

To Borrow Is Human, to Originate Divine

"The government is virtually never cited today as an educational leader as it has been in the past - inaugurating concepts and techniques that are picked up by industry." *The Washington Post*

The federal government, like most organizations, is trying to squeeze more performance out of fewer resources, and in the process often ends up questioning the quality and quantity of its training. One estimate puts the federal training budget at \$633 million a year. That's more than it would cost to produce 400 episodes of *Miami Vice*. And it's just the sort of big number that makes us—as in we the people—ask what we're getting and how good it is.

"There's a total continuum," claims Alice Sargent, a frequent consultant to the feds on management training. "The FBI can stand up to IBM, and the IRS is tops." But, she admits, for many of the more than 150 federal agencies, "the idea is not to manage but to relate to the Hill."

Plenty of management training is available to the federal employee, but it is seldom mandated and, apparently, seldom chosen. Jim Colvard, deputy director of the Office of Personnel Management, maintains that the average federal civilian worker spends less than 5 percent of his or her time in training.

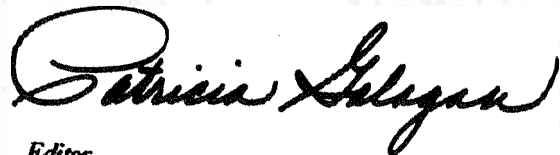
An insider who develops management training at the Internal Revenue Service, Ruth Gentilman speculates that if management training is treated like yesterday's lunch it may be because management isn't treated like a discipline in many agencies. "Often there is no career track for the professional except to go into management, and managers are

viewed as people who don't do anything but go to meetings." She recommends training for new managers in how to achieve competence through the performance of others.

"Some programs haven't kept up with research on the skills needed by managers," admits Ed Schroer, ASTD's vice president for professional development and a former OPM executive in charge of training. But he insists there is plenty of good management and executive development available for anyone who wants to take advantage of it.

That few do seems pretty clear. Why is a matter of speculation. "Often management training is like the Edsel," says Barbara Beach, director of management training at Management Concepts Inc., a management consulting firm heavy in government clients. "It's designed to serve a market that doesn't exist. It gives too much and more of something that wasn't wanted in the first place. What's needed is not cleverer designs or more original research but products appropriate for the market."

So maybe there is nothing new under the sun. Products without markets are ancient history and not at all unique to the government. Maybe nothing, not even editorial speculation, should be undertaken without a needs analysis. If you the readers would be willing to tell others how management development can be of conscious service to today's critical issues, please write to "Issues," care of this magazine.



Editor