

YOU WANT TO BE WHAT! A TRAINING DIRECTOR?

*Dad's letter to
an aspiring son*

Dear Bill,

Your Mother and I both enjoyed and appreciated your letter very much, and were delighted to hear of your good grades for last semester. Since Mother is also writing to you, I'll let her relate the current events and confine myself to responding to your thoughts about following in my footsteps.

First, let me assure you that I am extremely flattered (for reasons I haven't tried to analyze too deeply) that you would consider being a "training director - like your old man." Maybe it's because I assume an implication that you consider my career life has been worthwhile and successful. Any father *would* appreciate that. Incidentally, the appreciation is just slightly tempered by the reference to an "old man." I am still young enough to consider myself as being in the prime of life . . . and just old enough to be slightly sensitive about having a son that shaves.

I am also flattered by your request for my advice and suggestions. After those difficult years when you were trying out your wings for size and understandably (and perhaps even necessarily) rejected most of my values and advice, it is nice to have you back in the fold. Perhaps it is conceit on my part to consider it an evidence of growth and maturity for you to feel that the 'older' generation (and me in particular) does after all have some wisdom worth consulting.

Rather than directly answer your question for suggestions on some elective courses to take, I am sending along some current literature summarizing that subject much better than I possibly could in a letter. It also gives considerable information about the opportunities and forecasts of the future prospects in the field. Although it is as objective as most career literature, it does have a tendency (like most career literature) to somewhat glamorize the job and neglects to mention the 'lesser' aspects of the work.

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I feel that it is very necessary in making a decision about anything as important as a career choice to consider the nega-

tive aspects as well as the positive - the frustrating aspects as well as the fun aspects. So I hope you will read carefully those positive aspects given in the literature, and I will try to enlighten you about some of the more negative and frustrating aspects. Though you haven't heard me discuss them at home, believe me - there are some lulus. Here are a few:

1. One big problem in many companies is the fact that the training or education department has been an organization stepchild, and has been tucked away somewhere in the organization chart, generally under a personnel director - many of whom know very little about training and care about it even less. The possibilities for effectiveness there have been minimal - and in most cases the results have been minimal too.

I'm not sure why the training department has been tucked away in so many companies - perhaps it has been simply to keep them out of trouble. Many needs for training programs are uncovered by snooping into problems that exist within departments, and most department heads are less than enthusiastic about anybody snooping into their department - especially ivory tower characters who "couldn't possibly understand the practical problems" a manager must deal with. It is also very painful for them to have anyone point out training needs - since it implies a criticism of the job they are doing. To do so in a way that does not raise tempers requires the tact and diplomacy of a master statesman, the finesse of a chess master, the patience of Job, and ingenuity bordering on genius. When faced with an obvious need that cries out for action, these testing qualifications can cause even the hardest of training directors to develop ulcers from frustration.

I must admit that the picture is changing as industry is becoming more aware of the vital part training

plays in the profit and loss figures through improving job performance (and hence, morale), and in the total efficiency of the operation. The trend now is toward having a separate department or division, staffed by people with education and experience in training, reporting directly to the top man or a vice-president for personnel services. The training director usually also serves as a consultant to top management.

2. A regular and common frustration involves working with supervisors in developing and scheduling a training program that they "want" their personnel to have. (Incidentally, bear in mind that it is always the employees who need training - supervisors don't.) When the scheduled training session is put on, they simply can't spare those same personnel to attend the program. Since the training director doesn't have any authority in any other department, there isn't a darned thing he can do about this problem without generating antagonism except:
 - a. Go home and beat his wife or children
 - b. Go home and kick the dog
 - c. Take another antacid pill, a donnatal, and grin and bear it.

Incidentally, I do hope you appreciate the fact that I always endeavored to avoid the first two choices in my own career. I hope you can also appreciate the fact that it is very difficult, and frustrating, to have to be nice to everybody you work with - always. As a training director, you don't have much choice. To do anything else could do serious damage to the possibilities of continued acceptance of the training program.

3. Another very real frustration comes in trying to motivate employees, at all levels, to become interested in more learning and in continuing their education. There are a number of categories of the uninterested I have found especially prevalent:

- a. Those who are too busy with their work to take time to learn how to do their job more efficiently or to better themselves.
- b. Those who claim they are "too old to learn," and who are determined to prove it. This type usually fits the mold of the people described in the song from an old musical; they are "so by gosh stubborn that they can stand touching noses for a week at a time, and never see eye to eye."
- c. Those who know their job so well they don't need to learn anything more. These are usually, though not always, content with their status quo and not at all anxious to upset it. It also includes those who won't be convinced that somebody else can teach them anything.

A slightly different type of the disinterested are the ones who actively resist training and change - the "it was good enough for grandma" type. Their favorite responses to any suggestion for a training program are "We can't afford it," "It can't be done," or "It won't work," ad infinitum, ad nauseum. This type is particularly prone to view any training program as a criticism of the job they are doing.

Bill, let me assure you that working with the uninterested without losing patience or temper is a monumental task.

4. There are a number of other frustrations that are worthy of consideration too. By lumping them together, I don't mean to suggest that they are less frustrating than those already listed. They aren't. Let's take a look at them:
 - a. Working with supervisors who are teaching all the time, mostly unintentionally, and doing a very poor job of it. They aren't interested in learning how to be a better teacher for all those reasons listed earlier, plus their insistence that

teaching isn't a part of their job - "That's the job of the training department."

- b. Having supervisors who expect people who haven't finished their training to perform as well as an experienced person. On the other side of the coin are those supervisors who won't (for a multitude of reasons) permit the trained person to function to the capacity for which his training has prepared him.
- c. Having trainees learn something one way in class, only to have them get on the job and be told "we've found a short cut for that procedure." This seems particularly prevalent in training safety procedures.
- d. Trying to convince management and supervisory personnel of the need to follow sound educational procedures in developing training programs - such as spending time defining learning objectives. This type of thing is generally regarded as an unnecessary waste of time. At the same time, it's frustrating to work with so many 'experts' in education - practically everybody you work with.
- e. Trying to figure out how to have an effective training program that should have started yesterday, there isn't time for today, and which will be too late tomorrow.

Although they might not properly be included as frustrations, there are a couple of other problems facing the training director that must be considered among the negatives of the job. One is the sometimes almost overwhelming temptation to act like a petty tyrant with his staff. In view of the fact that he has to work with so many people using nothing but tact, diplomacy, and gentle persuasion, I guess this temptation is not too surprising. He must keep in mind at all times the fact that his staff have all those same frustrations plus one - him.

The second problem is that of keeping