

Training Is Not Entertainment

I just read your interesting article, “The Need for Speed,” in the February issue of *T+D*. An individual from another company sent it to us as something to consider in our training work.

It contained good information, but I am afraid that I must disagree with the overriding view of the piece. The article stated that we must make e-learning entertaining or have it compete with other electronic media to produce successful training for future generations. If we do not, then the twentysomethings will not be motivated to learn the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs effectively.

It is an arcane view that training must be entertaining—or even short. Game manufacturers, television producers, and moviemakers spend billions of dollars to produce entertaining visualizations to keep us in our seats for very short periods of time. Even so, most of these productions are boring beyond tolerance and resort to disgusting and bizarre content to maintain our attention.

Motivation is the key. Training is based on job need, not whether or not it is interesting enough for an overly preoccupied twentysomething to sit still for 15 minutes.

If training is done right, the need for its information will be so great that learners will break down doors to get to it, even if it were written on matchbook covers. Training as the product of performance improvement analysis will be welcomed because workers actually need it.

The problem is that so much of what trainers do is for naught. Not because it is not entertaining, but because it is not needed. Then we wonder how we can keep twentysomethings—and adults alike—interested in superfluous information. What’s next? Remakes of *Tom and Jerry*, or *Fear Factor* surreptitiously dubbed with training content?

Training, unlike other professions that progress in a straight line, is forever going round and round in circles. Trainers fret about entertainment and spend liberally until it gets too expensive, then they return full circle to performance-based products that actually help employees do their jobs better. Trainers themselves seem ineducable. Thanks for the article.

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Thought-Provoking Article

I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful article, “Leveling the Levels,” in the February issue of *T+D*. The article by Allison Rossett was very helpful and enlightening.

I really liked the examples she provided to support her ideas in the article. These are great ideas to apply to our work and then to ask as we develop training and assessments. Some of her questions addressed how we can “erase the dichotomy between learning and work” and “integrate measurements with learning, support, and work.” The discussion was interesting and thought provoking.

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Levels of Evaluation

Allison Rossett’s comments ring true, especially her treatment of Level 1 evaluation in the “Leveling the Levels” article. We denigrate Level 1 evaluation by using terms like, “smile sheets” and the like. But the truth is we still use them.

I like to think it is because reactions are likely to be the only opportunity we have for determining the accessibility of our learning content. Kudos to Dr. Rossett and to *T+D* magazine for updating tried-and-true methods in current contexts.

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The Changing Face of Evaluation

I found Allison Rossett’s “Leveling the Levels” article very insightful.

Dr. Rossett is certainly right on target, as usual. Those of us in organizational development must continually strive to ensure that our methods and tools keep up with the rapid pace of the

technological advancements in the workplace. This is certainly true when it comes to training as well as evaluation.

Thank you for publishing cutting-edge articles like this.

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Informal Learning

Eric Sauve's article "Informal Knowledge Transfer" in the March issue of *T+D* is correct in its analysis.

The workplace is undergoing a transformation and one consequence of that transformation is a shift in resources from formal learning settings to informal situations.

Our research shows that this is a global phenomenon and that the role of the trainer becomes one of supporting, accelerating, and directing learning interventions that meet organizational needs and are appropriate to the learner and the context.

However, we should be clear that technology is an enabler in the process, not a total solution. Informal learning communities—as advocated in the article—may well make a contribution in knowledge-intensive industries but they will not work everywhere. They assume a prior sophistication on the part of the learner and a willingness to participate. In most cases, learning will continue to require a sympathetic and supportive human intermediary, which is good news for the profession.

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Mailbox

Wrong Message

You undermine Elaine Biech's message and expertise by using a photo of her with her pink shoes in the March issue of *T+D* magazine. *T+D* set the women's movement back a few decades by choosing to ask her about her shoes.

I think you were trying to portray her as fun and quirky, but instead, she comes off as off-balance, obsessive, and quite possibly in need of some professional help.

In the four questions you chose to ask her, you had four opportunities to gather some information about what she does and how she does it, but instead, you chose to ask about her shoe collection.

I find this an especially bad choice, given the quote on page 37 about females succeeding in management, "Mentoring programs are likely the only remedy to bridge the gap..." You had a chance to portray Ms. Biech as a mentor to women in business. Instead, you portrayed her as a kook.

Thinking I might be overreacting, I passed the article to several people in my office. An informal survey of their reactions shows that after reading the first paragraph under her name, people are willing to consider her advice, but after seeing the photo and reading the last two paragraphs, they aren't.

Micromanaging different shades of shoes, duplicating some pairs several times, owning more shoes than one person can wear, or worse, actually wearing all those shoes does not paint her as a responsible, rational decision maker.

I fear you've inadvertently answered your cover story question, "Why are women still scarce in the executive suite?" Obviously, it's because people still insist on asking them stupid questions.

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Elaine Biech Responds

Patricia, thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts about my picture and interview in the March Long View column. I certainly appreciate your concerns, but I view the issue differently. I believe the women's movement has come a long way—at least far enough so that we can wear pink in the boardroom if we choose. My clients judge me on the results I produce—not what I am wearing. I noticed that *T+D* also asked Elliott Masie about his colored jackets in January's Long View column. I wonder if anyone had similar concerns for him?

A half dozen more traditional settings existed for the photo shoot, including the dozens of books I have written and edited. And although the setting chosen was certainly not what you would expect to see in *T+D*, it certainly was a lot more fun! Work should be fun. None of us should have to go "to work"

in the morning. We should all love our jobs so much that we get up and go to play every day! I love what I do. The photo shoot and the final picture added more pleasure to my life.

All of us—men and women—need to be appreciated for who we are as individuals and for the results we contribute to our employers and our clients. I respect your thoughts and believe that an appreciation for cognitive diversity ultimately produces astonishing results—for all situations.

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My Heroine

Great profile of Elaine Biech in the March issue. She's my new heroine.

Elaine provides living proof that a woman really can have it all—a successful training organization, the respect of her professional peers for her many contributions to the field, and a collection of fabulous shoes that convey her colorful personality and creativity.

As a baby boomer, I launched myself into the workplace in 1970. I've endured the navy blue interview suit, then those weird silk rosettes on my tightly buttoned up white shirt collars (the female necktie, which looked awful on all of us), and a slew of golf shirts with company logos that hung to my knees because they were designed for someone six feet tall.

It is heartening to realize that as a society, we may finally have come to the point when we as women can just get on with who we are—worthy contributors—and not worry about showing a little pizzazz in what we wear. This diversity training stuff must really be working because it's nice to see that trainers are walking our talk by showcasing someone who is successful in the business, yet not stamped out of some innocuous mold.

I don't presume to fill such large shoes as Elaine's (and I mean this in the figurative sense only), but Elaine and her footwear collection create a bright pink and shiny beacon of inspiration pointing the way to my own dream of success.

I've got the photo hanging on my bulletin board. It puts a smile on my face every time I see it.

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Mailbox

We welcome comments about *T+D* articles.

Send letters to mailbox@astd.org or pketter@astd.org.