Practicum

Guiding Beliefs and Daily Beliefs

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Corporate culture is elusive. When I decide to investigate a firm's culture, I start by distinguishing between the company's fundamental guiding beliefs and the daily culture.

People have all sorts of beliefs, from profound to trivial: beliefs in God, in the sanctity of the family, in private enterprise, in their local ball club, in the water cooler as the best place to go for the straight story at work, and in watching television before bedtime. Some of the beliefs are about the minutiae of daily life. Others are about areas of major importance to an individual, an organization or society at large. The loftier—guiding—beliefs provide the context for the practical, nitty-gritty beliefs of everyday life; that is, *guiding beliefs give direction to daily beliefs.*

In the family, for example, there may be a guiding belief that it should be a strong and cohesive unit, central to the lives of its members, all bonded closely together in regular and meaningful ways. From this guiding belief, then, stem many daily beliefs about meals, vacations and other activities. When it comes to meals, for instance, there may be daily beliefs that meals should be eaten together, rather than according to individual schedules; that nobody begins eating until everyone is seated; that grace be said before eating; or that there be no television during meals. In the same way at work, there may be a guiding belief that every employee should have the opportunity to develop to his or her maximum potential. Daily beliefs at work, then, might stress honest and regular feedback, meaningful performance evaluation, promotion from within and excellent development programs.

Guiding beliefs, themselves, come in two varieties. There are *external* beliefs about how to compete and how to direct the business, and there are *internal* beliefs about how to manage, how to direct the organization. Taken together, they are the roots and principles upon which the company is built, the philosophical foundation of the corporation. As fundamental precepts, guiding beliefs rarely change. They are held in the realm of universal truths, and are broad enough to accommodate any variety of circumstances.

Daily beliefs, on the other hand, are a different species. While they are equally part of a corporation's culture, they should not be confused with guiding beliefs. Daily beliefs are rules and feelings about everyday behavior. They are situational and change to meet circumstances. They tell people the ropes to skip and the ropes to know. They are the survival kit for the individual.

One additional remark about guiding beliefs is important here, and that is: How many beliefs should guide a company? In principle, there is no magic number. There are as many guiding beliefs as can be identified and either lived by or aspired to. Based on my experience, however, the optimal number is three, and the maximum four. With five and beyond, people will only remember about three, and many will have a different three. (How many of the Ten Commandments can you name, and how long have *they* been around establishing themselves?) With truly healthy companies, everyone—employees, customers, shareholders, competitors, government and the public at large—knows what the company stands for. Employees, especially, have the guiding beliefs in the forefront of their minds, and are able to apply them easily to their daily behavior. And everyone can remember three.

Training and Recessions Don't Mix

Despite the need to improve productivity to help overcome the effects of the recent recession, many companies cut back in one of the ways to do just that: They reduced employee training efforts. A recent poll of senior human resource executives at 100 Fortune 500 companies showed that 45 percent cut back their employee training to meet the need to reduce expenditures, reports Andrew Sherwood, president of The Goodrich & Sherwood Company. Of those firms that cut back, 13 percent eliminated training altogether while a whopping 87 percent reduced the number of courses of study given. This had the effect of reducing training staffs by one to four people.

The companies that reduced training, for the most part, plan to stand pat with the lesser program despite the improved economy. Only 40 percent of them plan to build staff and training programs.

Only one firm in the survey added to its training staff during the recession in recognition of the need to train people to increase productivity and profits.

A Few Good Leaders

Submitted by Phyllis Bonfield, Administrative Management Society, Willow Grove, Pa.

In filling management positions, employers generally rate an applicant's interpersonal and leadership skills as more important than experience, education or enthusiasm finds a survey on management job-search techniques conducted by the Administrative Management Society (AMS).

On the other hand, management-level employees tend to believe employers rate work-related experience as the most important element in an applicant's portfolio, reports the survey, published in the September issue of AMS' monthly magazine, *Management World*. While 34 percent of the employers agreed that experience is most critical, a larger number (43 percent) of the employers look for leadership potential and an ability to deal with people when hiring management personnel.

To find out about popular job-search practices, AMS polled 200 employers with hiring responsibilities for their companies and 150 management-level employees who shared their experiences on the best way to get a new position. The standard resume and cover letter still rate number one as the best way to get a job interview according to 36 percent of the employers. The second most popular method is a referral from another employee in the company (22 percent), followed by a referral from a search firm, employment or college placement office (17 percent).

From the employees' viewpoint, the most successful way to obtain a job is through contacting business associates, as 30 percent of the respondents say. The recommendation by 18 percent of the employees is to use employment agencies or search firms, and 16 percent say classified ads are best.

Employers and employees do agree that career growth and a challenging job opportunity are most important for job satisfaction. Though money is important to employees, only 10 percent rate it as most important in selecting a job. However, 50 percent say they would not take a new position without a salary increase.

Management World's special job search report is available for $5.00 by writing to "Management Search," Administrative Management Society, 2360 Maryland Road, Willow Grove, PA 19090.

Trouble in Paradise

Hard to believe, but the good life in California may not be all it's cracked up to be. How else does one explain the recent passage of a bill by the Golden State Assembly that seeks to enhance the self-esteem level of its citizenry? If Californians need a self-image boost, is there any hope for the rest of us?

Low self-esteem, the legislature found, is the root of the following evils: violent behavior, poor grades, all forms of discrimination, teenage pregnancy, authoritarian social stratification, drug and alcohol abuse, powerlessness, emotional repression, poor health and lethargy.

The legislature (pending State Senate approval), therefore, is going to do something about it. Public education on the role of self-esteem in human behavior, identification of factors influencing self-esteem, and determining ways the government can help develop and perpetuate self-esteem among Californians are just some of the proposals the wizards of Sacramento have devised to combat the state's apparently sagging morale.

A pretty tall order for a state government, you say? Maybe. But the legislature is so confident of success that it voted a mere $750,000 to work on the problem. No matter what you think their chances are, you won't be able to accuse them of excessive modesty.

Block That Nostril!

Try this simple exercise next time you're having trouble working on budget figures: Close your right nostril and forcibly breathe through your left. If all goes well, this will shift your thinking processes from the right brain (creative, intuitive) to the left brain (cognitive, mathematical). Now you should be able to cope with balancing your figures.

This advice is based on conclusions reached by neuro-science researcher David Shannahoff-Khalsa at the Salk Institute for Biological Sciences in San Diego (see September's issue of *Psychology Today*). "When the airflow is predominantly through the right nostril," he discovered, "greater relative amplitudes of EEG activity are found in the left hemisphere, and vice versa."

Shannahoff-Khalsa believes that "by consciously recognizing how the rhythms of hemispheric dominance affect the mind, and by altering its state by simple breathing exercises, it may be possible to take a personal role in regulating our mental lives."

All this may explain why severe head colds make *any* thinking difficult.

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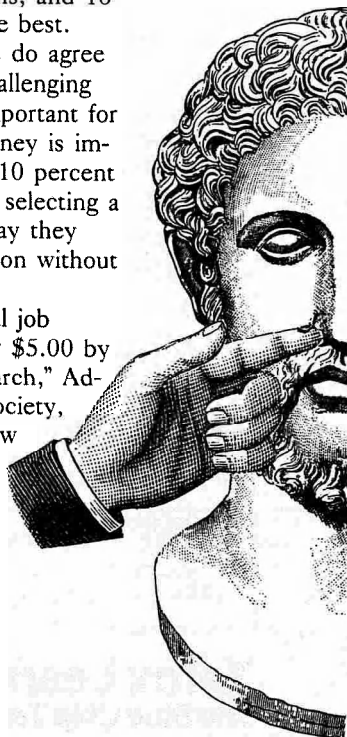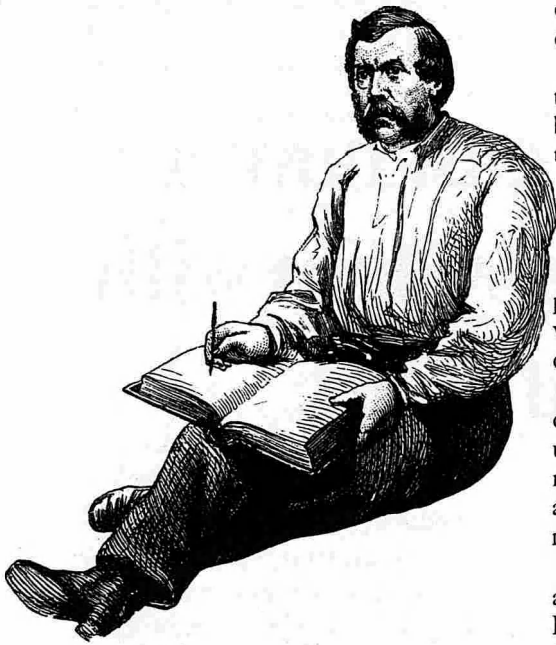
U.S. Execs Rate Business Writing

Submitted by John Rost Associates, New York.

One of the "most neglected" skills in the world of business is the ability to write, according to a majority (79 percent) of 218 executives who participated in a new, nationwide survey by Communispond, Inc.

"This feeling of negligence stems probably from the limited training executives receive in high school or college even at the M.B.A. level," said Bruce B. MacMillan, vice president of the management consulting firm specializing in business communication.

"And it partly explains," he added, "why 44 percent of the surveyed executives said their major goal is to 'write more clearly, in a better organized way.'"

Asked what they would "most like to improve" about their business writing, 28.5 percent cited "spending less time generating documents."

The time factor, in executives' minds, is closely related to increased management productivity, Mr. Mac-Millan said. Nearly 43 percent of the executives gave business writing skills (on a scale of 1-10) a ranking of "9 or 10" in helping to increase their productivity. An even greater percentage (49 percent) also rated those skills "9 or 10" in importance to their personal career advancement.

Most executives (75 percent) said they either "hate" or merely "tolerate" business writing. Over 50 percent rate their own skills as "fair or poor." But they were even more unanimous in evaluating the quality of business writing they receive and read. Nearly 60 percent described it as "fair or poor," and they had several other words for it: unclear, wordy, disorganized, impersonal.

The Communispond survey included a cross section of middle and upper management from small, medium and large companies in the accounting, marketing, finance, sales, research and public relations areas.

Copies of the survey summary are available from Communispond at 485 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

Breaking Down the Barriers

Submitted by Alicia Miller and John M. Williams of Technical Communications, Sterling, Va.

Talking computers are putting to rest many misconceived notions regarding the training and hiring of handicapped people. One of the most notorious beliefs is that it is costly and seldom worth the effort to train handicapped people because constant assistance and monitoring of their work is required. Another idea held by the uninformed is that moderate to severely handicapped people find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with today's rapidly changing technology.

Deane Blazie, a national computer scientist and leader in developing speech products, says, "The world is changing for disabled people. Computer technology is enabling them to do the same work non-disabled people do. Talking computers, for example, are becoming the eyes, ears and voice for both blind and speech impaired people."

Blazie's comments are vigorously supported by businesses across the country, as they discover that handicapped people using computers are as productive as able-bodied workers, and in some cases, even more so. This is especially true when they are trained in conjunction with existing educational and vocational rehabilitation programs. In fact, as handicapped people demonstrate their creative and technological skills, it becomes evident that they are an important segment of America's work force.

Currently, the computer industry is taking the lead in developing resources and in providing the technology to train handicapped people. Rehabilitation centers, colleges, universities and many self-help organizations are using computers in career and vocational education. Disabled people with various disabilities are taking advantage of these opportunities and computer technology.

Wayne Hall works for Able Electric Company, El Cerrito, Calif. He has diabetic retinopathy and has been blind since 1979. Since August 1982, he has been using an Information Thru Speech talking computer (ITS) for accounting and inventory.

"With my ITS," says Hall, "I can hear what I cannot see. ITS is my eyes. I can listen to the information in front of me a word, line, sentence and paragraph at a time. A page at a time too. I can check facts and figures and have immediate recall for verification of information. It is the most valuable tool I have to work with."

Manufactured and distributed by Maryland Computer Services, Inc., in Forest Hill, Md., ITS is one of a number of talking products used by blind, speech-impaired, autistic and other disabled people. IBM, Apple, Digital and others also have talking computers and terminals.

In selecting a talking computer or terminal, there are special features to look for. They include unlimited speech vocabulary, the ability to use standard CP/M programs without program modifications, its ability to use such high level languages (BASIC, COBOL, FORTRAN, Pascal), information and retrieval abilities, intelligent terminal capabilities, disk storage ranging from 250,000 to 8 million characters and an adjustable rate of speech that can range from about 45 to 720 words per minute.

"In speech technology, we have the

start of a social revolution among disabled people because computer technology is enabling them to compete with non-disabled people," said Mary King, department of rehabilitation, Pleasant Hill, Calif. She introduced Hall and other disabled people to talking computers.

King encourages rehabilitation people and the manufacturers of computers to sing the praises of computers to the entire nation. Only then, she believes, can we reach the understanding that is necessary to make a difference in both the lives of disabled and non-disabled people. She believes that too many people still view computers as science fiction.

"The production of synthetic speech is not difficult to understand. Once we understand the different ways it can be produced, we can start to feel more comfortable with it and look for ways to adapt it in our lives," says King.

The type of synthetic speech, for example, used by ITS is produced by a Votrax VSB synthesizer board that is capable of vocalizing 64 different phonemes (phonetic sounds such as th, sh, long and short vowels). A microprocessor converts letters and phonemes into digital codes corresponding to these phonemes, employing standard English pronunciation rules. For example, the silent "e" rule tells the microprocessor that an "e" followed by a space or by punctuation and preceded by a consonant that is in turn preceded by one or more vowels, should be silent. Approximately 400 such rules enable ITS to produce intelligible full word speech.

The Georgia Computer Project is an example of how the computer industry is working to make handicapped people a part of the work force. It uses a number of Total Talks, talking terminals, to train severely handicapped students to become computer programmers.

Through the project's Rehabilitation Center in Southeast Atlanta, approximately 17 students, including many disabled veterans, graduate yearly and are placed in professional positions in and around the metropolitan area.

Wayne Ogar, admissions coordinator for the project, which is associated with Goodwill Industries, says, "What is nice about the terminals is they are very flexible. Our quadriplegic students use them, too."

A Warning on Transplants

Submitted by John Diebold, chairman of The Diebold Group, Inc., an international management consulting firm based in New York, and author of Making the Future Work *(Simon & Schuster, 1984).*

Europe is in danger of learning the wrong lessons from the U.S. success in high technology.

The modish term "Unternehmer-Kultur" (enterpreneurial culture) is often invoked in the drive to turn every city, state or region (particularly if it lies in a river basin) into another "Silicon Valley." But the approaches being used all too often ignore the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the people in question, while attempting to impose an alien U.S. or Japanese formula.

For any of the three players—Europe, Japan or the U.S.—to hold up a mirror and copy the strategy of either or both of the others is a sure losing strategy.

Europe has enormous strengths, beginning with its human and cultural endowment. I know from 25 years' experience at working with the completely German staffs of Diebold Deutschland GmbH and with the staffs of our client organizations that there is no shortage of imagination, creativity and know-how. There are, however, significant cultural differences among Japan, Europe and the U.S. Each must look hard at its own strengths and weaknesses and, from a candid and rigorous analysis, devise its own unique strategy in the high-technology race.

The U.S., for example, lacks the institutional and cultural conditions that have enabled the Japanese to subordinate the interests of the individual to the good of the country. The U.S. also has a business/government relationship quite different from the Japanese. Nonetheless, the U.S. has certain inherent strengths, among them the ability to fail and start again with no stigma attached. Mavericks and loners have a better chance of being accepted in the U.S. than in either Europe or Japan. These qualities of the American character—often called

"Yankee ingenuity"—have been strengthened by the tax system, the mobility of the labor force, the wide base of university education, the interchange of university and business research, and other characteristics of the U.S. economy. Venture capital has been an important element, but it has succeeded only because of the cultural environment in which it has become available.

I see two dangers in the current headlong pan-European plunge into high technology. First, too much is expected of venture capital in a political and cultural environment in which risk-taking is discouraged and failure is not tolerated. Venture capital, by its very definition, implies risk and speculation. In the U.S., venture capitalists know that many new enterprises will fail while only a few good ones will succeed. When the mediocre or substandard firms are supported, the system is so heavily burdened that even the winners cannot thrive.

Secondly, too much emphasis is placed on high technology, when it is only one of the elements of economic well-being. Of the more than 30 million new jobs that were created in the U.S. during the 1970s, the majority were in small- to medium-sized businesses that could not be characterized as high technology. Neither large corporations nor government contributed any appreciable amount to that 45 percent job increase. No more than 1.5 percent of the 600,000 new businesses created in the U.S. each year may be termed high-technology companies. Most of the new jobs were in low-technology manufacturing and in services. In other words, the Unternehmer-Kultur must in no way be limited to the production of silicon chips, but must include many far less glamorous occupations as well.

The reason high technology is important in advanced industrial societies is not that it creates new jobs in the production of advanced electronic components and equipment (although this is an important and growing area of U.S. employment). Rather, the crucial role of high technology is in boosting the economic competitiveness of more and more industries quite apart from the high-technology arena. The marketability of the automobile depends increasingly on the quality of the computer system

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that controls it. The same can be said of home appliances, machine tools and a widening array of otherwise low-technology products.

High technology, although important, is only part of the picture. Industrial strategies that rely too heavily on high technology are bound to fail, just as surely as mimicking Japan's MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) or U.S. venture-capital firms (almost none of which exist in Japan) is doomed to fail.

SSSSSSSlide Over Video

Submitted by Henry L. Berman, manager of video services at The Foxboro Company in Mass. He writes, consults and teaches on the subject of audio-visual production.

Consider the 35mm slide. This tiny fragment of celluloid, mounted in a two-by-two-inch frame, is one of the most versatile training tools available. Yet, in contest with video, the slide often suffers an unfair loss.

To help the slide regain its rank as a #1 medium choice, the following list of slide benefits was assembled.
■ *Slides give the illusion of reality.* When it comes to presenting the real thing, few media convey the impact of slides. They can show a product in its entirety or in the most intricate detail. They can linger endlessly, or through multiple exposures, change in rapid sequences to build excitement and suspense.
■ *Slides offer first rate color.* While video offers color, its fidelity varies with the camera, the lighting and the quality of the recording equipment. (Unlike slides.)
■ *Slides are easy to manipulate.* They can be changed and rearranged with no more equipment than the two fingers required to hold them up to the light. Their sequence for a presentation can be revised quickly and efficiently. Video, in comparison, requires expensive monitoring equipment simply to review a piece of tape, and editing facilities to make the most minute change.
■ *Slides are flexible.* They can accommodate various presentation needs. By the simple process of rearranging, adding or omitting slides, a program can be tailored to virtually any audience.
■ *Slides are easy to present.* Slides require only a simple projector and, in the absence of a screen, can be projected onto a wall. Video, on the other hand, requires a playback deck and monitor. Not only must this equipment be compatible with the tape, but in the absence of a large-screen monitor the audience size is limited. Use of a large screen television generally means a choice between losing image resolution and using an expensive projection system. Slides provide large and sharp images at the same time.
■ *Slides are universal.* The Kodak Carousel has become the de facto standard for slide projectors so slide users enjoy an almost certain availability of the appropriate projector. Eliminated are questions about VHS, U-Matic and Betamax; Speed I, II or III. And, if the material is going overseas, there are no format compatibility problems (NTSC or PAL) to worry about.
■ *Slides are easy to produce...* Slide shows rely on subject knowledge and good style—and very little equipment. With a camera and film, you're ready to shoot. Video production, however, calls for a studio, decks, monitors and more—all costly and demanding much experience.
■ *...and easy to revise.* Care must be taken with materials needing regular updates—for example, a program dealing with the organizational structure of a company constantly undergoing change. Such material may be more practical to develop on slides than on videotape. In choosing the medium, consider the need for easy and inexpensive revision. The slide may well be the best candidate.

How to Keep More Trainers Home

Submitted by George M. Piskurich, director of the department of training and education at the Mt. Sinai Medical Center of Cleveland in Ohio.

Add it up for yourself. Between airline fares, hotel bills and restaurant checks, the average cost of sending a trainer out of your site for one week can easily exceed $2,000 and can cause substantial wear and tear on the trainer.

The solution to the problem of bulging expense reports and lost productive time is simple: for off-site instruction, keep your *live* trainers home, and send *self-directed* trainers to the field.
They sleep little and save a lot
Whether they are videotapes, computer tapes or slides, these centrally designed, packaged training programs travel well—and cheaply. Once at their destination, they require minimal accommodations, and they make no phone calls home.
They keep flexible schedules
Self-directed trainers are always available, and willing to work day and night. They arrive at the branch manager's convenience, then stay for training vacationing staff and new employees, long after a live trainer would have left for home.
They're willing to share the classroom
Of course there are situations that demand live presentations; however, training often can be handled just as effectively, and with more control, by using a self-directed training package. Even when personal interaction is necessary, the amount of presentation time required of the live trainer can be decreased dramatically by sending a packaged program in advance.
They exercise quality control
The self-directed program ensures that all your trainees—no matter where they are—receive exactly the same information. So once you've perfected your presentation, trainees nationwide can benefit—and offer equally excellent results to your company.

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