

# Training & Development Journal

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## Issues

### Tell Us What You Think

Men and women come out of the military every day with good skills: the abilities to work with people, understand organizational structure and management, and assess situations accurately. Many have actual HRD experience. One would think that the HRD profession would look on them favorably.

In his letter below ["Not Being All You Can Be"], Ray Belongie says that former military personnel with HRD backgrounds are frowned on by HRD professionals in the private sector. Is he right? In your experience, how does military HRD experience play in the business world? Do you look for it, or does such experience give you bad vibes? Or is it a non-issue, something that doesn't affect you one way or the other?

We'd like to hear your opinion on this or any other issue that is important to you. Send your letters to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

### Not Being All You Can Be

I recently have completed 20-plus years of military service, am armed with a master's degree in human resources management, have four years of teaching graduate management courses and experience as a lead trainer for train-the-trainer modules, and have five years of curriculum design, development, and presentation. With that experience I began what is called euphemistically a second-career transition. A funny thing happened, however, on the way to the job market. I knew that I would not simply step from the mil-

itary to the business sector and have my credentials automatically accepted. But I was not prepared for what appears to be an extremely negative perception of former military personnel who want to work in people-related fields such as human resource management and organizational development.

When the rejection letters started coming in, telling me that I did not appear to be qualified to do what I have been doing for the past five years, I figured that my resume and cover letter were the culprits. Since then, I have spoken with other former military personnel who have tried to get into human resources training and development, and with several executive search agents who specialize in human resources. I finally realized that the perception of former military personnel by the business sector is not very positive, with regard to people skills, human resources, and human relations.

Most people have little contact with the military services and don't realize that the services, particularly the Army and Navy, have been pioneers in many areas, such as organizational effectiveness and organizational development. Change-of-command transition modules have been used in many units, and organizational climate assessments have been performed. The Situational Leadership Module is a staple of many military courses. Even Theory Y leadership and participative management have their place. Until recently, both the Army and Navy had special units to assist commanders with OD strategies to improve the health of their units.

In the area of human relations, the services are on the front line in dealing with racism, sexism, and sexual harassment. In Florida, a unique school trains personnel in human relations and interpersonal skills. The school trains members from all five branches of the military and has a worldwide reputation.

The image of former military per-

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sonnel as Captain Blighs, Beetle Baileys, or Gomer Pyles is not an accurate one. But because of it, there is an untapped resource of highly trained personnel with excellent people skills. Many have been instructors and facilitators, and also have been managers and supervisors at all levels of their service structures. From my experience in teaching entry- and midlevel managers from companies in central Florida, I have learned that the people problems found in business-sector organizations—conflicts concerning values and age, motivating subordinates, and dealing with bosses and peers—are similar to those in the military.

Perpetuating the stereotype of the Prussian military officer results in a loss to both business and the military. It is a loss to the individual who seeks to take the skills he or she has gained and apply them elsewhere. It is a loss to the employer who does not recognize the potential of that individual to be a positive asset to the organization.

*Raymond M. Belongie  
Palm Bay, Florida*

## Technical Training's Leading Edge

Your article on technical training was timely ["Technical Training in America: How Much and Who Gets It?" November 1988].

A congressional subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Doug Walgren, recently declared that America's technical and economic leadership depends more on properly trained and utilized technicians than on engineers. The subcommittee's study focused on the efforts of community colleges to make the American workforce the most skilled in the world.

Technician programs in community colleges do cover applied subjects, but, contrary to the statement

in the article, they are not simply job-specific. Community-college graduates receive intense training in both theory and applications.

According to articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, most firms no longer accept military or trade-school electronics training, but in fact require an associate degree from a public community college.

Technicians with such advanced credentials come to industry expecting career advancement and further training. Company training is often watered down and should be overhauled to be of college level.

*Glen W. Spielbauer  
Dallas, Texas*

## Beyond Drugs

In response to James W. Schreier's article "Combatting Drugs at Work" [September 1988], I first must say how pleased I am to see this issue addressed.

I do feel that it is prudent to mention that a comprehensive training program on personal problems in the workplace may better serve those we train. While drug and alcohol abuse and chemical dependency receive (deservedly so) great attention, other psychosocial and medical problems seem to take a back seat. That includes family or marital discord, emotional and psychological problems, compulsive disorders, caring at home for the elderly or invalid, chronic and terminal illness, and stress—all of which have a negative effect on employee productivity and safety.

Supervisors must be trained to recognize and to refer troubled employees through effective performance-management techniques—not to diagnose or to counsel, but to refer and to monitor employee performance.

For trainers who are developing a program for troubled employees,

employee-assistance program professionals are excellent resources, as well as the Association of Labor-Management Administrators and Consultants on Alcoholism (ALMACA).

*Sally A. Johnston  
The Washington Hospital  
Washington, Pennsylvania*

## Supplier by Any Other Name

When you hear the term "vendor," what images do you conjure up? Some people think of a scruffy street merchant with a hot-dog cart. Others imagine someone in a loud, checkered suit, yellow shoes, and a battered straw suitcase, who is eager to sell them something they don't want.

That's the basis of concern of the HRD Services Industry Task Force, chartered by ASTD to address issues important to the folks who provide the HRD community with products and services. Those people don't like being called vendors.

According to Task Force Chairwoman Cally Curtis, the term is neither fair nor accurate. Recalling the history of the HRD profession, Curtis points out, "We and our customers have grown too sophisticated and value-conscious for such a label to have any merit. Our responsibility is to satisfy needs, not push products. And we know it."

To fortify their position, the Task Force members looked up the *American Heritage Dictionary* definition of vendor. A vendor (or vender) is a "peddler or salesman" or "vending machine." The word's roots are from the Latin, meaning literally "to give sale."

The definition for peddler was even more discomfoting: "one who peddles for a living; a hawker." The word is from Middle English, *peddere*, meaning covered basket. It seems that the straw suitcase has

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been around a long time.

The inference of peddler/vendor was "to travel about selling wares . . . door to door . . . to occupy oneself with trifles."

"That's the problem with labels," Curtis says. "They may seem harmless, but they can perpetuate an image—or the ghost of an image—that does not square with reality. In our case, 'vendor' just doesn't apply."

The Task Force then researched the word "supplier," a derivation from the Old French *suppliere*, meaning "to fill up, complete." To supply is to "make something needed, desired, or lacking, available for use . . . to fill sufficiently; satisfy . . . to make up for a deficiency."

Would HRD services industry professionals be happy if everyone called them suppliers? The Task Force agreed that the term would be more accurate and acceptable than "vendors."

Kevin O'Sullivan  
Organizational Dynamics, Inc.  
Washington, DC

## Gender Specifying

For as many years as *Training & Development Journal* has been available to me, I have considered its contributors and editors to be, for the most part, on the cutting edge of issues.

What happened to editorial responsibility for Roger Plant and Mark Ryan's article "Managing Your Corporate Culture" [September 1988]? In this month of this year, referring to "man" when the real subjects are men and women is hardly cutting-edge quality. It is difficult to imagine a reasonable excuse for anyone to continue using sexist language, but even if we do choose to excuse some writers on the feeble basis of habit, what excuse do the

editors of a top-notch journal propose for themselves?

It has been a long and arduous battle to win the small sop of reading "he or she" where "he" formerly dominated. I expect more of the *Journal* than complacency about the subtleties of language that have subsumed women under the category of man.

Rita Bokma Keller  
Pictorial, Inc.  
Indianapolis, Indiana

[Editor's note: The *Journal* avoids gender-specific language whenever it can, and changes its own language and the language of its contributors to make general address to its readers. Problematic singular subjects and objects (such as "person," "individual," or "manager") are replaced with plural ones (such as "people" or "managers") in order to avoid the irritating and insensitive "be," "him" and "his," and the cumbersome "he or she" that would follow. If we can't change the singular, we use the latter formula. We generalize gender to satisfy the reader's desires and feelings; we do it, also, because we believe in it.

In the case Ms. Keller cites, however, we used "man" as a taxonomic label and for rhetorical purposes. The article defined three hypotheses, the titles of which were "Rational, economic man," "Social man," and "Self-actualizing man." *Man*, we felt, was a general noun: man was to men and women as lion is to lions and lionesses, and goose to ganders and geese.

From a narrow grammatical standpoint, we defend our use of the word in that instance. We could have worked around it, it's true, but another word or rewording would have sapped meaning from the specific, singular, generic idea of man, the noun that denotes the species. One could argue that such anthropological jargon is an

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*indulgence in a management article, but that's another matter altogether.]*

## Volunteerism

*(The following is in response to the September 1988 "Tell Us What You Think" concerning the encouragement of volunteer programs in business.)*

We at HOST (Hands of Shared Time) of Montgomery General Hospital are totally in favor of business organizations instituting formal programs to allow their employees to donate their time to volunteer projects.

This year, an employee of IBM spent three months with us to research subjects for a conference. Several employees from the C&P Telephone Company help us at special events. Since volunteerism is down nationally, allowing employees time off would greatly benefit organizations that totally rely on volunteers to help others.

HOST, sponsored by Montgomery General Hospital and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is an interfaith, intergenerational volunteer program to provide supportive services for isolated adults over sixty years old in their homes or in nursing homes.

Our volunteers, ranging in age from 15 to 85, provide such services as companionship, shopping, light housekeeping, transportation, and respite care. There is no charge to the older person for services.

We gladly welcome the opportunity to explain our program fully to any business organization interested in instituting a volunteer program.

*Theadora Marcot  
Hands of Shared Time  
Olney, Maryland*

## Thinking of You

I miss your on-target editorials in the *Journal*.

*James L. Evers  
James L. Evers Associates  
Nanuet, New York*

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