training the Technical Work Force*.

Moreover, they claim that technical workers are especially important to American competitiveness "because they are the lifeblood of industries that produce the lion's share of internationally traded products and services" and because



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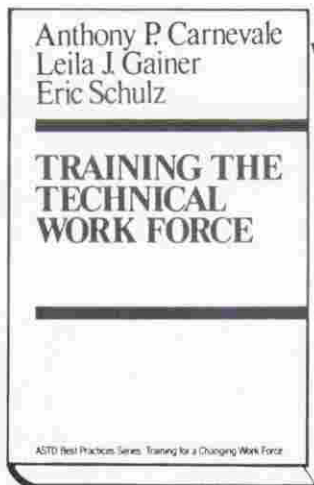
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they "invent and produce technologies that result in the 'upskilling' of all workers. The continuous integration of new technologies with more highly skilled labor is widely recognized by labor economists as the true source of American competitiveness."

This third volume of the "ASTD Best Practices Series" examines the nature and role of training in today's technologically shifting workplaces and presents specific guidelines for conducting effective technical training within a variety of institutions.

In Chapter One of *Training the Technical Work Force*, the authors define technical training (a term that has always been somewhat arbitrary) and explore the size and scope of technical training in the United States. They discuss the ways technical workers are prepared for their jobs (qualifying training), as well as how they keep their technical expertise (upgrading training).

"Between 67 and 79 percent of technical professionals and techni-



cians receive more qualifying training than upgrading training. Approximately 50 to 75 percent of technical professionals and technicians participate in upgrading training, but fewer than 50 percent of skilled trade workers participate in skill upgrading."

In addition, technical workers must be willing to go beyond the traditional bounds of technical training. Instead of spreadsheets,

on-line databases, and hierarchical line management, they must be able to grasp and be comfortable with highly sophisticated concepts and methods, such as statistical quality control, just-in-time production, and participative management.

The next two chapters of *Training the Technical Work Force* analyze the systems employers use, both to deliver technical training and to link training to their strategic goals. The authors ask the questions, "Who provides technical training?" and "How is technical information shared?" and they identify patterns in companies that provide such training.

Chapters four through six—perhaps the most interesting chapters in the book—tell how 10 of the nation's largest employers organize and deliver technical training programs. The corporate "best practices" represent centralized, decentralized, and integrated technical-training systems.

For each case study, the authors include an introduction, the com-

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pany's strategic goals, its training structure (in terms of organization, staffing, target groups, and linkages between departments or functions), and how training supports the corporate strategic goals.

An excerpt from a case study of one centralized system: "During the past several years, United Technologies has examined all of its operations as part of an overall strategy to improve products and services and to increase its sales and earnings. United Technologies has grouped its operations into 'core businesses' that reflect the greatest financial strength and potential.

"As a result of the corporation's operational assessment, numerous operations . . . were divested [or] realigned, overall employment was reduced, and overhead and material costs were decreased. Current and future strategies emphasize the expansion of United Technologies' 'core businesses,' becoming a more efficient and innovative manufacturer, and being more responsive to customers' needs."

An excerpt from a study of a decentralized system:

"Federal Express attributes much of its success to its conscientious, efficient, and quality-and service-oriented work force. The company believes that a well-trained and highly motivated work force is crucial to its continued success, especially in view of the technologies involved in its operations. Consequently, Federal Express continually promotes job satisfaction and advancement opportunities through personnel policies that are considered the nation's most progressive and innovative."

The authors continue this particular profile by describing specific training technologies and systems at Federal Express. Within the company's divisions are decentralized training groups, each of which is responsible for training and upgrading its own people and for keeping pace with state-of-the-art training methods.

For instance, each technical-train-

ing group uses "computer-assisted instruction with interactive video-disc (IVD). This system allows any trainee to take any course at his or her own pace. It also permits courses to be designed to meet the specific needs of any of the groups (for example, maintenance and engineering use more graphics and less text). IVD also allows tailored remedial courses, where required. Finally, IVD permits training to be conducted on-site via terminals, thus minimizing the amount of time employees need to be away from their jobs."

The authors recommend that readers view this volume "as a compendium of facts, figures, and case examples." That's a pretty accurate description, and readers may decide to skim through the relatively dry writing and the "gray," unadorned pages. There are a few tables, although they aren't terribly meaningful, perhaps because they are products from outside sources instead of products of the authors' analysis.

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Also, because of the rapidly changing field of technical training, some of the data is already old (the data gathering for this study began in 1986, and some figures derive from 1985 data). However, the specific research is valuable in that it sets forth many definitions and parameters that have never been officially or widely published.

Technical-industry employers and practitioners, vocational educators, and academics in the fields of education, business management, and industrial relations will find this book helpful, particularly when used with the other ASTD/DOL products.

Training the Technical Work Force. 191 pp. San Francisco, CA: **Jossey-Bass**. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: CATW. \$23 for ASTD national members; \$25 for nonmembers. **Circle 182 on reader service card.**

A Practical Tool

The "ASTD Best Practices Series—" the final product of a seminal research effort—likely will spawn many other publications and research efforts in the field of training and human resource development. The references and documentation are informative, interesting, and readily useful.

When used together with the companion publication *Workplace Basics Training Manual*, the series is an eminently practical training tool that "provides a complete picture of the who, what, where, when, and how of basic workplace skills training."

Workplace Basics Training Manual. San Francisco, CA: **Jossey-Bass**. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: CABM. \$33 for ASTD national members; \$35 for nonmembers. **Circle 183 on reader service card.**

Additional Reading

Competing Against Time: How Time-Based Competition Is Reshaping Global Markets, by George Stalk Jr. and Thomas M. Hout. 285 pp. New York, NY: **The Free Press**, 800/323-7445, \$24.95. **Circle 184 on reader service card.**

Getting Commitment at Work: a Guide for Managers and Employees, by Michael C. Thomas and Tempe S. Thomas. 117 pp. Chapel Hill, NC: **Commitment Press**, 800/752-2471, \$12.95. **Circle 185 on reader service card.**

A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance, by Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham. 413 pp. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: **Prentice Hall**, 201/767-5937, \$32.80. **Circle 186 on reader service card.**

Better Makes Us Best, by John Psarouthakis. 79 pp. Cambridge, MA: **Productivity Press**, 800/274-9911, \$16.95. **Circle 187 on reader service card.**

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