

David Perilaitis

You Are What You Read

F.H. Freeman, in his article, "Business Bestsellers: Past and Present," in the Center for Creative Leadership's Winter 1987 *Issues & Observations*, wonders what "managers think of the spate of business bestsellers?" To answer that question he gathered information already collected on center leadership program attendees. Here are his findings:

"First, some managers either don't read books, can't remember the books they read, don't like to admit that they read books, or don't like to answer nosy questions—about 5 percent of the managers left this question blank. A significant number implied, by the 'favorites' they listed, that they read only escapist literature—spy thrillers and the like. A small but not insignificant percentage seemed to prefer more classy reads like philosophy, historical fiction, documentaries, poetry, and biography.

"But—surprise—a large group chose one or more business-management books as their favorites. Out of 860 books listed, some 188 were in this category. In both the current sample—1986—and one from the period 1982 through 1984, [*In Search of Excellence*] was a clear winner. In the more recent sample, *Iacocca* was a strong second. *Search* was a most-enjoyed book for 50 of the managers, *Iacocca* for 44. The *Bible* and *The One Minute Manager* were neck and neck at 17 each."

Cost-Cutting Canards

U.S. business managers can be pardoned for appearing defensive these days. Many of their executives, after letting management ranks bloat while management productivity eroded, have chosen to combat high overhead costs by employing "slash-and-burn" techniques reminiscent of primitive agriculture (see "In Practice," December 1986). Decimating management ranks seems the expedient solution, but is this somewhat heavy-handed form of "management development" necessarily the most efficient in the long run?

Although he would agree that overhead can be a problem, management consultant John L. Neuman says "no" to indiscriminate layoffs. In the second installment of his two-part series in *Management Practice Quarterly* on corporate America's white-collar dilemma, Neuman lays to rest the five major misconceptions held by today's executives concerning the causes and cures of overhead paralysis. Neuman, senior partner with the New York-based Management Practice Consulting Partners, argues that the challenge of overhead reduction cannot be addressed until management understands the true nature of its building blocks.

According to Neuman many CEOs feel they intuitively grasp what creates and sustains overhead as well as how it can be reduced when necessary. "In actual practice," he says, "the CEO and his aids assume that overhead is as much under control as manufacturing is in the factory. They're wrong."

Neuman's list of wrong-headed executive tenets includes the following: ■ "Overhead cutting should come from the top. This is simply not possible. CEOs cannot lead the charge because the enemy isn't visible to them. True excess can only be seen from the bottom.

"No overhead reduction project has a prayer of establishing lasting cost cuts without lowering the efficiency of the business unless it nurtures the power of participation among the upper, middle, and lower management levels, as well as among nonmanagers.

■ "Overhead fatness and leanness are evident. The best cost-cutting opportunities are in the high-fat and low-productivity

functions. Cost-reduction programs that target selected high-fat areas may look plausible on paper, but experience shows that the untargeted broad-based approach is best. That way everyone in the company is included in the drive and there are no sacred cows.

■ "After a major cost-cutting sweep, an organization should rest for two or three years. Once again, common sense leads to faulty strategy. The McKinsey data on over 150 corporations demonstrates no correlation between companies' past histories at overhead cutting and the results achieved in an effective participative process.

■ "Redundant and superfluous employees are the by-product of a cost-cutting drive and should be let go—the more the better. An overhead cost-reduction project that measures success with a body count cannot achieve optimal results. One problem is that it creates fear and distrust in the ranks, which paralyzes participation. Another is that it fails to go to the heart of the problem—understanding the complex interrelationships between intraorganizational overhead suppliers and receivers.

"Lastly it overlooks the fact that when more people are doing the right things they can save many times the cost of their services and can also generate huge increases in revenue.

■ "With outright dismissals morale will only suffer a short-term beating. The morale factor is far more responsive to management skills than most CEOs recognize.

"The way employees and job security are addressed from the very inception of a cost-cutting effort will have a long-term impact on morale, trust, loyalty, productivity, and management credibility. Firm dedication to minimizing terminations, even if it ultimately benefits only a handful of workers, goes a long way toward sustaining morale. It's not easy to identify alternatives to terminations, but those CEOs who throw up their hands in despair at such an approach are being short sighted."

Your Job Is Temporary

Jobs are seldom forever, warns HRD consultant Andrew Sherwood, chairman of the New York-based Goodrich & Sherwood Company. "As long as you have the skills currently needed and there is a job available," he says, "you will have a relationship with the com-

pany. But beyond that there are no guarantees of job security."

Sherwood, author of the new career book, *Breakpoints*, published by Doubleday, suggests that employees, particularly at the managerial level, prepare for the possibility of bad news on the job in the following ways:

■ **Financially**—Put some additional money away for early retirement and build up a cushion of funds to support yourself if relocation becomes necessary.

■ **Emotionally**—Recognize that while you may love your company, the company never unconditionally loves you even though your boss may. A few quarters of red ink or redundancies created by a merger, and hundreds or even thousands of workers may be retired or fired.

■ **Occupationally**—Keep your antenna up. Make a determined effort to find out which companies in your industry are expanding, standing still, or losing ground. You will have a back-up strategy if needed and your targets will be lined up for a concentrated job search.

Corporate Volunteering Spells Success, Community Commitment

Employees volunteering in their communities contribute 50 million hours of community service worth \$400 million annually, according to recent nationwide survey. The survey results and other information are detailed in *A New Competitive Edge: Volunteers from the Workplace*, a book released last fall by VOLUNTEER: The National Center.

"We found that many U.S. corporations today link their business success to their community involvement through employee volunteering," said Ken Allen, the center's president. "There is a clear sense that being involved in the community by supporting employee volunteer interests is good business—good for the company and good for the community in which it operates. Corporate volunteering contributes to a company's strong competitive edge in today's marketplace."

Corporations support and encourage employee volunteering as a way for the company to respond to workers' concerns about the quality of their work

and home life as well as to increase and reinforce workers' skills, respond to public expectations of corporate involvement, demonstrate moral leadership, build company pride, and motivate employees.

A New Competitive Edge also details how employee volunteer activities and programs are structured and administered and describes the basic support mechanisms and programs developed by businesses. A key feature of the book is a profile section of 15 companies considered to be the vanguard in the field of employee volunteer involvement. The 15 are Apple Computer, Atlantic Richfield, Barnett Bank of Jacksonville, CBS, Exxon, Federal Express, Honeywell, Levi Strauss, Metropolitan Life Insurance, Pacific Power and Light, Proctor & Gamble, Scott Paper, Shell Oil, Tenneco, and Xerox.

The Center's book is the culmination of VOLUNTEER's Workplace in the Community Project, a two-year, corporate-funded program that focused on improving the quality and increasing the quantity of workplace-based volunteering.

For information on either corporate volunteering or to obtain a copy of the book, contact Cynthia Vizza, VOLUNTEER: The National Center, 1111 N. 19th St., Arlington, VA 22209; 703/276-0542.

HRD Writing Award

The winner of the Woodlands Group's second annual Dugan Laird Award for Excellence in Writing in the Field of Human Resource Development is Dan Dickinson. His winning article, "How to Turn Employees Off: A Conversational Primer," appeared in the March 1986 issue of *Training*.

Laird was well known as author of numerous articles and the popular *Approaches to Training and Development*. Through the award the Woodlands Group recognizes what it deems "outstanding HRD writing by selecting the article from one of the three publications" Laird was most associated with—*Training & Development Journal*, *Training News*, and *Training*—"which best meets the standards Dugan promoted and practiced in his own teaching and writing."

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Training &
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Journal

Successful Courses Start with Well-Written Invitations

Submitted by Lori Long, a training, methods, and procedures specialist for Deluxe Check Printers, Inc., in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Incomplete invitations bias students against a class before it even begins. Students who receive such invitations rightly will wonder if important information will be overlooked in the classroom too.

This checklist can help you guarantee complete invitations:

- **Addressee**—Consider whether you want to send individual invitations—to make each student feel special—or whether you want to list all students' names at the top of the invitation—to let students know who else is coming. Either way use people's names; no one wants to come to a class as an anonymous entity.

- **Opening**—Your opening should invite the student to attend a specifically named class.

- **Requestor**—If the student's manager requested that the student attend, be sure to say so.

- **Dates**—Use the days of the week and the dates—for example, "Monday, January 12, through Friday, January 16."

- **Times**—Outline when class will start and end each day, how long will be allowed for lunch and breaks, and approximately when lunch and breaks will be taken.

- **Description**—Include a short description of the class—purpose, content, and activities.

- **Instructor**—Mention the instructor's name, position, occupation, and credentials.

- **Out-of-towners**—For students attending class from out of town, include name, address, and price of recommended or available accommodations; recommended time of arrival at accommodations; how to get to accommodations from airport, if applicable; types of transportation needed and available.

- **Directions**—If necessary attach a map to the invitation to show the locations of the classroom, building, and available parking.

- **Handicapped**—State whether handicapped facilities are available.

- **Facilities**—Briefly describe the

classroom facilities. Where should students go or what should they do when they get to the building where class will be held?

- **Meals**—Describe meal arrangements. Will meals be provided? If not what restaurants are convenient and how much will they cost?

- **Money**—If students will need money for materials, parking, and the like, suggest approximately how much.

- **Contact**—Include the name and phone number of the person to contact with questions.

- **Inviter**—Sign your name and, if relevant, include your position or title.

- **Courtesy copies**—For company classes held internally, students' managers should be sent copies of the invitations.

Where to Go for Federal Grants

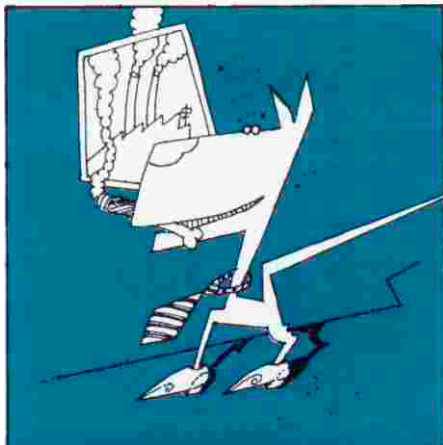
The *1987 Federal Funding Guide*, a two-volume, 723-page book on federal aid programs including four quarterly updates that will add another 250 to 300 pages to the volume, has just been published by Government Information Services (GIS). The guide details nearly 140 federal programs that offer financial aid to state, county, local, and tribal governments as well as nonprofit and community organizations.

James J. Marshall, GIS publisher, explains, "There have been a lot of regulation changes during the past year. And many people fail to realize the enormous sums that Uncle Sam still gives away in federal aid." Programs described in the guide will channel an estimated \$57 billion in federal aid in fiscal 1987.

The guide provides precise information on dollars available, eligibility requirements, application deadlines, the outlook for funding, allowable use of funds, and program contacts. It also provides in-depth analysis of recent legislative changes affecting state and local government, including rule changes, new requirements, and new money in the federal pipeline.

[Editor's note: Readers of *Training & Development Journal* can receive a \$12 discount if they clip this article and send it along with their order for the guide and updates. The regular price is

\$139.95, but an order accompanied with this article is only \$127.95. There is an unconditional money-back guarantee. The guide may be examined for 15 days and returned for a full refund for any reason. A special premium, *91 Proven Tips and Secrets for Winning Grant \$\$\$ in 1987*, is also included. Order from Government Information Services, Department 100, 1611 North Kent St., Suite 508, Arlington, VA 22209; 703/528-1084.]



David Proffitts

White Male Execs Still Top Dogs

As recently reported in these pages, today's executive suites boast more female bosses than ever before. But although female executives are making more money than ever before, they've still got a long way to go before they catch up to the earnings their male counterparts rope in.

According to two nationwide surveys, women holding positions at the vice-presidential level and above earn \$124,623 annually—42 percent less than male executives. The surveys, conducted by Heidrick and Struggles, a Chicago-based executive search firm, show that men at comparable corporate levels report annual cash compensation of \$214,000.

The table below shows the salary breakdown by region and gender.

	Women	Men
National	\$124,623	\$214,000
East	\$132,813	\$218,000
Midwest	\$163,143	\$202,000
South	\$67,619	\$212,000
Southwest	\$82,454	\$217,000
West	\$114,233	\$221,000

A Heidrick and Struggles survey also showed that only 1 percent of executives are members of minority groups. "Minority representation at the vice-presidential level and above," notes the firm's president and CEO, David R. Peasback, "has virtually remained unchanged since our 1979 survey when it was reported at 1.2 percent."

A Failure to Communicate

Submitted by Michael H. Markel, Rosemont, Pennsylvania.

Before he goes to bed each night, a top engineer at a major consumer products company reads hundreds of memo pages written that day by the engineers he supervises. Johnny Carson says good night before he does.

A businesswoman comes home from a troubleshooting trip to a branch office and begins her report at the beginning—by describing the taxi ride to the airport. How much time does she plan to spend writing her report? That's easy; the unofficial company policy is to put in as many days on the report as you put in on the road.

An air-pollution expert has earned such a reputation in his company for incomprehensible writing that nobody bothers to read anything he puts down on paper. That's too bad. He's a national authority, but around the company he's known as "The Smokestack," a nickname he doesn't seem to mind.

Something crazy is going on here. It would be humorous if it weren't so expensive.

The average business letter costs about \$8 to send out; the average

report, about \$50 per page. And that's just the cost of writing. Nobody has figured out the cost of reading the millions of pages churned out each day. Technological advances such as the photocopy machine and electronic mail make it easy for people to send even the slightest memo to dozens of innocent readers.

Poor writing costs in another way. Badly written operating instructions can cause industrial accidents. Ambiguities in construction codes can lead to unsafe buildings. And according to the president's commission on Three Mile Island, that famous accident was caused in part by a failure to heed some crucial reports.

Business, industry, and government, well aware of these costs, all attack the problem by sending their employees to writing courses. Such training can help clear up part of the problem: the writer's misunderstanding of what the reader wants.

This misunderstanding is taught in school. The English teacher who asks for an essay of "at least 1,000 words" on why Macbeth was so antisocial is trying to indicate a certain level of analysis. What the students hear is that if they have only 600 words to say, it might be wise to come up with another 400. Is it any wonder that adults say "at this point in time" instead of "now"?

The purpose of on-the-job writing is to help the readers do their job, not to test the writer's knowledge or perseverance or commitment. Therefore writers shouldn't show off their expertise by loading the document with everything they know. Rather they should make it as simple and concise as the situation allows, and they should include a summary—the bottom line—at the top.

But there is another problem too: those people who intentionally write badly. Some people like to think they are composing, rather than writing. While freely admitting that short paragraphs, simple vocabulary, and a lean structure would make life easier for the reader, some people insist on the right to "create"—and let the reader be damned. "After all," they say, "it's my report"—even though they do work on company time.

Some people use writing as an occasion to shore up the fences that



David Proffitts



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In Practice

separate their territory from everyone else's. If knowledge is power, why spread it around? Lurking behind this idea is the sad admission that communicating clearly would make the writer dispensable.

People in business and industry state emphatically that writing causes them great stress and that it saps the time and energy they would rather devote to other job activities. The managers and executives—who have to read the bulk of the writing—lament the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the writing.

To a large degree, on-the-job writing will remain a burden for both writer and reader because communication exposes all of the tensions inherent in interpersonal relationships. But some measures can be taken to improve the quality of the writing.

Management can

- call the employees together and explain and exemplify the kind of writing they want;
- stop making arbitrary—and often uninformed—revisions on their subordinates' writing;
- stop sending their subordinates to remedial grammar courses when faulty grammar is not the problem;
- participate actively when the company retains a competent consultant; managers, too, can learn something.

Employees who do the writing can

- think more about the reader and less about themselves;
- stop using the writing assignment as a vehicle for some other kind of message such as "I'm smart but underpaid and underappreciated;"
- write simply, clearly, and concisely.

"In Practice" is edited and written by Robert Bove. Send items of interest to: In Practice, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.