

ARE YOU A FAILING TRAINING MANAGER?

how so many determined training types manage to self-destruct

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Through the last 15 years of American industrial history, which is now archeology for all of us, we have been impressed with two great migrations. The first was the dissatisfied or opportunistic engineer and scientist who migrated from contract to contract and from company to company until the 1969-1971 economic setback.

The second great migration was by the training manager and the organization development specialist. This migration has been less noted and visible in the various business journals in America. Yet those of us in the profession of organization development and managerial training have been markedly aware of the transitory mailing addresses of our colleagues who have developed a low level of frustration and uncomfortableness between their own expectations and "what they will let me do" in their occupational setting. The resumes are a virtual flood of paperwork from company to company and to the search firms.

The question is not the lack of organizational need or the restriction in salary adjustments, but that of the personal and managerial effectiveness of our colleagues and their own level of expectations for themselves and their professional processes. It has been said that we are our own worst enemy, through our aspirations and expectations, and our own impatience with the inability to impact an organization structure and its processes. What apparently occurs in our job lives is the disparity experienced by the professional between what he feels is of vital and critical importance to his organization for change and "what they will let me do." The circulation of resumes seems to be the alternative for the training manager in his own state of frustration. But how much of this frustration is *self-imposed*, *self-induced*, and produces a situation of *self-destruct*?

One of the signs of an amateur in a training billet is the casting and presentation of himself as a self-styled expert.

He sees himself as the end-all, be-all and change-all with the occupational and organizational world revolving around his proposals for change and that he, as the prime change agent, continues to try to "always kill the big bear." Have we



not learned the basic psychological truism that many achievements are results of a stepwise progression of introducing change as opposed to insisting upon a major *revolution*, rather than an *evolution*, in the change process? The failing training manager sees his introduction of change as primary, above and ahead of what the organization will accept and "where they are" in their own understanding of the necessity for that change. He also takes the position that the total process must be accepted at one point in time and feels extremely frustrated and personally rejected when line management will live with only a small pilot study based on his change agent proposal.

In order to rescue this amateur training manager from his own downward spiral of self-ineffectiveness, one needs first to examine his own psychological needs. How do you rank your need for *power*? How do you rate your need for organization power in relation to your need to provide *service*? Where do you stack your need for *personal power* as compared to the need for acceptance and belonging in your organization? Have you confused your own need for power and visibility with the professional need for being a change agent and for accomplishment?

If power is your strongest need as compared to the zest to give of oneself and the need for organization achievement, this ordering of values and priorities may often spell the difference between career and professional effectiveness and career and performance ineffectiveness. "If I only had more political clout around here, we would get something done for change" . . . these words are saying, in effect, if I had more personal visibility and influence, I could be a more effective practitioner of the training profession. These "red flag internal conflicts" so often show through to line management. These are the red flags of the trainer's need for personal dominance in that relationship.

Line managers will often be alienated by trainers who seek to dominate a relationship

When a line manager emotionally experiences the training manager who has a need to dominate that relationship, he tends to be threatened and alienated from both the individual and what that trainer is suggesting in his proposal.

If the need for power and dominance is your prime stimulator, should you remain in the training and organization development career path? This is not to say that a professional in training should not have influence in an organization, but is it a self-induced handicap that interferes with one's forward movement as one tries to super-impose himself in those line relationships? A training manager who places power ahead of achievement and change agent service is headed for a win-lose conflict and the result, by-and-large, is that he loses in this sum-zero gamesmanship.

The effective training manager honestly examines and confronts his own need for power and whether he has the "organization bridge table" finesse to convey to management that he is authentically consumer-oriented. What is your ability to genuinely listen with "your third ear"? Are you genuinely interested

in providing consultative guidance as an in-house professional or are you there to dominate that relationship? Do you visualize that you sit in a "side-by-side" relationship with that line manager, or do you see yourself in a selling relationship wherein you "talk him into it" to gain a *personal conquest*?

Another earmark of the failing training manager is his need to "peddle training



gimmicks" to line managers. The peddling of techniques, for technique sake only, often leads to demise. What we are saying is that as professionals, we are not gimmick oriented. Unfortunately, we, as organization consultants, see the training manager who is constantly bringing technique to line management's attention, rather than a rationale for the change. Too many training managers are "package oriented" and focus on the "new" package. In the eyes of the line manager, the failing training manager who is selling the latest in devices is perceived as "coming with a new gimmick again!"

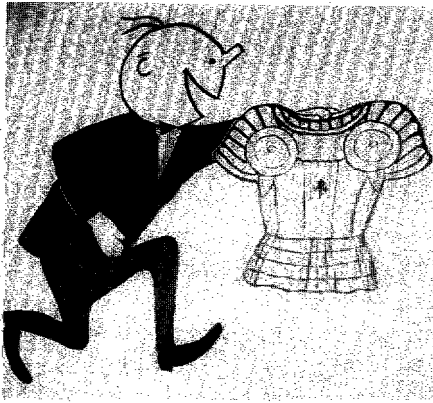
Are you so media-bound that you are constantly selling your management on the latest instruction programs rather than focusing on generic needs and what the organization itself needs for its vitality? So many examples of the failing training manager reflect a person who is current, knowledgeable and excited about "that new management theory and technique" but who has lost sight of why he exists on the payroll. Line managers see these "media ped-

lers" as trying to turn their departments and themselves into *experimental objects* rather than seeing the training professional as a producer of results which line management needs and requires.

How comfortable and effective are you in swallowing your ego? The effective training manager focuses on "what my customers need" and forsakes his own ego to experiment with something that he is personally curious about and which might be fun for him. The amateur's operating style focuses around self-opportunism and self-centeredness, rather than a customer-centeredness wherein the customer's operating realities are center stage. When line managers feel they are made into objects for experimentation with "that new technique or methodology", they resent it and feel they are being manipulated and exploited. They usually turn the individual off and tune out the proposal request no matter what its intrinsic value might be.

Let's look at another earmark of the failing training manager . . . the projection of the "breastplate of armor." Too often, when a training manager makes a presentation, he goes in "loaded for bear" with the expectation that he is going to be rejected. He girds the breastplate of armor around his loins, over his chest, and on other parts of his anatomy for the attack. His own concern of being rejected often produces an anticipatory fear which is telegraphed and communicated to the line manager. Because of this anticipation of rejection, the training amateur comes on either *too long, too hard or too strong* and often times as an ingratiating apple polisher seeking the doles which might be passed off as personal acceptance. The training manager who constantly fears failure could well become a self-destroying person and a self-destroying manager of an important function.

In these cases of "breastplate armor" attack and defensiveness, the self-ful-



filling prophecy often comes true, namely, both the purveyor and the training idea for change are rejected and scuttled. This is quite similar to one's pre-marital courting days wherein if you are a suitor and expect to be rejected by your potential lover, this may become a reality because of the non-verbal as well as verbal messages you send in the dating relationship.

We simply ask the trainer to take a look at his own attitudes prior to walking in to the line manager's office. Do you have a "do or die" attack and a possessive attitude? Do you see yourself as an effective human being or do you expect that he will shoot you down in flames? For your own effectiveness you need to decide *before you enter that manager's office* whether you are there to consult with him or whether you have your "selling shoes" on and you are going to telegraph that you are "on the make" at his expense.

It is also incumbent on the professional in training to ask himself what vocabulary and whose values system he tends to communicate through... his values system or the manager's? The amateur who does not do his value and vocabulary homework and search the manager's background and *his* experiences, including his hangups and his tender spots, is in for a presentation destruct before he even completes his proposal. How sensitive are you to your audience's tender spots, his specialized needs and operating values? Have you walked

into the line manager's office without your homework done or have you entered the relationship with a genuine and authentic need to counsel, guide and listen to what is really operating?

Effectiveness as a training manager is to put your training concept into *his* frame of reference, *his* value systems, *his* vocabulary as well as *his* operating needs! Think in terms of cost as well as payoff, specifically the cost to this individual, his budget and the payoff *for him*, not yourself! Accept the behavioral fact that the line manager has little or no interest in payoff for you. He is

Learn to work in terms of his operating world, his values, his informal political world realities

interested in being effective himself. The question is whether he perceives you as an individual who is genuinely concerned about his needs and his career effectiveness. Do you walk in the line manager's moccasins? Or, do you climb over his back for your own visibility and for your own conquest? Can you work on his emotional side of the desk in terms of how *he* perceives his operating world and can you work effectively in terms of *his* values, operating needs, and informal political world realities?

What typically happens to you, emotionally, when one of your line managers gives you "a hard way to go"? The training amateur bores in deeper, sells even harder, stops listening, gets into a debating contest and tries desperately to *logically* prove his point. He becomes psychologically myopic, preoccupied with the barriers he is emotionally experiencing. He tends to hear only what he wants to hear and tends to perceive only what he wishes to perceive. He becomes less and less effective as he continues to talk, reaching the point of interpersonal irritation and, finally, training program rejection.

When the professional training manager meets resistance, he stops! We experi-

ence presentation rejection through different signals from our audience. Every line manager is different and has his own way of turning somebody off. Some of the things you might be alert to are loss of eye contact, pinpointed hostility against sub-points within the presentation, away from the main issue at question and direction of attention to somebody else or something else within the immediate environment.

For example, during a recent presentation we made before an executive vice president of a *Fortune 500* corporation, the executive in question opened his desk drawer and began staring into it. It turned out that he had a television screen in that drawer which displayed running stock market quotations. It would have been insensitive for us to proceed with a presentation on organization development when it was obvious we were competing with "the bulls and the bears" on an unseen ticker tape. In this particular incident, the diversion was accepted as having value to that company officer. By being sensitive to *his* need to divert attention, it displayed to him that we were interested in him as an individual and it simply delayed our mutual planning for a few minutes of stock market conversation which had

If you lose his attention, this is the time to listen, and ask informational questions

value to him. If we had not stopped in a sensitive manner, we would have lost that relationship and the organization development program which he needed.

If you begin to lose the attention of your line manager during the presentation, or if he begins to give you a hard way to go, this is the time to listen and to increase your skill in asking informational questions. It is the time to stay open, not the time to bulldoze and to increase selling. It is the time to practice the two "d's" of resistance handling — diagnosis and dialogue. Only through diagnosis of what is happening between

the two of you at that point in time and a genuine interest in an open dialogue can you hope for that ongoing relationship and the possibility of being of professional service to his operational area. Remember the quotation attributed to Alex F. Osborn, "A fair idea put to use is better than a good idea kept on the polishing wheel."

The failing training manager is that individual who lacks the sensitivity to know (1) when and how to introduce change, (2) when to tactfully and tactically question, (3) when to listen and (4) when to leave and withdraw from the interaction. These are positive acts within the repertoire of the training professional even though they may be a tough course, emotionally, to follow. However, these vital ingredients pave the way for ultimate, active and positive results, if these behaviors and attitudes on the part of the training manager are executed with authenticity.

In our experience in organization development and manager training, we have been impressed that the majority of relationships of the training professional with line managers are effective, personally rewarding and excellent. When line managers call attention to an omission

Look at resistance in light of constructive suggestions, rather than as personal rejection

which you have made within your proposal, for the most part they are trying to fill in the gaps to make it more palatable and acceptable to them for your *mutual* welfare. When line managers suggest that you are "missing the boat," often they are really trying to help your proposal succeed by recalibrating your organization compass. If you look at resistance in the light of constructive suggestions, rather than seeing their ideas as personal rejection, you are on your way to being more effective as a training professional. Few training managers can understand the scope of an organization and all of its

informal political world problems and potentials as thoroughly as the executive who lives within his organization.

We have to listen for more of these emotional nerve-end organization signals, signs and cues so we can be effective in terms of operating realities. Only by knowing, listening and accept-

ing these realities within an organization's informal political world can we be in a service position to have line managers accept our organization development proposals and only then can we be effective as change agents. Are you willing to have your "organization compass sensitivity" recalibrated in a helpful way by your line manager?

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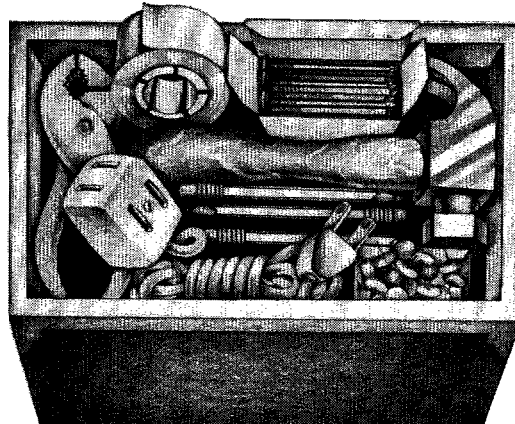
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