

USING PUBLIC SEMINARS AND INSTITUTES

how to incorporate outside training into your management development program

How does a training director take full advantage of public seminars and institutes? What approach should he use to make them an effective part of his overall management development program?

This article suggests that such outside training can both supplement and reinforce the internal training program, if the training director can skirt the hazards involved.

In this article, "outside training" refers to public seminars conducted by such organizations as AMA and many university extension services, as well as institutes, workshops, courses or what-have-you held by professional societies, trade and business associations, management consultants and others. The key word here is "public." Programs conducted by these outside organizations specifically for the company are largely an extension of the inside training program, and will not be treated here.

The path to management development is a tangle of booby-traps and there are many avenues that can be taken — many approaches that can be used — and a correspondingly large number of ways to spend the training budget without getting the results you want.

In terms of hard dollars, outside training can be a major part of the annual budget. In a budget squeeze, training directors may be hard-pressed to justify these expenses unless the whole subject is treated within the framework of an overall pattern of management development.

JOB TRAINING ONLY PARTIAL

Let us start out by recognizing that managers are developed primarily by the challenges they meet and overcome on the job, coaching of their bosses and sometimes even by the more subtle assistance given by their subordinates.

But on-the-job development is only partial development.¹ An airline pilot sharpens his skills in the cockpit, but both he and his passengers need the security of some basic foundation which can be built only on the ground. A

manager with only his own experience to guide him may be gathering additional experience in new circumstances, at the expense of the future of his company and his people.

To training falls the responsibility of exposing the manager to the vast storehouse of knowledge assembled by other managers: of techniques tried and proven (perhaps tried and proven unworkable), of insights gained over an entire career, of principles useful in making work go more smoothly.

To training goes the job of helping managers stay ahead of the rising curve of the information explosion, of providing them with opportunities to prepare themselves for new responsibilities, of equipping them with newer and sharper tools to get their own jobs done.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES NOT WEAKNESS

Certainly, the training director can do much of this in his inside training sessions. But he is not confessing any weakness when he determines that these sessions cannot provide all the training that his management needs. Perhaps his sessions must be relevant to several layers of supervision, or perhaps they must generalize to supervisors in several departments, and most certainly they must be presented to from a dozen to perhaps hundreds of supervisors — all of whom have their own needs.

On the other hand, the right outside session meets the very specific needs of one man. Thus, the newly-appointed buyer in a small purchasing group gets a well-founded picture of the purchasing function in a week of concentrated study at a seminar, or a warehouse manager gets valuable insight into the capabilities offered him by a newly-installed computer, or a project engineer brings himself up to date on the latest developments in pollution equipment. In none of these situations could the training director be of much assistance, since the particular need of this one man does not justify the expense of de-

GERARD J. ENNIS
*Supervisor of Management Development
Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant
Atlas Chemical Industries, Inc.
Chattanooga, Tennessee*

veloping an in-plant training program.

Too, the training director is "all things to all men," a true generalist who knows enough about any field to know where to look for more information. Occasionally, his "students" need exposure to specialists in their own fields. There are times when simply accumulating more general information is not enough for the technical man, the labor relations specialist, the marketing man, or the transportation manager. These men, and others like them, occasionally need to sit at the feet of the masters so that they can deepen their own experience. The most valuable men have knowledge that is deep as well as broad.

FOR TOP MANAGEMENT

Moreover, outside training is often the only way to handle the sticky problem of training the very top management. A session the training director organizes may be just as professional as that of the outside expert, but the top men need the company of their peers to get the most out of group sessions. Subconsciously or not, top managers will not participate fully in in-plant sessions, or raise questions when they have doubts, or try a new technique, perhaps in role-play. Their "image" is that of the absolute problem-solver before whom all problems are reduced to utmost simplicity, and shades of gray are resolved into starkest black and white. They, too, have their own kind of peer group, and they can relax and open up their minds to new concepts only in the presence of comfortable company who pose no threat to their own image.

Often, too, a top manager will accept a new idea more readily from an outside source than from one of his own employees. It is no secret that consultants are often able to sell to top management ideas which members of their staff have been pressing unsuccessfully for months. I don't think that the presentation of the idea is any more clever or comprehensive; it's simply a variation of the old "grass is greener" syndrome.

OUTSIDE TRAINING ADVANTAGES

Let's look at some more advantages of a planned program of outside training.

Regularly sending supervisors at all levels to outside training can infuse new ideas throughout the company. (If your company doesn't *want* new ideas, then you've read too far already.) Try as he might, the training director usually finds himself preaching the accepted way, the school solution, the company philosophy. Unless checked, this constant exposure to the voice of the company tends to create stereotyped, unidirectional managers.

Depending on the company, this outside training can waft a soft breeze of new ideas into all levels, or even brew up a storm of change that ventilates the mustiest corners of outdated procedure and outmoded system.

Participants return with new ideas from both seminar leaders and fellow participants as well. Often the fellow in the next seat has a solution to a problem which has bothered the manager for a long time. Many seminars encourage participants to bring in problems for discussion. Just as with jigsaw puzzles, riddles and cryptograms, sometimes the fellow casually peering over your shoulder can put his finger on the key to the mystery.

These "outside ideas" offer perhaps the greatest difference between the public seminar and the inside training program. If only company men attend, discussion revolves around "the way we did it before" — which may be exactly the wrong way to do it now. And strangers look at problems more objectively, while fellow managers often inject personalities by trying to find out *who* is right, rather than *what* is right.

CHANGE OF PRESSURE AND PACE

Also, in an inside training program, the pressure of time hangs ponderously over every participant. If sessions are held during his normal work hours, he comes back from the class to a desk piled high with reports and phone messages. If he

had to leave an important job in progress to attend the session, he is only physically present at the session. More often than not, his mind is on his job; he is a mental "drop-out." It is a wonder that any learning at all takes place under these circumstances.

Outside training removes much of this pressure. The manager can plan his work so that there are few if any loose ends when he leaves for his seminar. He arranges his schedule much as he would for his vacation, so that his mind is more or less relieved of worries about the work, and is more receptive to the training. Oddly enough, he often returns from what might normally be considered a grueling seminar schedule as refreshed as though he had actually been on vacation. He has had the time for considered reflection.

Bernard Baruch stated that he got away from some of his toughest problems by turning his attention to other equally tough problems. The managerial mind does not need a complete stoppage of thought so much as an opportunity to stretch itself into hitherto-unexplored by-ways.

INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT

There is yet another advantage of off-plant training. No training director is ever blessed with enough instructors and conference leaders. Managers returning from seminars might be called on to conduct sessions as part of the inside management development program, thus exposing a wider audience to some of the ideas developed at the seminar. Not that the entire seminar program need be repeated — that would not serve the needs of many of the audience. But a sketch of the high points, or an in-depth look at just one of the facets of the program might well fit into the training director's overall program.

As a side note, this task helps the participant at an off-plant seminar concentrate his thinking on what he is learning. By all means, this arrangement should be discussed with the man before he leaves, so that he knows that he will be

called on when he returns. The conference leader learns more from a class than the participants; and the need to prepare to instruct helps him organize his notes and his thinking while he is away, and perhaps will force him to press the seminar leader to clarify a point or organize the material in a different way so that the attendee understands more fully what he hears.

ANCILLARY BENEFITS

In addition to these benefits, which are directly related to management development, the training director and plant management could reasonably expect some ancillary benefits. On occasion, a manager attends a public seminar in hopes of coming back to the plant with the answer to a particularly vexing problem. It is not rare that he returns with the feeling that other companies are having the same problems as his, and perhaps not approaching them as well. There is some consolation in knowing that you're not alone in the wilderness.

On the human side, being sent away for outside training is some tangible expression of management's interest in a man's own development. A company footing the bills for a public seminar is betting a hundred to perhaps over a thousand dollars that the man will be worth more to the company in the long run. It is a vote of confidence in his ability to grow. Lip-service about how highly the company regards him is replaced by hard cash for plane tickets, hotel bills and registration fees.

And perhaps an off-plant seminar gives the lower-ranking supervisor his first opportunity to get out and speak for the company, explaining its policies and defending its practices. This sort of activity often strengthens his identification with the company, and might make a career employee out of a job-jumper.

"HEAD HUNTING"

Incidentally, some personnel directors might fear that job recruiters use these seminars as happy hunting-grounds enticing hot-shots away from the company

with promises of better chances elsewhere. There is no denying that some of this goes on, but generally no man has been lured away by a "head-hunter" at a seminar unless he was already looking to jump at the first opportunity. The opposite tack — keeping company men away from such occasions of sin for fear they will be spirited away — is more likely to drive a good man to other companies which take a more enlightened approach toward managers and their development.

MATCHING MAN AND SEMINAR

Up to this point, I have referred only in general terms about what advantages you might expect from sending a man to outside training. But heed this warning: not just *any* training seminar will suit our man. The man and the course must be carefully matched if your company is to get the most out of this opportunity.

First, the man. He cannot be a quota-filler, sent merely because Company X makes it a practice to send N men away each year for seminars. Top management (or at least departmental management) must select which man must be trained, and determine the results they want from the training. Obviously, this rule assumes that there is a long-range management development plan in effect within the organization, so that management knows what knowledge and skills a lower-level manager needs to move up the ladder (or simply to stay even with his job in the rapidly changing marketplace). Many of these needs can be filled by experience on the job, but some can be filled only by going off the job to a more academic atmosphere.

Once the man has been selected and the specific need identified, the training director's responsibility becomes to select the proper course to meet the need. The man himself should not be permitted to select his own seminar, because his own selection may be governed solely by which organization has him on its mailing list. The training director, obviously, should be familiar

with the wide range of organizations offering training, and be in a position to evaluate their relative effectiveness in this particular situation. He should have as much say here as he has in the in-plant training, because outside training is but a part of his overall training.

THE QUESTIONS TO ASK

To help management most in how to spend this money, he should look for the answer to one important question about any proposal for outside training:

"Why is *this* man going to *this* seminar at *this* time?" This question will force a thorough thinking-out of what management expects from its money. The question focuses first on the man. What are his needs? What is his potential? What does he already know about the subject? Is there a more likely man to send instead?

Next, the training itself. What seminar is most likely to meet the man's needs? Who sponsors it? What is the reputation of that organization? Is it an orientation session, or a workshop? Is it structured to permit attendees to air their own problems? How much will it cost? Who will lead the session and what do you know about him? Where is it conducted, and how often? Is the training held in more than one city?

Last, the time. Is there some sudden problem that requires quick training to solve? Or is this a lacking in the man which might be filled more economically by a course at a local university? Can the man attend a near-by meeting in a few months, or must he be sent immediately, wherever it is?

The man must have some preparation before he goes away. His line supervisor should tell him specifically what to bring back from the course. If this training is part of a normal performance appraisal and management development process, he should know how the training will boost his potential. If a particular plant problem dictates his selection, the manager should discuss the problem with him and arm him with specific questions.

ly, telling the man that he is expected to assess the seminar might be his last reminder that he is being sent away not for a holiday-with-travel-pay, but with a definite objective in mind. The evaluation should be in the light of that objective.

If the man can take the evaluation form with him, it helps focus his attention exactly on how the course material may be applied to his situation. Noting specific points in the seminar that apply to his situation is merely another application of the old training principle of repetition.

Faithful following of the required form may also point out additional training needs. This form may be the only contact the training director has with the man; and that man may point out, based on knowledge of his own department, that what he has learned could profitably be conducted in-plant.

At budget time, a file of these evaluation forms may give a quick answer to management's legitimate query about what the company gained. If the man and the course have been carefully selected and matched, the comments on the form should give concrete evidence that the company got full value for its money.

Such a form also helps in the training director's continual evaluation of training sources. A number of negative evaluations from attendees should tell the training director that a sponsoring organization is not delivering what it promises. On the other hand, a number of positive comments gives the training director confidence that a given session will meet a man's particular needs.

FOR PAY-OFF

All in all, this feedback makes the training director more knowledgeable about his field, shows top management his concern that only necessary expenses are made for training, and — most important — puts him in a better position to advance the growth of those depending on him for guidance and assistance.

After all, that's the real pay-off in this training business.

REFERENCES

1. Willard E. Bennett's book *Manager Selection, Education and Training* (McGraw-Hill, 1959) is a landmark treatment of the components that enter into a management development program.
2. This form is based largely on one devel-

oped by Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick, Professor of Management Development, University Extension, The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. Dr. Kirkpatrick's booklet *Obtaining Maximum Benefits from Outside Management Development Programs* (Department of Commerce, University Extension, The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee) contains some further thoughts on how organizations can obtain maximum benefits from outside management development programs.

A MEMO FOR YOU:

1. Inquire about open dates at our conference center in sun-drenched upper Carmel Valley (part of the beautiful Monterey Peninsula). It is the most completely-equipped conference-center little-theatre on the West Coast, and sits in the midst of modern hotels, quaint villages, unique shopping, tournament golf courses and tennis ranches. Some Summer and Fall dates are open.
2. Ask about our complete video tape recording capabilities and our library of training program tapes. We can help train your staff to effectively use your equipment, too.
3. Send for our schedule of one-day, three-day and weekend seminars on such subjects as: "Effect Conference Leadership" . . . "Communication Skills" . . . "How to Write Better Letters" . . . and more. College affiliated. Your place or ours.
4. Ask for available dates of our consulting lecturers and schedule of fees for their appearances at your seminars.
5. Write for a list of our correspondence courses, such as: "How to Write for Business."
6. Ask for our list of publications including: "How to Hold more Productive Meetings" . . . "How to Write Your Own Resume" . . . and more.

Carmel Valley Conference Center

A Division of Media Four

WRITE BOX 4858, CARMEL, CALIFORNIA 93921
OR TELEPHONE (408) 422-1261 OR (408) 624-5986