

Six Signs of Computer Trouble

High staff turnover, delayed systems and cost overruns are clear indications to corporate management of problems in the information services department. Are there other equally important, but less obvious signals? Roger Sobkowiak, president of Software People Concepts, a New Haven, Conn. consulting firm, suggests senior management watch for six signs of trouble:

■ **Dissatisfied end-users.** In many companies, managers outside the MIS department have difficulty dealing with computer "techies." Such communication problems affect everyone and can hurt performance. More companies are learning that people-sensitive managers can handle direct contacts with others from nontechnical departments. "Techies" should be given different responsibilities.

■ **Old technology.** MIS professionals are frequently frustrated by lack of up-to-date computers and routine applications. Trained on more sophisticated systems, they often seek jobs elsewhere rather than persuade management to acquire new hardware or reassign them.

■ **Maintaining old programs.** Industry estimates indicate that programmers typically spend two thirds of their time

maintaining old software. Such work is repetitious and boring, as well as a major source of staff dissatisfaction. In such situations, a software problem is at the root of a human resource problem.

■ **Underused equipment.** Many computers, acquired for desk-side use, may be operating 100 percent of the time but using only 10 to 20 percent of their capability. In some situations, the office automation professionals and programmers may not have been given adequate training or incentive to do more. In other cases, a \$10,000 machine may be performing tasks that could be handled by a \$2,000 machine.

■ **Resistance to new technology.** Managers and staff can be slow in accepting new equipment or ways of doing things, and some are capable of sabotage. Companies that fail to address such people problems imaginatively always will encounter difficulties with new software and hardware.

■ **Technical obsolescence.** Automation and new technology usually cause a certain degree of job insecurity. A changeover in computer systems, for example, may make a part of the MIS staff technically obsolete overnight. Sophisticated new

programs enable nonprogrammers to perform more and more tasks, and thus threaten many MIS people. A company that ignores such fears will encounter plenty of unanticipated problems because it did not deal with the people issues.

"Traditionally, senior corporate management was content if the MIS department appeared to be under control. Because they themselves had seldom come up the information-services route, they hesitated to get very involved," says Sobkowiak, who was director of human resources for programming with ITT prior to founding Software People Concepts. "While a hands-off posture may have been defensible when MIS served only a narrow purpose in the organization (such as taking care of the payroll), it is scarcely prudent in the mid-1980s. Today, information services and related high technology can provide a competitive edge and play a major role in a company's strategic positioning."

Since 1980 there has been growing sophistication in how companies evaluate the MIS department and its performance, believes Sobkowiak. This is reflected by the tough technical and business questions management now asks. But, despite such progress, companies have not kept pace in dealing with the human resources implications. "Most," he says, "are far behind when it comes to translating technology issues into people issues or in knowing how to optimize the introduction of new technology."

"Companies can no longer say to employees, 'Here's the hardware and here's the software. Now work with it.' That sort of attitude, still far from uncommon, can hurt performance in a variety of not-so-obvious ways—to say nothing of staff dissatisfaction, high turnover, low productivity and systems that always seem to be late. A wide gap exists between lip service paid to human resources concerns and real action. On top of that, few companies even possess a core of professionals equipped to handle such problems.

"Until companies face these issues squarely, performance problems will persist and continue to grow."

How to Select Sales Training Programs

Sales organizations often take a seat-of-the-pants approach to buying a sales training program. They favor the year's hottest off-the-shelf package because it's fashionable or take an established program because it's accepted in the business and is a low risk for buyers. But they often make their choices without doing research to determine what the sales force really needs.

There's now a better way, according to Porter Henry & Company. To help companies better organize their approach to buying sales training, the New York-based consulting firm has designed the "Sales Training Decision Maker," a questionnaire consisting of 20 tough questions to ask before buying a sales training program.

The questions are designed to get managers and executives who buy training to think about whether an off-the-

shelf program or a custom approach makes the most sense, or if they need to conduct research to identify the real needs of the sales force.

Among the questions the "Sales Training Decision Maker" poses are:

- Does the success of your company's new-product launches depend heavily on sales-force involvement and skill?
 - Is your company implementing sales strategies that will require the sales force to sell to a new set of decision makers, sell a new concept or change its sales approach?
 - Does your company have a complex sales process (long selling cycle, committee decision making, technical sale)?
 - Do you need flexible training that can satisfy the training needs of all salespeople—from rookies to pros?
- The "Decision Maker" allows participants to score their own answers, which can be used as a guide in deciding what type of sales training to buy. It's an instant recommendation on what direction to consider—buying a custom-

designed program that's specifically geared to the company's market conditions, environment and sales force, taking a generic, off-the-shelf package or conducting more research on sales needs before making any decision.

A copy of the "Sales Training Decision Maker" can be obtained free by contacting Michael Gold, Project Writer, Porter Henry & Company, 370 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017

Cancer and Job Discrimination

Five million Americans have had cancer. The good news is that three million of them have survived for more than five years. In fact, the long-term cure rate is now 50 percent and climbing. Many of these survivors are returning to the workplace. But all too often, what they find there is discrimination by employers who still cling to the



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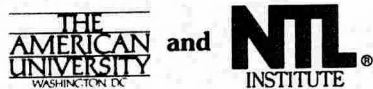
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myths and fears that surround this disease, reports an article in *Employee Relations and Human Resources Bulletin*, a publication of the Bureau of Business Practice, Waterford, Conn.

With more employees returning to work as a result of the increasing rate of cancer survival, management must prepare itself to deal with the problem of unequal treatment of former cancer patients in their organizations, says Barbara Leeds, Coordinator of Worksite Counseling & Consultation Service for CancerCare, Inc., New York. (CancerCare specializes in counseling cancer patients, their families and employers.) Leeds told the *Bulletin* that employers should not be lulled into thinking that basic fair-employment practices will fend off charges of unequal treatment. The attitudes and myths that surround the disease often contribute to a subtle form of discrimination. For example, being oversolicitous to an employee with cancer—or the opposite—avoiding him or her completely because of awkward feelings.

Leeds points out that a company's overall attitude toward employees who develop cancer and job applicants with a cancer history is critical. It's up to employers to set an example by promoting a positive and realistic attitude about cancer within their organizations. Educational programs, such as those offered by CancerCare and The American Cancer Society, are available sources of support for companies that would like help getting started.

The CancerCare program focuses on counseling cancer patients returning to work and helping employers learn how to deal with cancer issues. In Leeds' opinion, the employee seminars organized by CancerCare to address the issues of prevention and detection of the disease are an especially effective part of the program because they:

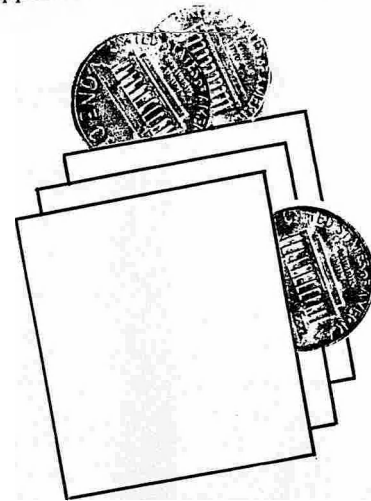
- help bring issues into the open and encourage people to deal with their prejudices and fears about cancer;
- promote early detection, which is vital to recovery and which may spare an employee and the company a serious cancer experience;
- provide a forum where the company can demonstrate a positive attitude toward former cancer patients.

CancerCare also conducts "brown bag" seminars, described by Leeds as "lunchtime" sessions, during which the focus is on dispelling cancer myths and trying to stimulate examination of per-

sonal attitudes about cancer. Employers are also encouraged to review their personnel practices to determine whether they discriminate against cancer patients.

Counseling and discussions needn't be limited by the availability of outside support, Leeds cautions. "Companies can take the idea one step further and establish their own in-house groups to deal with the factual and emotional aspects of cancer," she suggests.

If Congressman Mario Biaggi (19th District, NY) has his way, discrimination against cancer patients won't be just poor policy, it'll be illegal. Biaggi has authored H.R. 1294, which seeks to amend Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to outlaw employment discrimination against an individual on the basis of a cancer history. Matthew Martinez, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities, where the bill has been referred, has joined Biaggi as cosponsor of the bill. The bill is now in hearings. Fifty house members strongly support it.



Cheap Media

Submitted by Edmond T. Parker, Aramco, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Want to save money in your presentations? Try the diazo print, an economical alternative to photography and printing. The unit cost of a chart-size print is approximately \$8 to \$12 in small multiples. There is no increase in price with quantities of two, three, five or a dozen copies. Diazo prints come in either black or blue on white and in large sizes— 3' by 4' would pose no

problem. This factor alone gives them a decisive advantage over many other media. Furthermore, diazo print-making capability is very common in industry; many trainers can make the prints within their own company at negligible cost.

"Diazo print" is something of a generic name for several different processes that produce blue or black lines on white paper. In the trade, they are also called whiteprints (to distinguish them from blueprints). If your engineering department cannot produce prints, a glance at the Yellow Pages under "blueprints" will reveal shops in every city and large town—and most shops that make blueprints also make diazo prints. Often, same-day service is available. As for cost, \$8 or \$10 should be average for a 3' by 4' diazo, although the cost may be higher if the original art is small and must be enlarged to the desired size.

In one case I needed to reproduce one page from a five-sheet flip chart. The flip chart was needed by five trainers

simultaneously. Obviously, printing would have cost a fortune. We solved the problem easily and cheaply with diazo prints and were able to use professional illustrations and design effectively.

Before creating original artwork for a chart or poster, speak with the blueprint (or whiteprint) shop. Ask whether they have any special requirements. Find out whether they use standard sizes for diazo prints. If so, ask what the dimensions of the standard sizes are. Next, determine whether the shop has the capability of enlarging originals to create the desired size of diazo. Finally, get quotations on price. As with any other service or commodity, prices will differ.

Original artwork is prepared, as for any visual medium, keeping in mind a few special considerations:

■ *The original artwork should be in black and white.* Diazo prints do not allow for color reproduction, so color originals are unnecessary. Moreover, the contrast of black ink on white paper reproduces

best. Other dark inks besides black will reproduce, but black is best.

■ *The original artwork should be done in the same dimensions as the intended final format.* This will provide a sharper, cleaner image. Also, a full-size original is easier, quicker and cheaper for a shop to reproduce in diazo.

■ *You can make a large-format diazo print from a small original.* The lines on the print will not be as sharply defined as they are on the original. The larger the original artwork, the better the line definition on the reproduction.

■ *If the original art is smaller than the ultimate format, keep proportions in mind. A proportional scale is the right tool for calculating the appropriate dimensions.*

■ *Even a very small form can be transformed into a large-format chart by using the diazo print.*

■ *The final chart or poster can be either horizontal or vertical.* The artist, trainer and instructional designer can decide whether horizontal or vertical format is preferred. The layout and dimensions are planned accordingly.



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■ Clean, camera-ready artwork is required for diazo printing just as it would be for a printed or photographic reproduction. The diazo machine is somewhat more forgiving than a camera, but original artwork should be clean and free of extraneous marks.

The diazo print is not perfect. It is comparatively flimsy; its images appear slightly soft-focus. Nevertheless, if multiple copies of a large-format chart, poster or flip chart are needed for training and cost is a consideration, diazo prints are a practical and economical medium.



Cheap Media II

Submitted by Ron Baynes, Baynes Communications, Inc., Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

If your job involves teaching people to use new, high-tech tools and systems, you are familiar with the problems that arise when you have to make instant revisions.

Michael Clavin, technical training manager of Honeywell's Communications Network Division in Dallas has found an answer. When he needs to plug new slides in, or even to create a completely new show, he shoots everything on Polaroid transparency film which he develops instantly using a compact autoprocess system. And if new original graphics are needed, he prepares them using a computer and simple graphic software.

To make instant slides, Clavin photographs his originals (charts, schematic diagrams and computer graphics) with a 35mm camera. For black-and-white work, he shoots with POLAPAN CT 35mm, a continuous-tone film rated at ASA 125, or with POLAGRAPH HC

film, an ASA-400, high-contrast film designed for reproduction of line art and copy. He makes color slides on POLACHROME color transparency film (ASA 40).

The system requires no darkroom and is easy to use. Clavin photographs originals on a copy stand. Rewinding the film, he inserts the cassette and its accompanying processing pack into the autoprocessor, a unit about the size and shape of a desktop tape dispenser. To develop the film, he turns a crank until the film is completely wound. After a two-minute pause he winds the film back into its original cartridge. The film is now processed, dry and ready for cutting and mounting, using a Polaroid slide mounter that comes with the system.

The speed and simplicity of the process has allowed Clavin to come up with new or revised presentations—literally on demand. Recently, the division installed a new Honeywell PABX in its Dallas head office and Clavin was asked how soon he could come up with

a slide show that would explain to employees how the system worked and what it could do. That was on a Friday afternoon.

Clavin promised Monday morning delivery. Actually, he did much better. That night he took most of the available camera-ready art home along with the autoprocessor and film. Using his computer's graphic program to round out the coverage, he produced new visuals complete with lettering and images. Then, he mounted the hard copy print-out and other camera-ready art on a copy stand, photographed them, autoprocessed the film and mounted the slides. He finished the job in time to catch the late Friday-night news.

Computerized Company Counselors

Submitted by Elizabeth Rosen, technical staffing specialist, AT&T Bell Laboratories, Short Hills, N.J.

Company counselors' initial encounters with computers generally involve manipulating massive amounts of complex data using foreign information-handling tools and techniques. It's no wonder that this "casual" user group welcomes rescue by computer experts when similar computer-based tasks come along. However, those counselors not rescued may experience a surprisingly delightful payoff for their suffering. The computer network provides stratospheric possibilities in enhancing counselors' effectiveness.

In my corporation, almost all employees use computers. As a career counselor, I have used the computer network as a hotline for career counseling, a medium for collaboration and an effective mechanism for sharing information.

The computer network is not the place for highly confidential, long-term, in-depth psychotherapy. However, the possibilities for work-place career coaching are vast. Sometimes it's hard for employees to make the time or find

Decision Making.

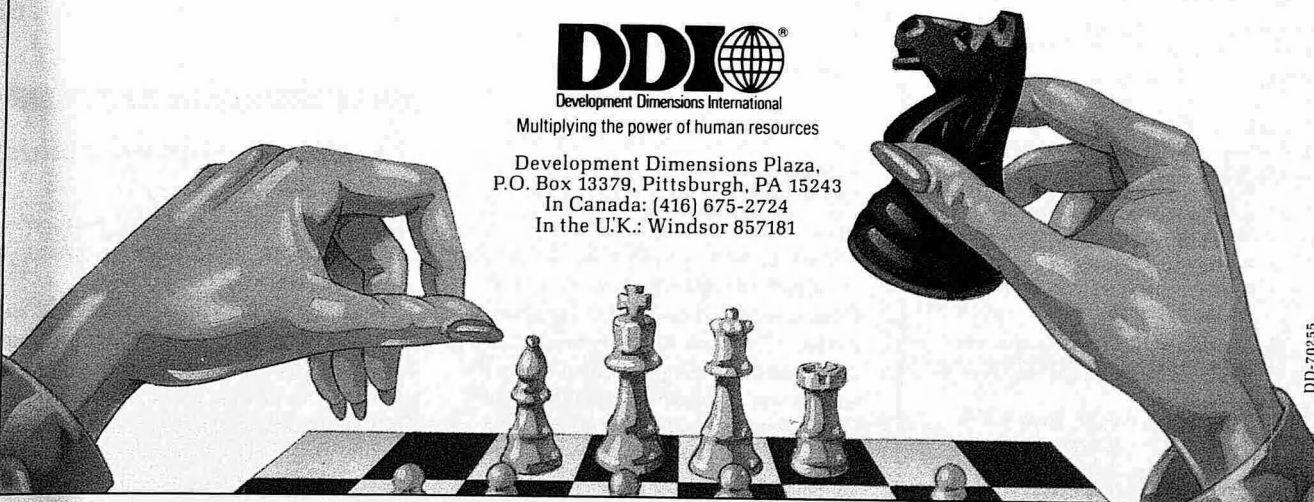
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the privacy for such counseling. Busy schedules can crowd out even simple phone calls.

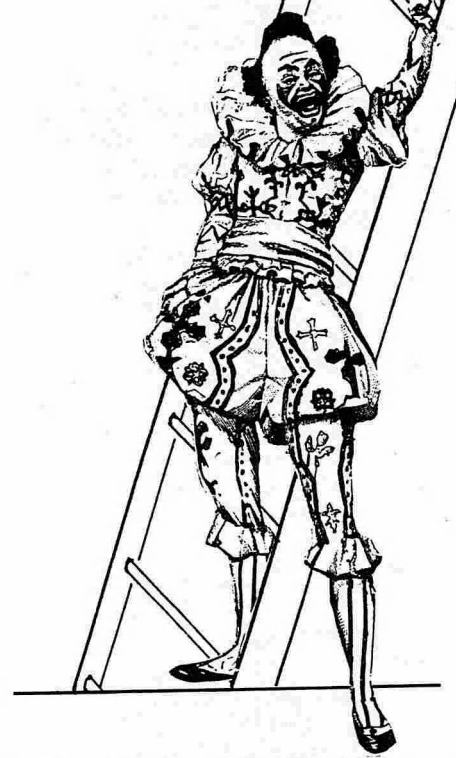
But following an initial session or phone conversation, questions, updates and documentation can be exchanged using electronic mail. Quick and positive responses not only enhance the employee's attitudes regarding him or herself but also project a responsible and caring corporate image. Employees' requests for information regarding corporate procedures and practices gives counselors an opportunity to share and further define the language of the corporate culture.

Employees can also be coached in the use of computing tools for career development. For example, on-line task and time organizers are generally available in computer users' libraries. Counselors can also provide resume guides and automatic formatting and proofreading tools to employees requesting help moving within the corporation. Computer systems administrators can help counselors locate and customize these tools for special project applications.

All sorts of information can be exchanged via computer. Advertising internal job openings helps find qualified people within the company, aids technology transfer and can boost employee morale. People can learn about commonly shared corporate goals and business needs—and become responsive. In a recently established job-posting campaign implemented by our corporate career-counseling organization, electronic mail receipts returned to job advertisers contain career coaching assistance for interested applicants.

Laugh Your Way Up the Career Ladder

If you believe that business is no laughing matter, the results of a just-completed nationwide survey of corporate attitudes toward employees with a sense of humor both will change your mind and bring a smile to your face. Conceived by Robert Half International, a financial executive, accounting and data-processing recruiter, the survey was conducted by Burke Marketing Research, Inc., and based on interviews with personnel directors and vice presidents of 100 of America's 1,000 largest corporations.



The respondents were asked: "Do people with a sense of humor do better, the same as, or worse at their job than those people who have little or no sense of humor?" The overwhelming majority, 84 percent, felt that employees with a sense of humor do a better job than those lacking that quality. When they were asked about the people in their own company, 32 percent of the participants in the survey said that top management had the best sense of humor, while 28 percent awarded that honor to middle managers and 18 percent to other staff personnel.

In commenting on the results, Robert Half said that, in his experience, "People with a sense of humor tend to be more creative, less rigid and more willing to consider and embrace new ideas and methods. In today's business environment, if you haven't got a sense of humor, the joke could be on you."

A Classroom of the Future

Submitted by Steve Cross, staff manager—media relations, AT&T Communications, Basking Ridge, N.J.

With a growing employee base, Wang Laboratories, Inc., was faced with training backlogs for some of its key courses. To reduce these backlogs, Wang turned to teletraining. Companies large and small increasingly use advanced teletraining technology to deliver and manage the training of

employees in everything from short technical primers to multi-day curriculum courses on broad policy, management and technical subjects.

Teletraining can take many forms. The concept refers to the use of a mix of technologies to integrate the planning, delivery and management of a training program. A full range of teleconferencing equipment combined with AT&T network services permits a speaker to deliver both the voice and visual components of a training program comparable to that of a classroom environment. Wang Laboratories, set up a multi-point teletraining network to expand its training capabilities from audio-only teletraining. Wang now connects various company sites, enabling participants to talk with each other and see accompanying visuals on Wang computer screens.

Wang enhances these training sessions with its own equipment, such as mini-computers, personal computers and a picture imaging computer which scans images, diagrams and drawings,

and transmits them. In addition, videotapes and slides at some sites—and hard-copy hand-outs and student materials—round out each teletraining session.

"We had some very clear business reasons for implementing teletraining," says Rebecca Warshawsky, Wang's project leader for teletraining. "In our industry, there's a good deal of continuous change, and we have to be able to get information on new products as well as enhancements and updates to people in the field. Teletraining is one way we felt we could accomplish that."

From a cost standpoint, adds Warshawsky, teletraining also has produced impressive gains. She explains that teletraining costs for Wang are less than a quarter of the expenses associated with sending employees to a central training location.

"With teletraining, we can accomplish in one day what would normally take three to five days," she says. "We reach a much larger audience."

Moreover, participants react very

positively to the teletraining medium.

"We have an evaluation system, and it shows that our people have not been intimidated at all by this medium," she emphasizes. "By the end of this year, we expect to reach about 1,500 employees and customers."

Does teletraining really work? Researchers at the University of Wisconsin and Johns Hopkins University have found that "teletrained" students perform at least as well as those taught on-site in face-to-face classes. Numerous pre- and post-training test results compiled by AT&T and others demonstrate that the technique is ideally suited for many human resource development needs.

Please send items of interest for In Practice to Robert Bove, Training & Development Journal, 1603 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

University Associates 1986 Training Events

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

- San Diego**
- Jan. 20-24 Designing Experiential Training Modules
 - 28-29 Essentials of Organization Development
 - 30-31 Helping Individuals Respond to Change: A Training Approach
 - Feb. 3-4 Successful Strategies for Managing Conflict

MARCH

- San Francisco**
- UA '86 Pre-Conference Events**
- 10-12 Effective Team Building
 - 10-14 Understanding Group Dynamics
 - 13-14 Producing Results with Others
 - 17-19 The Essentials of Situational Leadership
 - 17-18 Doing Strategic Planning
 - 17-18 The Manager as Team Builder
 - 17-18 Video & OD: A Production Workshop
 - 19 HRD Director's Day
 - 19 People Performance Profile
 - 19 Behavioral Interviewing
 - 19-21 **UA '86 Conference**
 - UA '86 Post-Conference Events**
 - 22 Video: An OD Intervention
 - 22 The Essentials of Situational Leadership
 - 22 Managing Organizational Change
 - 22 Japan: The Most Misunderstood Country
 - 24-25 American Productivity Tour
 - 24-28 Successful Consulting
 - 26-28 Improving Work Groups

APRIL

- Chicago**
- 3-4 Becoming a Professional Trainer
 - 7-11 Designing Experiential Training Modules
 - 14-18 Enhancing Trainer Style
 - 21-23 Effective Team Building
 - 24-25 Helping Individuals Respond to Change: A Training Approach

MAY/JUNE

- Atlanta**
- 5-9 Understanding Group Dynamics
 - 13-14 Essentials of Organization Development
 - 15-16 Successful Strategies for Managing Conflict
 - 19-21 Improving Work Groups
 - 22-23 Doing Strategic Planning
- Toronto**
- May 26-30 Successful Consulting
 - June 2-3 Managing the Human Resource Training Function
 - 4-6 "An International Conference on Managing Change"
 - 9-13 Designing Experiential Training Modules
 - 16-17 Becoming a Professional Trainer
 - 18-20 Improving Work Groups

JULY

- San Diego**
- 9-11 Effective Team Building
 - 14-18 Understanding Group Dynamics
 - 21-22 Becoming a Professional Trainer
 - 23-25 Improving Work Groups

AUGUST

- Cincinnati**
- 11-15 Enhancing Trainer Style
 - 18-22 Successful Consulting
 - 25-26 Doing Strategic Planning
 - 27-29 Effective Team Building

SEPTEMBER

- San Francisco**
- 15-19 Designing Experiential Training Modules
 - 23-24 Successful Strategies for Managing Conflict
 - 25-26 Essentials of Organization Development
 - 29-30 Helping Individuals Respond to Change: A Training Approach

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

- New York**
- 6-24 **HRD '86 Pre- and Post-Conference Events**
 - 7-10 **HRD '86 Conference**
- Toronto**
- Oct. 27-31 Enhancing Trainer Style
 - Nov. 4-5 Essentials of Organization Development
 - 6-7 Doing Strategic Planning
 - 10-14 Understanding Group Dynamics
 - 17-18 Successful Strategies for Managing Conflict

DECEMBER

- San Diego**
- 4-5 Doing Strategic Planning
 - 8-12 Successful Consulting
 - 15-16 Essentials of Organization Development
 - 17-18 Successful Strategies for Managing Conflict



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