

In Practice

Peak Performance

This may interest enthusiasts of adventure-learning principles who don't like the outdoors: indoor rock-climbing.

Garrison Leykam in Orange, Connecticut, gives workshops in rock climbing as a way to overcome fear and meet challenges. Leykam conducts programs at the indoor rock-climbing gyms, Go Vertical, in Stamford and Prime Time, in Wallingford. Prime Time has more than 5,000 square feet of climbing space on textured walls up to 32 feet high. Climbs are rated on a difficulty scale, taking into account the number of aretes, roofs, and overhangs.

The facility also features a 12-foot cave with handholds that let climbers "Spiderman" up the side and across the ceiling.

"Rock climbing is a metaphor," says Leykam. In his three-day workshop, "Climb Every Mountain," Leykam teaches participants how to take control of risk situations by applying what they learn from rock climbing.

On Day 1, participants talk about all kinds of fears in a roundtable discussion. In a recent workshop, high-school students expressed concerns about dating and not getting into college. Day 2 is devoted to climbing. On Day 3, participants return to the classroom to revisit their fears and create an action plan for dealing with them.

Participants at another indoor climbing facility, the Athletic Club Illinois Center, in Chicago, go up against the Wall, a 100-foot climbing facade. It's the highest such wall in the world, says Susan Harper of Synergy Consulting. Her Chicago-based firm offers the "Corporate Climb," a workshop on professional development, leadership, and teamwork. Program leader and 26-year veteran climber Tony

Peeters says that rock climbing builds trust. "In many cases, the bond of support and encouragement can last a lifetime."

Easy Does It in the Big Easy

Training is credited for an 18 percent drop in homicides in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 1994, New Orleans had the highest murder rate—47.6 per 100,000 people—in the United States. This year, the number of killings in the Crescent City was 190 in the first six months, compared with 232 in the same period last year.

Police superintendent Richard Pennington says that the decrease is due to the additional training given to homicide detectives. Repeat murderers are common, says Pennington. Better-trained detectives arrest more killers; confined cons aren't free to commit other murders.

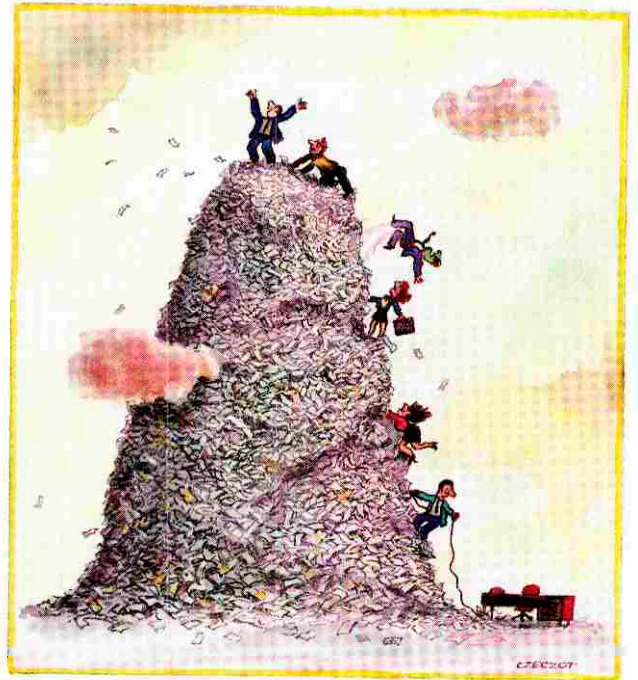
"As we continue to get training, we're going to get better," he says.

From the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

Partners in Workplace Learning

More suppliers of training products and services are creating partnerships as a way to expand their expertise and global reach.

For example, Nippon Wilson Learning has formed an alliance with J3 Learning—a software company



Anulrzej Czeczot

Perhaps it's a leap, but rock climbing may help prepare you to deal with workplace violence and other risks.

based in Minneapolis, Minnesota—to deliver computer-based training programs and techniques to Japanese businesses. In Tokyo, the partners unveiled a multimedia learning-center lab featuring CD-ROM drives and network-delivered video. The event was attended by Walter Mondale, the United States ambassador to Japan.

In another merger, the management-consulting firm Arthur D. Little—based in Cambridge, Massachusetts—has acquired Innovation Associates, which specializes in enabling companies to become learning organizations. Innovation Associates was co-founded by Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*.

“E” for Effort

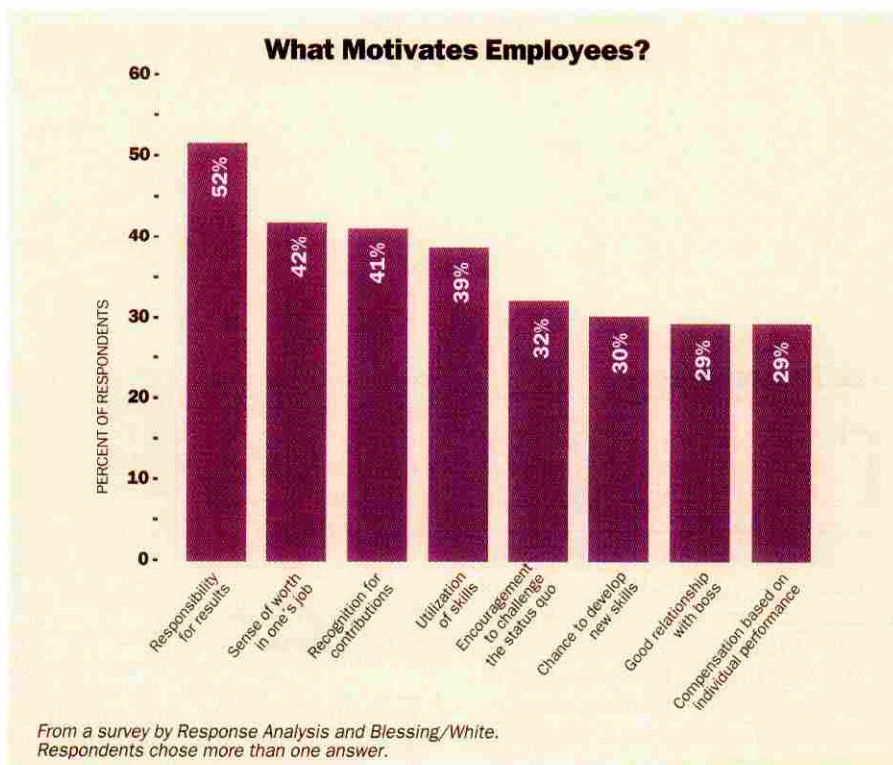
It has been 12 years since social scientists Daniel Yankelovich and John Immerwahr introduced the concept of “discretionary effort”—a voluntary effort by employees to do more than just what is required. Now, discretionary effort isn’t so voluntary. Workers are expected to exceed basic job requirements and become multi-skilled, more flexible, and more responsible. Whatever the terms, how can employees be encouraged to exert extra effort?

A recent survey of 1,563 management, technical, and professional employees in manufacturing, services, government, and education (conducted by Response Analysis and Blessing/White, both based in Princeton, New Jersey) inspired a plan with ways employers can motivate employees to exceed expectations.

The plan includes these suggestions:

- ▶ Give employees responsibility for the results they produce, not just for the work.
- ▶ Focus on employees’ strengths rather than weaknesses.
- ▶ Celebrate employees’ contributions and successes.
- ▶ Build better communication between managers and other employees.

“The survey’s most significant conclusion is that extraordinary opportunities to improve productivity are being wasted,” says Dave Lynn, a vice-president of Blessing/White. “Instead of encouraging employees to



go the distance, businesses are encouraging them to go to lunch.”

Survey responses show that the crucial factors for eliciting employees’ extraordinary efforts include a sense of worth in their jobs, good use of their skills, compensation based on individual performance, and good working relationships with managers. Found to have less effect were pay, teamwork, and the necessary resources.

The survey, “A Study of Voluntary Effort in the Workforce,” also asked respondents to rate their organizations on how well they motivate employees. Twenty-nine percent said that their companies do a “good” job; 10 percent said they do a “very good” job. Twenty percent said that their companies do a “poor” job; 5 percent said they did a “very poor” job.

Those figures don’t add up to 100 percent. Perhaps the remaining respondents didn’t make the effort to respond.

Invisible Workers

“Contingent workers” could make up half of the U.S. workforce by 2000, according to labor analysts. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that

currently 8.4 million U.S. workers are independent contractors, as well as temporary and part-time employees.

But often these workers are invisible and unmanaged. Many companies can’t even identify them. As a result, they become a kind of second-class workforce whose existence can subject companies to administrative problems, Department of Labor liabilities, and audits by the Internal Revenue Service.

The IRS estimated eight years ago that 3.7 million employees were being paid illegally as independent contractors. The IRS claims that the number has grown since the spate of downsizings and layoffs, though it has no recent figures. Increasingly, the IRS has been investigating large corporations, such as IBM, that use contract workers extensively.

In another case, Texas A&M University admitted that it illegally paid 400 farm laborers as independent contractors rather than as employees, underpaying the government about \$86,000 in payroll taxes. The university also deprived the workers of unemployment, disability, and Social Security benefits.

The new Independent Contractor Tax Simplification Act outlines strict criteria for classifying independent

contractors. And companies are turning to external suppliers for contract-employment programs to help manage contingent workers long-term.

"A big issue is that companies train contract workers, who don't stay around for the companies to recoup their training costs," says Irene Cohen, CEO of Corporate Staffing Alternatives in New York. "Companies need to provide benefits and incentives to these workers—to retain them long enough to reap the investment in training and still have the option of flexible staffing."

Customer Service Turns Gold

By Jill Weisser, relationship manager and assistant vice-president in Merrill Lynch's financial services operations and systems training and development group, 300 Davidson Avenue, Somerset, NJ 08873. Phone 908/627-5243.

Workers these days must be more fluid, flexible, and knowledgeable than in the past. To help people meet those criteria, Merrill Lynch's customer-service group is taking a new approach to training.

In the past, service providers received 10 weeks of technical training focused on the procedures for taking service calls. The classroom training included call simulations and structured on-the-job training. The outcome was a group of highly skilled technicians.

A newly created program, Service Gold, addresses the need for more self-directed and self-motivated workers who demonstrate versatility outside the boundaries of procedures. The overall theme is "developing the knowledge worker."

The program is based on four core competencies:

- ▶ Business understanding. A knowledge of Merrill Lynch, including its structure, core processes, culture, and clients—and some basic knowledge about business, financial data, and the financial-services industry.
- ▶ Technical understanding. A knowledge of the technical aspects of specific jobs, including brokerage accounting and computer skills.
- ▶ Intellectual skills. A knowledge of

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basic research and of problem-solving models and their use in real-life situations.

▶ Interpersonal skills. Skills in written and verbal communication, teamwork, group process, and leadership, as well as skills in change, stress, and time management.

The idea for the program originated when customer service asked for a training approach that supported the service culture more directly. Instead of conducting a traditional task analysis, the training group asked Merrill Lynch managers to describe the ideal service provider. Then it developed those descriptions into a service-competency model.

Next, the training group selected the approaches and designed a curriculum, including such courses as The World of Money and Markets on the nuts and bolts of financial services, a problem-solving workshop to enhance trainees' intellectual skills, and a team-building course.

Once customer service approved the training plan, several project managers selected training associates to form design-and-development teams. A curriculum designer provided guidance, and project managers met weekly to review the project's status.

Before the official rollout, all courses were pilot-tested.

The training approaches—which vary with course content—include traditional classroom sessions, self-paced materials, the use of computer-based training and electronic performance-support systems, and a learning-organization approach in which supervisors and guest speakers conduct training through roundtable sessions and "Lunch and Learn" meetings.

To enroll in Service Gold, service providers meet with their supervisors to determine development needs and

appropriate courses. Service providers who complete "accomplished-level" courses are deemed "service ready." Those who complete more advanced courses are recognized as Service Gold employees.

Suit-ability

Preparing to make your next presentation? So, what are you going to wear?

How you look is as important as what you say, according to *101 Stupid Things Trainers Do To Sabotage Success* (Richard Chang Associates, Irvine, California). Authors Nancy Stern and Maggi Payment say that if you don't get yourself done up right, you're likely to be undone.

The book offers these axioms:

- ▶ If you look too rich, you may alienate the audience.
- ▶ If you look too poor, you may lose credibility.
- ▶ If you're dressed too casually, you may be perceived as unprofessional.
- ▶ If you look sloppy, you may communicate a lack of respect for the audience.

Stern and Payment recommend that you know your audience members and choose clothes that put you equal to or a notch above them. The hemline: If you don't plan your wardrobe, you're making a big mistake.

The Elements of Performance Management

What makes an effective performance-management system? According to Gary Topchik of SilverStar Enterprises, performance improvement is a cycle with three elements: planning, monitoring, and appraisal.

Performance planning involves establishing expectations with each employee, says Topchik, in terms of the following:

- ▶ Contributions. This is a statement that details the expected business impact of the employee's activities. It provides direction and sets criteria.
- ▶ Behaviors. This statement describes behavior that is outstanding, acceptable, and below par.
- ▶ Resources. This is a list of what the

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In Practice

employee will have to work with, including tools, level of authority, additional training, and access to resources.

Of course, you cannot define every contribution, behavior, or resource in advance. Topchik recommends concentrating on four or five key responsibilities and agreeing on indicators of business success that the manager and the employee will track. Make sure the plan is achievable and challenging.

Performance monitoring involves observing performance regularly and providing feedback to the employee in regular sessions. Use the indicators of business success to tell whether the employee is meeting the objectives; agree on any needed changes to the performance plan.

One major objective is to recognize achievement and reinforce good behavior. Problems and concerns will come up, warns Topchik. Recognize employees for solving those problems and preventing future problems. Less experienced employees will require more frequent performance monitoring. But even experts need an occasional "pat on the back." Give it to them.

Performance appraisal usually takes place in a yearly session. In this session, review all the performance-monitoring sessions held through the year. Never discuss any performance that has not already come up in those meetings. Look at the monitoring sessions as a series of snapshots. The appraisal considers the whole series—to spot trends, recognize achievements, and glean insights.

The appraisal puts the year in perspective and provides closure. It plants in the ground a new peg from which to measure future performance. And it's an opportunity to provide input into the next performance-planning session. Remember, says Topchik, the process is a cycle that will be repeated next year.

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This month's "In Practice" was compiled by Haidee Allerton. Send items of interest to "In Practice," 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.