

TAKE TRAINING OUT OF THE MID-WAY

LESLIE THIS

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The other evening my eight year old son was going to a party for a young miss celebrating her seventh birthday. As he was leaving the house he asked, "Dad, what do I say when she answers the door?"

Being a professional trainer, I recognized this as an opportunity to make amends in a training area I had completely overlooked—my own family. I sat Jimmy down, got out the film projector, set up the screen, and found, by rare good fortune, a sixteen minute film on "Twenty Possible Inter-Personal Reactions in Response to Specific Greeting Stimuli." (*Happy Kangaroo's Humanics Film Library*).

Jimmy needed it. His sister, appointed as an observer, noted he yawned at Episode Twelve. This indicated an emotional block. I read the pamphlet accompanying the film and found the solution in question twenty-four. His mother and brother helped me out with some role playing. At ten-thirty it was obvious Jimmy had worked through his trauma—as proved by a written questionnaire. Unfortunately he was also very sleepy and at that very moment Gracie called to find out how come he hadn't attended her party and to say they'd all had a swell time and she would be by for her gift in the morning.

Of course, I could have simply told Jimmy, "When Grace comes to the door, say 'Here's your present. Where's the eats?'" But that would have been simple and would not have demonstrated my knowledge of, and facility with, training methods, theories and resources.

ANY one familiar with the training field knows my illustration is not too overdrawn. Training abounds in methods and gimmicks—look at the content of the multitude of conferences, seminars and institutes; at the books and pamphlets published annually; at the agendas for training activities sponsored by individual companies and organizations. Just briefing the clever ideas coming across a training director's desk is a full time job.

We shouldn't be too harsh with training directors. This is a new field. Most of us came into it from other occupations and backgrounds. Understandably some trainers are confused. They use terminology and methodology with a great deal of noise and power, but too little comprehension.

Any new profession goes through a period of groping for answers, and usually latches upon methodology as one of the easiest professional handles to

grasp. We substitute noise, jargon and activity for knowledge and skill.

We desperately need help to find our way. We need to look at some very basic questions. What is training? What can training accomplish? What are the limitations of training? What is the legitimate place of training in an organization? How do you use training effectively? What is the responsibility of the employee in relation to the company's training program?

This paper can only sketch the problem and some of the factors involved. It is to be fervently hoped that as a profession we will begin to examine training and ourselves with some of the zeal we have accorded methodology and techniques.

Much of training relates to supervision. A hundred years ago the owner of a small business performed this function. He had a small work force and personally could teach them his work pattern, standards of quality and production, peculiarities of operation, etc. With the coming of industrialization this became impossible. It was at that point he introduced a supervisory staff.

Basically his objectives are to turn out the greatest quantity of items of the highest quality in the smallest span of time by the fewest possible employees at the lowest cost.

HOW does training fit into this picture? Training, to paraphrase the familiar quote that victory belongs to him who "Gits thar fustest with the mostest," aims to take a new employee and "git him to the employer's minimum quantity and quality production level

in the leastest time." That today is still its basic function.

One other large function has been added: to work with tenured employees to help them "Git to the maximum of their capacities in the leastest time." Stripped of its *fol de rol*, that about sums up the training department's job. Some other minor functions have been assigned to it, but for the moment we're dealing with essentials and basics.

THE prime responsibility for self-gain and advancement belongs to the individual. It is his and his alone, though few accept it. Employees today too frequently believe that if they get ahead, it is their company that must arrange it. The company must offer courses and programs, buy books, pay for attendance at conferences, and offer study on company time. And the employee insists that such training be done entertainingly, without hurt, outside reading or much application on his part.

I am afraid that too many training departments do little to discourage this warped outlook. If there is one thing that should be known and understood by training directors and employees above all else, it is this: a company is interested in that training which will materially contribute to better quality, production or efficiency; the individual's utilization of his full capacity, interests or advancement related primarily to the individual's benefit, desires, needs or ambitions is a secondary consideration.

Workers have about forgotten that they have a personal stake in further training; that it is to their advantage to know what is going on in their field,

to hold their own, to advance, to have the personal satisfaction of appreciating and understanding their field. It is all a part of our unfortunate present American philosophy "I am out of college and know my field. If you want anything else, feed it to me in a silver spoon and coat it with honey and syrup."

Training is a two way street, offering benefits to the employer and also offering very tangible benefits to the employee. Training is related directly to an employee's wages, promotional opportunities, career, family welfare, security, standard of living, and the satisfaction of whatever aggressiveness and ambition he possesses.

Understanding this, we can then state a simple premise: the objective of a training department is to impart knowledge, attitude or a skill needed in a job, not to entertain or amuse. We should be able to assume that employees attending a meeting are there to learn and that the content and time involved should center around this objective.

IT'S related to motivation. We trainers have tried to sugar-coat learning until all we have left is a mouthful of frothy sweetness. Only recently is sanity returning, when practitioners are beginning to ask, "Doesn't the trainee have to want to learn?" Companies in their training programs have tried to do the motivating for learners. "Just present your body to the class and we'll make you an executive or supervisor or expert in any field—all done to polkas and pink lemonade and won't hurt a teeny-weeny bit."

And so we substitute methodology for content. We live in a day of fads. Few of us are capable of judging the worth of a technique ourselves; we depend upon so-called experts in various fields. Unfortunately, too many training experts are simply glib mimics of cunning phrases gleaned from superficial reading or study. One pronounces a curse on a method and we thresh it with our verbal flails. Any one who has lived very long is soon struck with the cycle of fads. Today you keep a baby on a regular feeding schedule, tomorrow you whale the daylights out of him. Today you decry the junk in your living room; tomorrow you pay exorbitant prices to buy it back as antique. Some very capable, simple training methods are in such a cycle.

RIGHT now it seems, "The vehicle is the thing. Content is secondary."

Anyone not wishing to pay the price hasn't any business trying to learn. We cheapen education, training and the scholar when we encourage learners to think otherwise. Let's call much of our training the stuff that it is, spume and carnival midway knowledge. Such may have its place in our society, but we not only do an injustice to serious and thorough learning, we cheapen the concept, value and esteem the public has had for education.

Learning doesn't have to be hilarious. We are making the mistake of believing unless we entertain learners, roll them in the aisles, use tricks and surprises and give away dishes that people won't learn. Perhaps the recipients don't want to learn and your efforts are wasted.

Learning is serious. Learning is sometimes tedious and time-consuming. Learning demands seriousness of intent, application and concentration. I wonder who we think we're kidding when we say, "Come on 'a my house. We're going to make you experts in twenty minutes. Films, dancing girls, drama and doodling. Our learning capsules dissolve instantly in the brain. Begin to feel educated three minutes after taking one."

IF you question my statements, take any group of employees who are run through such Fun Mills and realistically test the depth of their knowledge. It won't even wet the end of your measuring stick. They come up reciting the catechism of a few tenets you've drilled home with the aid of puppets and cartoons, but they have little concept of what the tenets mean.

I am not saying that learning must be deadly. All of us have had brushes with that and don't care to repeat. I am only saying that real learning carries a price. It can't be reduced completely to a Broadway musical production.

I have belabored this point because real training is so often dismissed with the shrug, "It's so serious. You have to slip learning into jazzy sessions like you give a baby aspirin in jelly."

To see training in its proper perspective, it seems to me we must also get learning and motivation in their proper perspectives. When this happens, methodology falls into its proper place and we become less gimmick-happy.

There are some other things we training directors need to review. One I

would mention are the rules or laws of learning. I won't go into them; they are readily available. Too few of us really know or understand them. One of these days some opportunist will label them "Dr. Goolsby's Magic Learning Cocktail" and they'll be the rage and toast of trainers coast to coast.

Part of our trouble is we often put too much responsibility on training. It won't perform miracles. We've got a good remedy for certain management headaches, but it certainly isn't a substitute for radical surgery.

Being new professionally, we really don't know all that training can and can not do. As a result, we let ourselves be assigned, or volunteer for, jobs that aren't our field. Training has real limitations. Training is no panacea for all of management's ills. Training can not be a substitute for faulty employment and recruitment, poor administration or problems that are related directly to factors beyond the training province.

Only after a problem is carefully explored and it becomes obvious to all concerned that the flaw is faulty training, or lack of it, should we consider training as a solution. Too often the only criterion is, "Here is a problem. Let's set up a training course." Training is a tool, not an Aladdin's Lamp.

IN looking at a specific problem where training is being considered as a solution or complementary to other actions, we should ask very searching and practical questions. What is the problem? What are the factors which affect a solution? Is training demonstrably needed? What part of the problem can training affect?

How important to the whole solution is the training element? Will the training effort expended be worthwhile? What is the simplest training program that will accomplish the result we can practically expect? What is the simplest effective training method we can use to accomplish the desired result?

Approached in this way, training is related specifically to its function and offers a most useful tool. It avoids the training department showing off and gets results rather than just activity. The proof of an effective training program is results, not whether people have a wonderful time, or the hours pass entertainingly and swiftly, or the participants are impressed with glittering concepts, phrases and Utopian solutions.

If training is the proper solution, and

you carry out a good training program with the support and understanding of all concerned, the problem won't be there when you've finished with your training activity.

Training is an exhilarating field and most of the men and women in it are pretty wonderful people. But training is also a practical field with limitations. We've all had a lot of fun and it's been exciting. But we're older now. Maybe it's time we laid aside our party hats, slogans, whistles, chalk talks, puppets, cartoons and flannel boards and take a good critical look at our boisterous profession.

(The views expressed by the author are his own and do not necessarily represent those of the American Red Cross.)

Soliloquy For Supervisors

(With apologies to Hamlet and Shakespeare.)

. To train or not to train,
 That is no problem. Surely 'tis wiser in a Chief
 To spot well in advance his training needs,
 And by a prudent plan fulfill them.
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
 Fall not by chance alone: they land the most
 Upon the heads of those who close their eyes
 And say, "We have no time to train—
 We have too much to do!" "Too much to do,"—
 Aye, there's the rub, for while the poor souls struggle hard
 To do their daily work, they fall behind,
 Their errors mount, their frantic efforts fail,
 And soon they are immersed up to their ears,
 Within a very sea of woe.

—Manes Spector