

THE TRAINING GAUGE

how a marketing trainer defines the concept of the training function

For a number of years now the training department has been a focal point of genuine controversy. Just what is the role this department should take? What posture should the director assume? To whom should the department report? These and other similar questions have been actively debated and sound arguments have been developed for the positions taken. It seems to me this is a real issue, that it is more than a theoretical controversy or exercise. We, as professional people, should be willing to examine our particular situation carefully so that we can satisfactorily answer these questions for ourselves.

It also seems to me this critical self-analysis is particularly appropriate right now. Conditions around us are changing at an increasingly rapid rate. What was revolutionary the day before yesterday, we take for granted today. What's more, this accelerating change has implications for us, for our "customers" (the ones we instruct), for our department and for our organization. It is here now, and we must address ourselves to it — to manage it — lest we be handled or mangled by it.

It is not necessary to enumerate what these changes are precisely, nor to attempt to show what each of them can mean to each of us. This is being done regularly by experts. What I feel we trainers need do is be aware of some of the general conclusions we can draw from this whole area of change. Then we can apply what we have learned to those important questions posed earlier, applying the principles to develop answers for ourselves.

The following comments are ones that I have been wrestling with for some time as a means of coming to grips with this whole situation. Perhaps this approach to the subject may be helpful to some of you in your examination of this question.*

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*The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or the thinking of Monsanto Company.

TWO SCHOOLS

It looks as though there are two distinct schools of thought regarding the training department itself. Briefly, the role it plays is either that of a need satisfier or as a usable tool. In the first instance, the department is responsive to the situation as it is defined or identified. In the latter instance, the department is used as an initiative force to cause something to happen in a desired way.

The positioning of the department also has two groups of adherents. One group maintains it should be under the personnel function, while another indicates it should be located elsewhere — where it has direct and ready access to top management. An excellent article appeared in the October 1969 issue of the *Training and Development Journal*, entitled "Role and Organizational Location of Employee Development Specialists in the Federal Government," by Leonard Ackerman. In this, the two schools of thought are examined, a survey is reported and some meaningful conclusions are drawn.

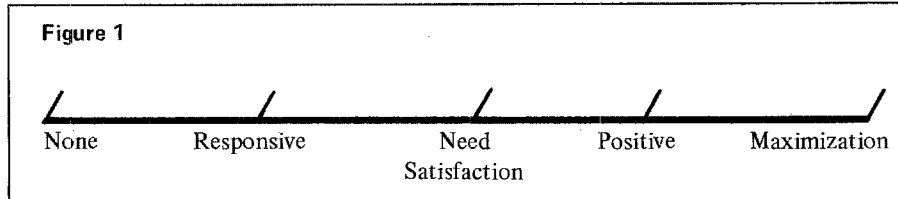
Now, what are we, as training people, going to do about it? The question we must answer is, "What is the role our respective training departments should assume? Should it be defensive or reactive or should it be offensive or initiative? Should it respond to the identified needs of the organization or should it be a creative tool for the use of top management? Once again, a good case can be made for each of the two positions — both can perform a meaningful role.

TRAINING POSITIONS

Before we decide what role our particular department should play, let's discuss what is involved in these two broad categories as well as the various degrees that make them up. I think it is also appropriate at this point to say that marketing training is my "bag," and that my views of training are a direct reflection of this specialized activity. However, I feel the concepts can be applied to any similar activity, and I hope this will provide a handle to grasp, a

way to go or a place to start.

I see the training function and the attitudes expressed toward it as a straight line with five separate and distinct positions. This is how it looks to me:



and this is how I define the positions:

NONE

This is just what it implies — no formalized training whatsoever. There is a certain amount of necessary “hands on” training or explanation for specific jobs or positions to get people started. However, this is often done on a hit-or-miss basis, and sometimes not at all. When a crisis arises, some sort of remedial action is undertaken on a crash basis, but little — if anything — carries over for the next time. Certain expressions characterize this type of condition, and most of these will be familiar to you:*

“We cannot afford the luxury of training.”

“Cream always rises to the top, so who needs training?”

“I got where I am without it; so can they.”

“You can’t argue with success, and look at our record.”

“You either have it or you don’t, so who needs training?”

“You can’t *prove* that training will improve anything, so I say it’s not worth the cost.”

“We let ‘them’ (companies which lead their industries) do our training. Then we hire who we want by offering more money.”

All of these indicators of attitude have a certain ring of truth to them, and they are hard to counter. All are charged with emotion, and consequently an appeal based on logic alone will not over-

come them. However, there are responses that can be used to create an element of doubt as to their complete validity. However, I would generalize and say that trying to establish a formal

training function in this atmosphere is just not worth the effort. Overcoming this extreme attitude would discourage even the most dedicated professional.

RESPONSIVE

This is negative training, and it’s training for all the wrong reasons. It is working on the symptoms instead of trying to cure the actual disease. It can be recognized by expressions such as these:

“We can’t attract new people without a training program.”

“Everybody knows you need training.”

“‘They’ have a training program, and ‘they’ seem to know what ‘they’ are doing.”

“Look over what’s available. Pick out the best from each program and put it together for us.”

“You know what our people need, so put a course together. We need a good job, so take three months.”

“Joe has been around a long while and knows how we do things. Let’s make him our trainer.”

This attitude leads to training for training’s sake. Little attention is paid to course content, relevancy of the material or if it accomplishes anything. It also leads to another real failing — the calibre of instruction may not be professional. People are assigned simply because they are available, or worse yet, because they can’t get along anywhere else. The result is often a numerical record of bodies through the mill with no attempt being made to ask: “What is trying to be accomplished?”, or, “What has been learned that can be used to improve performance back on the job?”

Once again, a situation that would defeat anyone with any dedication to real learning improvement.

NEED SATISFACTION

This is the foundation on which many training departments are based. It is categorized by the attitude that performance can be improved by training and development. Phrase indicators of this attitude would be:

“Let’s survey our people to find out what they want. Then we can devise a program to satisfy these requirements.”

“The specialized job situations we have require specially trained people.”

“A good training program can do a lot to improve morale, as our people realize we don’t just throw them into the deep end of the pool.”

“We can’t expect our people to ‘just know’ what to do. We must prepare them for their jobs.”

“Let’s develop our own programs so we can tailor them to our particular situations.”

“Let’s survey those who have been through our program. Maybe they have ideas on how to improve it.”

Here, there is the recognition of the value of training and the willingness to make it a viable tool for the individual. By starting with the people involved and then building a program around their needs and wants, a training effort results that pays dividends to both the individual and the company. Usually, some attempt is made to measure program effectiveness and some sort of indicator is developed. Program improvements are made based on feedback from participants as well as from the instructors’ experience. Response to such programs is usually favorable, participation is active, the word gets around the company and the industry that this is a worthwhile effort. There is a place for the professional here, and he can make a real contribution.

POSITIVE

At this point on the scale, the basic attitude toward the training function changes. To the left of this point on

*The example statements given are to assist the proper positioning on the scale. They are not necessarily direct quotations. Rather, they are illustrative paraphrases of the author.

the scale, the underlying attitude has been a defensive one in that the department merely satisfied identified needs. Now the concept expands beyond need satisfaction to one of creative utilization of the department. It becomes a tool of offense, not defense. The concept charter, or role of the department, has been vastly broadened, thus allowing it to perform in ways not previously recognized or identified. This expanded role is categorized by expressions such as these:

"The training department shall be looked upon as a training ground for our future management. The knowledge and experience an instructor gains in interpersonal relations and group dynamics will be invaluable in future managerial positions."

The training department is a 'window' into the company. As such, it will only be staffed with people of demonstrated desire and an ability to instruct."

"The staff of the training department shall be used as internal consultants. For the company, this will utilize the experience of the instructor to best advantage. It also provides the instructor with current experience with which to illustrate the concepts he presents."

"The training department shall be used as a customer service resource. They shall do this by working directly with line marketing people as a means of satisfying identified customer needs and providing additional assistance to secure new customers."

"The training department shall conduct problem solving sessions with line (or staff) functions in important situations. This will provide a meaningful service to the line, demonstrate applicability of the method, and result in a dollar return for the company."

In the Positive Area, there is a recognition of the potential the training function has and a real desire to capitalize on this understanding. It not only satisfies the identified need requirements of the people being trained, but it can do other things of creative importance. Trainers can also be used as "assistants to" high level executives for short periods of time. They can work on temporary or special assignments without disrupting the table of organization either before, dur-

ing, or after the assignments. They can perform public relations functions, be used as recruiters, conduct conferences or meetings for trade associations, and in general, enhance the reputation of the company.

In summary, the payoff for both the company and the individual is large. As far as the instructor is concerned, the learning experience is so great, I question who benefits the most — the student or the instructor. (In truth, I think it is the instructor.) As far as the company is concerned, the payoff is limited only to the utilization that is made of the department — once the scope of the department is expanded so that positive — offense type — creative usage can be made of it.

MAXIMIZATION

This is the final area, and it represents the optimum approach to people. Here, the management of the company is dedicated to the premise that the best way to improve overall performance is through maximizing the performance of all the people throughout the organization. They think this, but more importantly, *they demonstrate commitment* to comments such as these:

"People are our more important product."

"Attendance at the appropriate management training programs shall be one prerequisite for achieving managerial status."

"To adequately train and develop our people, a separate Department of Human Resources shall be formed. This department will report directly to the chief executive officer. The training function shall be an integral part of this department, and in fact, will be the foundation of it."

"Before ascending to an upper level position, all executive managerial personnel will either spend a prescribed amount of time in the department of human resources or they will demonstrate to the chief executive officer an understanding of, and the ability to, practice the principles of interpersonal relations as subscribed to by this company."

"The development of subordinates shall be the first priority on every manager's job description. This will be the first area of review during the annual appraisal."

This company is dedicated to working through people, not in spite of them,

and it demonstrates this by supporting this principle on a continuing basis.

BENEFITS

Let's look at some of the ramifications this attitude would mean for the people who make up the organization. I suggest there would be no need to "motivate people." The atmosphere created by this attitude would not only allow people to contribute to their maximum ability, but it would encourage them to do so. Their efforts would be recognized, acknowledged and rewarded in a way that money, carpeting, private parking spaces or corner offices never will. In short, each person is recognized for what he is, a valuable contributor to himself and the organization. Thus, he motivates himself, which is the only real lasting motivation.

Further, it means the individual grows with his job. He doesn't merely do what the job description says he must do. He stretches his capabilities, thus preparing himself for his next job, secure in the knowledge his boss will support him.

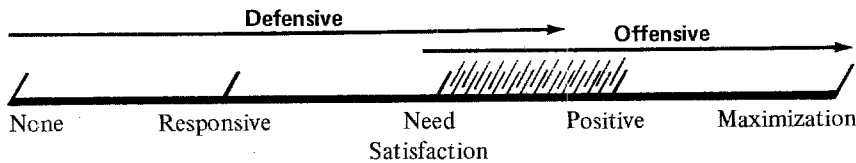
There is also a real payoff for the manager and for the company. When people perform to the limit of their ability, it means that *total effort* is directed to the task. And how can one ask for more than that?

But let's pause a minute. Is this realistic? Can we really expect this kind of total performance? After all, we are human and this is asking for a great deal. Well, perhaps not. But, if these principles are recognized for what they are and what they will do for the individual, I suggest the payoff for everyone will be far greater than when lip service is given to the importance of people and interpersonal relations.

TRAINING FUNCTION ROLE

Let's look once more at the scale. There is a point somewhere between Need Satisfaction and Positive when the attitude toward training and toward people changes.

Figure 2



It is difficult to pinpoint precisely where this takes place, but somewhere in the shaded area the entire atmosphere changes from one of the defensive or reactive to one of offensive or initiative. It goes from "We need it" to "How best can we use it?" The line of demarcation is fuzzy, as tactics of offense can be employed in an atmosphere that is purely Need Satisfaction.

Some examples of tactics that illustrate this initiative type of attitude were given earlier. However, a few additional ones might be useful:

Holding short training sessions that are based on "in-house" capability to meet special marketing situations for distributors, trade associations, civic groups, the academic community or the disadvantaged.

Staffing the training function with more than the minimum number of people. Those not instructing can

- Learn additional skills that enhance their training ability and their value in their next position.
- Improve and update existing programs based on feedback, the latest developments and the success of other companies.
- Be used as consultants to newly appointed managers.
- Perform as replacement managers in emergency situations.
- Utilize instructors to critique selected "on the job" performance for either staff or line people.
- Use the training department as the coordinator and as the communication focal point on those projects that require multiple working groups that do not have a common reporting point.
- Use the training group to conduct problem solving sessions for "here and now" situations.

How the training department can be used as a contributor is limited only by our imagination. However, there must be the attitude that the group can do more than just serve a need, perform a service or teach the people.

Today, the leading business writers are challenging top management to ask itself, "What is our business?" The answer to this question is not simple as the answer can drastically change the future of the organization. There is infinitely greater latitude and opportunity for a company if its answer is, "The recreation business" versus "The hopscotch business." There is nothing wrong with the latter view, but when the expanded sense of possibility is injected, it is indeed a whole new ball game.

THE CHALLENGE

This, then, is the challenge that I suggest faces all of us in the training function today. (It certainly does in marketing training.) We too must ask ourselves these penetrating questions: "What is our job? What should be our posture? Why are we here? Are we in the 'instructing business' to satisfy identified needs? Or are we in the creative 'learning maximization business'?" The answer for us is also a vital one. For what we are and what we are to become depends on the answer each of us has for this question.

I suggest this soul-searching is necessary. Those who attended the 1969 ASTD Convention in Miami will recall the challenge that Gordon Lippitt gave to the training community. Namely, that the

job of the training department is to manage the change that is here, now. I feel this challenge was well directed. It is the responsibility of those of us in training to understand what is taking place around us, and what the implications are for us and our respective organizations. We must prepare ourselves to meet our responsibilities, for only then can we train others to successfully meet the challenge of our changing environment. To do this, it seems to me we must first identify where we are on the "training line," decide where we must go, and then, how best to get there.

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