

A Linguistics Lesson

I was glad to see the *Journals* coverage of Artificial Intelligence (August 1987), but want to "debug" the spelling of the computer language "FORTH," rendered "FOURTH" on page 31. It almost was that spelling. The explanation appears in *Understanding FORTH* by Joseph Reymann (Alfred Publishing Co., 1983): "Charles Moore called his system concept FORTH (he considered it a *fourth*-generation system, but the computer on which he then operated could only accept five-letter labels)."

Diane Kirrane
Washington, D.C.

Shukria!

I read with keen interest Charles Garfield's article, "Peak Performance in Business" (April 1987). It is an excellent, thought-provoking article. Thanks to the editor for publishing such an interesting piece.

L.S.N. Gupta
Ashok Leland Limited
Madras, India

Needed: More Involvement, Less Money

I was greatly pleased, colleagues, to read David and Joanne Torrence's excellent article, "Training in the Face of Illiteracy" (August 1987). Although we in corporate America can strive to correct the problem of illiteracy through our internal training programs, the problem must be attacked at the source.

Unlike most suggestions offered by a host of panels, special committees, and learned institutes, I am *not* going to recommend more money for education at the state, federal, and local level. This problem calls for involvement. Get on the local school board or teach

a class in remedial reading as a volunteer. But, most of all, if you have children or grandchildren, get them to read!

Unfortunately, functional illiteracy *will* get worse before it gets better. During this time the educational system, along with teacher associations and federations, will place the burden for this failure in every corner except where it belongs. At stake will be billions of tax dollars. At risk will be the intellectual capacity of the nation.

I realize that, in general, American management tends not to become involved in issues that have political overtones. As a result we penalize our nation by removing from play the best problem-solving minds available to it.

We will never obtain the competitive edge we are reaching for as an association if, as representatives of corporate America, we don't take a stronger stand in the development of the resources educational America sends to us.

This year I chaired the school board for my local village. We negotiated with the union, argued at town meetings, and in the end returned to the village a surplus from which to start next year. Board members take turns sitting in class observing what and how the children are taught. As in business, attitude and professional behavior weigh as heavily as credentials.

Don't think it is impossible to make a difference because you are only one person. The rewards of graduating a class in which every student can read, write, and do numbers far exceed the risks.

Dr. Lyman O. Baier
Jackson, Jackson & Wagner
Newfields, New Hampshire

What's a Parent to Do?

The following are responses to the August 1987 editorial, "Bringing Up Baby While Holding Down a Job: Who Cares?". Judging from the responses, concern is widespread. Child care has become a business issue, and many are looking to business to assume the responsibility.—PLF

Working parents spend an average of 10 hours, mostly on the job, locating child-care arrangements for their children *every* time a new situation is needed. Working parents waste an average of eight working days per year due to child-care problems and conflicts. Nearly half of all employee parents report that they have considered quitting their jobs because of child-care problems. Can your organization afford these setbacks and losses? Probably not.

Furthermore, today's work force includes more than 13 million working mothers; by the year 1990 this number will increase to more than 18 million, reflecting an increase of more than five million women joining the work force in four short years. Over 85 percent of these women will have children during their careers, and more than 50 percent of them will return to work within one year of having a child. In fact mothers of children under three years of age represent the fastest-growing segment of the overall work force. By 1990, more than 50 percent of all employees will be working parents.

Many senior-level corporate decision makers are unaware of the child-care problems that besiege their employees and, ultimately, their company's bottom line. This has occurred because employees are hesitant to voice their child-care problems due to concern over job security. (You would be amazed at what employees, if surveyed anonymously, would tell you about child-care problems.) And junior managers, although more aware of the problems, hesitate to become corporate champions for child-care assistance because they sense little or no support for it at the senior levels of their companies.

The child-care dilemma will only get worse unless corporate America's personnel management directly addresses the issue. Companies taking steps to solve their employees' child-care needs and concerns, have already realized the following bottom-line benefits:

- increased productivity and employee morale;
 - improved employee recruitment and retention;
 - decreased turnover and lowered absenteeism;
 - increased public and community relations opportunities.
- These bottom-line benefits outweigh

child-care assistance costs by more than two to one!

The number of companies reaping these benefits happily is on the rise. Since 1978 employer-assisted child-care programs have increased from a mere 100 programs to the more than 2,500 in existence today. The child-care assistance options available to your organization are numerous. They include

■ *information and education* programs that include videotape and accompanying handout materials to help parents find and evaluate high-quality child-care arrangements; referral services that inform employees where there is child care available; and workplace seminars on child care and other topics of interest to working parents.

■ *financial assistance* programs through the use of pretax payroll reductions to pay for child-care expenses using a non-taxable dependent-care assistance plan. Companies that include child-care reimbursement as an option can make direct contributions to the cost of child

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care in the more modern and flexible "cafeteria-type" benefit packages that a growing number of companies are offering to their employees.

■ *personnel policy* changes to allow for flextime, which is a great help to working parents in terms of child-care scheduling. Companies can make provisions for unpaid parental leaves for working parents who have just had or adopted a child and can offer phased return-to-work options so employees will return much sooner and be much more productive as they reenter the work force.

■ *direct services* that sponsor, either singly or with a group of employers, a child-care center or a group of smaller family day-care homes near the workplace. The employer typically pays the start-up costs and annually subsidizes the center to a small extent; both these costs are tax deductible. Employees bear the responsibility for

paying the weekly fees that essentially support the center's operation.

Any one of the above, or a combination of child-care assistance programs, could solve the child-care problems at your company. With such a range of options and differing parental needs, it is important to seek guidance from an experienced child-care firm so you'll know the programs you select will be the most effective for your organization's needs.

Assisting with child care will help your organization be the best it can. As Amory Houghton, chairman of Corning Glass, said when referring to his company's pioneering efforts in the area of employer-supported child-care assistance: "It's the right thing to do. It's one of those little pockets of excellence which corporations are judged by."

The problem is not going to disappear and, unfortunately, employees are fearful of asking for help. To get the job done, corporate America and its senior management must address the issue

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head-on, thus easing their employees' child-care burdens, while helping to provide high-quality and educational child-care alternatives for our children—the corporate leaders of tomorrow.

John Bassett Place
President
Developmental Child Care, Inc.
Westport, Connecticut

We have over 1,000 Coast Guard personnel assigned to this area and our child-care center can't accommodate all of those needing its use. The problem is exacerbated by the nonexistence of private child-care centers close to Cape May. We have plans for a new, bigger child-care center but, until we move in to it, child care will continue to be one of the most talked-about and major morale factors on the base.

The Coast Guard, as a whole, has identified child care as a major area of concern and is taking action to improve the program. However, it continues to affect morale and career decisions for Coast Guard personnel.

Lt. R.A. Walleshauser, Jr.
Administrative Officer
U.S. Coast Guard Recruit Training Center
Cape May, New Jersey

I read with interest the August 1987 editorial, "Bringing Up Baby While Holding Down a Job: Who Cares?". I work in a community college/private industry council program that provides training to under- or unemployed area residents. The department provides child-care subsidies to participants during training and work search, thereby removing that particular barrier to receiving training or skills upgrade. But I have a deep concern for the continued success of our graduates because of the child-care problem in this country.

Many of the people I work with, who are mostly single mothers or married mothers with underemployed husbands, obtain entry-level positions averaging \$5.00 an hour with benefits. This is a decent beginning wage for this area, as our standard of living is good and affordable, and many of the graduates are

promoted in a fairly short amount of time.

But in families with two or more children, day-care costs can easily run from \$300 to \$600 a month. With take-home pay at the \$600-to-\$800 level, it's easy to see that prosperity is an American dream out of reach. Even with federal day-care subsidy money, these working parents face a real struggle. They frequently turn to cheaper, lower-quality day care or leave children alone. Worse yet they may find working "unworkable" and return to welfare so they can give their children quality care. At best they face hard work and low reward, continuously balancing home, family, and finances and looking for ways to cut down on day-care costs.

Quality, affordable, subsidized day care, located on or convenient by bus to worksites, would tremendously improve the worklife of millions of American women and men. Absenteeism, job-hopping, and turnover would decrease, as would the welfare rolls. The reality in this country is that many women must work, married or not. Yet no one seems particularly concerned about affordable, quality child care.

I appreciate seeing this issue approached in your magazine.

Jan Eliot
Lane Community College
Eugene, Oregon

Is child care hot? Did the stock market crack 2000? We are an employer-based child-care service whose growth exploded from an initial 20 customers to almost 250 a week. And we do it in a brand new building at a profit with a waiting list that often taxes the center's computerized admission system.

How do we do it? Sound management and marketing practices without ever losing sight of quality. Certainly it doesn't hurt to be open 17 hours a day (until midnight), nor to be in an area that's experiencing a profound labor shortage.

Parents who receive child care and other family benefits develop a loyalty to companies. This "brand loyalty" can't help but bridge the upcoming labor shortage that experts predict will hit in the next few years. Although the payoff

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*Dr. Stephan Lehane
Child Care Services
University of Southern Maine
Portland*

The recent "Editor's Page" on child care (August 1987) hit the nail on the head: child care has become a major issue for employers everywhere.

In April 1986 our company initiated an "Infant-at-Work" program, and because of its novelty and progressiveness it has received widespread attention, particularly from the media.

Our program basically entitles new parents to bring their infants to the office. Prior to an infant's arrival at the worksite, the new parent must submit a proposal to our company's management team outlining how he or she plans to care for the baby and carry out the daily work activities.

Once approved and in action, the situation is reviewed sporadically by our human resource department. Our company also maintains the right to decide when an arrangement is not working to the best interest of the company. When that is the case, the agreement—not the employee—is terminated.

Since a nursery is not provided, the infants are cared for in the offices or work stations of their parents. The program thus is intended for the infancy period only—not the more mobile toddler stages.

To date, three women have taken advantage of our program and are delighted with the flexibility and the opportunity for parent-child bonding the program affords them.

We've all agreed that this program couldn't work in all companies but are grateful that, due to our culture, it has worked for us. With approximately 55 employees, many of whom are female, we most likely will see more infants in our workplace in the months and years to come.

*Patti Danos
Blanchard Training & Development, Inc.
Escondido, California*

Tell Us What You Think

"Bozo Airlines cancelled my flight and wouldn't even offer me a hotel voucher for the night." "I had to call Moron Mart's order department three times before I got the correct shipment." "I just had a simple question and the people at Cretins, Inc., were so rude."

Customer service, or its lack, is generating a great deal of attention these days. Certainly organizations in the customer-service industry are expected to train their employees accordingly. But *all* companies have to deal with customers at one time or another, whether they are internal or external customers or other staff requesting help or information.

Should customer-service excellence be of concern in every industry? Customers think so. Therefore, should every organization provide customer service training to their employees?

We'd like to hear your opinions. Send your viewpoint to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

"Issues" is compiled and edited by Patricia Fitzgerald. Send your viewpoints to: Issues, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.