

# IDEAS THAT WORK

*In each issue, the Journal will carry one or more fresh ideas that have been successfully applied to the human resource development environment, and, in most cases, have saved organizations money and valuable time through increased productivity. If you would like to share a working "idea" with other members of the profession, please submit it to: Training and Development Journal, P. O. Box 5307, Madison, WI 53705.*

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## DEALING WITH EXECUTIVE STRESS IN THE OFFICE

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Addressing more than 200 corporate and institutional executives at a three-day workshop on the theme, "The Challenge of Managing in a Regulated Society," Dr. James J. Gallagher, chairman of Career Management Associates of New York City, noted that good news as well as bad can add to the stress of business men and women.

A large percentage of corporate management officials have necessarily developed highly personal techniques for coping with stress and are able to handle higher levels of pressure than the average person, Dr. Gallagher told the group.

He offered a seven-point program of physical activity in the office to enable the average executive to cope with stress-inducing problems, and a five-point approach to work planning to lessen psychological tensions of the job.

First, stand up during phone calls — it cuts physical stress.

Second, take a "seventh inning stretch" five or six times a day, and certainly between meetings.

Third, take catnaps — "lie down in your office and listen to the sound of your breath," a practice Dr. Gallagher said helps to "blank everything out of your mind."

Fourth, park at the far end of your parking lot, so you have to walk a little further to and from your office. "The president's location closest to the door is bad for him, and I know of a president of

one company who has his 'reserved' sign closest to the gate, instead."

Fifth, try to conduct short meetings with everybody standing — it is less tense and it can also keep the meeting shorter.

Sixth, carry a heavy attache case — overload the briefcase when you go home at night even if you don't open it, to get the exercise of carrying the weight.

Seventh, flex your arm muscles as you carry the briefcase, another physical means of relaxing tension.

Dr. Gallagher noted that exercise can lower the pulse rate and with calisthenics, jogging or bicycling, a tense executive can reduce the pulse rate by five beats per minute over a month's time.

For emotional stress the doctor proposed a five-point regimen:

First, "psyche yourself" into self-respect.

Second, feel mastery of your own working world — in scheduling your day plan to do what is most important first, and set some intensive activity from which you can take a break periodically.

Third, give priority to tasks you enjoy in your overall assignment.

Fourth, give some priority to those tasks you feel sure you can achieve.

Fifth, break up tasks into separate goals — for example, consider a report in terms of research, outline and writing, and feel the achievement of completing each of the steps, creating "three satisfactions from a single task."

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## INTERNAL INSTRUCTORS

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*"We believe in people."*

It is a simple statement but making that belief work for people in an organization is a real challenge. Meeting that challenge becomes most important and at the same

time difficult when trying to keep people productive for their entire company lives, and this is especially true for trainers, who ultimately give the tools of success to those they train.

Trainers give to their pupils in much the same way as rain breathes life into dry ground. When it rains, the impact of the moisture is almost immediately felt, with the real impact coming later as the ground holds the water and continues to give life long after the rain is gone. But, if it rains too much, the ground becomes saturated and the results can be damaging. The same is true for trainers. Their impact is life-bringing to the

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organization, but when they've trained too long, their effectiveness lessens and may even damage.

The problem, then, is how to get the most out of your trainers without reaching the oversaturation point. At Mountain Fuel Supply Co. we've turned to *internal instructors* to solve this problem, maximizing the effectiveness of our instructors and their training.

Gene Dalton, Paul Thompson and Raymond Price, in a study with engineers, have researched the problem of keeping people effective all of their corporate lives.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion of the study was that individuals move through stages of career development. If this progression is blocked, the individual becomes more unproductive as time goes on. The stages of career development can be summarized as follows:

#### 1. Transition from school to work

environment; picking up a mentor.

2. Specializing, confidence-building, and developing independent work and ideas.
3. Broadening interests and capabilities, becoming a mentor, interfacing.
4. Autonomous development, becomes a sponsor, influencing direction of organization.

#### Avoid Stagnation

These stages are applicable to all members of an organization, including trainers. Therefore, as trainers are in the company longer and longer they must be able to move between these stages to avoid becoming stagnant.

The need is to help the trainer move between stages, ultimately becoming a trainer of trainers or a mentor. In this position, they can lead others and coordinate training activities. We have found that the best way to do this is to identify internal instructors, from the ranks of the trained.

In addition to helping trainers stay more effective, there are other reasons for using internal instructors. One of the most important reasons, and perhaps the most critical for success, is their commitment. As soon as instructors have input into a program, their investment becomes different. The instructors have become committed to the program and its success. An example from our company describes how this works.

We had not had communications training for our business office personnel, and it had not been explored. We decided, since our business representatives were having problems coping with high bill complaints and other customer problems, to put everyone through a transactional analysis session.

The thought of a new training department with outside people running everything and "*What the heck is TA?*" were typical responses. So, to soothe the fears, we decided to bring all six business-office supervisors in and teach

them to teach TA. We taught them one segment every day for five days. Then, they taught all summer long once a week to the people in all 23 business offices. The program was a great success, turnover is down and we are doing advanced TA this summer. Having the supervisors teach TA not only committed them but has also served to insure follow-up support on the job. They have become our internal trainers.

The acquiring of new skills and the potential for growth of the internal instructors should not be understated. This offers an opportunity for the internal instructors that can be very rewarding. The key here is for the professional trainer to coordinate and facilitate but to stay in the shadows and make sure the "invited" instructor has the limelight and gets the credit.

#### Monitor the Process

Probably the major concern in using internal instructors is the quality of the instruction. If the instruction quality is low, the overall quality of the program is greatly reduced, so it is important that the trainer monitor carefully the instruction process. This monitoring becomes critically important when the instruction is the life and limb of the program. And, of course, internal trainers must be well-trained before expecting them to teach others.

Here are some specific steps that can be taken to insure that people selected to instruct are well-prepared, that the quality of instruction does not suffer, and that the instructors succeed:

1. A belief that the program will work if used properly.
2. Instructor seminars to give instructors the tools they need to be effective.
3. A manual for the instructors.
4. A few practice runs for the instructors.
5. Counseling and help for the internal instructors to make the program work.

In summary, the benefits that can come to a company with the



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use of internal instructors are:

1. Growth of trainers as they move from stage to stage and progress within the company, thus insuring constant training effectiveness as well as constant trainer productivity.

2. Greater impact of effective training on the company.

3. Reduced costs of training.

4. Increase in program commitment by the instructors.

5. Development of all individuals involved, trainer and pupil alike.

With a sharp eye on program quality and proper preparation, the program will work for you as it did for us. — *Cammon I. Arrington, Director of Training; N. Patricia Freston, Ph.D., Assistant Director; Cory R. Scott, Graduate Intern.*

#### REFERENCES

1. Gene Dalton, Paul Thompson, Raymond Price, "The Four Stages of Professional Careers — A New Look at Performance

by Professionals," *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer, 1977, pp. 19-42.

#### PROBLEM SOLVER ROTATION

You may be interested in knowing of a teaching/training technique that I'm using here at Laredo State University. I call it the Problem Solver Rotation (PSR) technique. It works as follows:

First I appoint four Problem Solvers and give each a short (about five typed lines) statement of a problem or of a question to be answered. I then divide the remainder of the class into four "advisory" groups—A, B, C and D, and station them around the room.

First Problem Solver 1 goes to Advisory Group 1, Problem Solver 2 to Advisory Group 2, etc., for their ideas about his problem. After about seven minutes the problem solvers rotate—Problem Solver 1 to Advisory Group 2, and so on, to get their ideas. Thus, after half an hour each problem solver has seen all

four advisory groups and each group has worked on all four problems.

The problem solvers move next to the front of the room and take a few minutes to collect their thoughts. Then each gives a five-minute report of his or her major conclusion, followed by questions and/or comments from the audience.

Finally, the advisors vote by secret ballot to select the problem solver who came up with the most adequate solution, and the problem solvers vote on which advisory group helped them the most. Inexpensive prizes are presented. The obvious advantage of the PSR technique is that everyone is involved at all stages. Another advantage, with some groups, is that it works very well where some students prefer to work in one language and others in another. One simply picks bilingual students to be problem solvers, and uses language preference as a criterion for setting up the advisory groups.

—*Kenneth D. Weiss, Department of International Trade, Laredo State University, Laredo, TX.*



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