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Issues

It's Good, But . . .

Darlene Russ-Eft and Linda Zucchelli's "When Wrong is Alright" (November 1987) exemplifies the type of article of which we should see more.

All too often training designs are endorsed or criticized solely on the basis of qualitative information. The paucity of solid research in *Training & Development Journal* suggests a lack of concern or awareness for the need to subject training interventions to legitimate research and validation procedures.

Even the article referred to would be strengthened if the authors reported the statistical methods and data that lead to their conclusions. A population consisting of 20 subjects would typically cause one to be suspect of the reliability of findings.

The authors report that "Since the ratings were very much similar between the two observers we decided the data were reliable." They also cite "only minor differences between subjects" and a "tendency" to have better recall when seeing two models. What is the inter-rater reliability? What statistics support the term "tendency"? What constitutes a "minor difference"? How many subjects participated in the academic study that was cited?

In general, it would have been helpful and reassuring to know the statistical basis that lead to some rather important design and training implications.

If our industry is to avoid being subjected to fad after fad, which erodes our credibility as a profession, then the research conducted by Russ-Eft and Zucchelli to help trainers and designers make rational rather than subjective decisions is to be encouraged. More statistical documentation would strengthen their commendable effort.

*Bernard L. Rosenbaum
Mohr Development, Inc.
Stamford, Connecticut*

Award Winner

Congratulations to Rick Behring of Baker Instruments Corp. in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the 1987 recipient of the Dugan Laird Award for Excellence in Writing in the Field of Human Resource Development. Behring has received \$500 for his article, "A Caravan of One: Looking Beyond the Desert," which appeared in the March 1987 issue of *Training & Development Journal*. The award is presented annually by the Woodlands Group.

Not Just Another Fad

When the word "excellence" hit the market in this country, I assumed it would enjoy the same life cycle that any new idea or fad would, probably two or three years at best. That would be followed by something new, something that didn't totally reject the old idea, but built on it. And this is okay; it's something we have all come to live with and expect. But this idea of excellence is *not* dying. My guess is that what we're really talking about in the long run is the survival of our way of life in this country. Everyone knows it, and we are all grasping at those things that we intuitively know will provide solutions to our problems.

There is a price you pay for excellence, however. I have not achieved excellence myself; I'm still working on that. Excellence is not a destination, but a journey. No one can ever say: "I have arrived."

Excellence is a deceptively simple idea—so simple, yet so difficult to achieve for many people. It requires a whole new mind-set about people—especially customers. Since it is conceptually simple, it's easy to

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Issues

spot when someone violates these principles of excellence.

I remember Tom Peters saying that if you were simply courteous to your customers, you'd have the lion's share of the market because you'd be alone. Courtesy is the exception, not the rule. Why does it rile me more now than it used to?

Once, I spoke with an agency about a program on excellence. The manager opened the meeting by saying how devoted he was to the message of excellence. After the presentation, the manager excused himself because he had so many things to do. Others waited around and visited with me. What came out was quite revealing. This manager reserved all decisions for himself, was very uncomfortable delegating, practiced over-tight controls, and would not take long vacations because decisions could not be made in his absence. That agency was not ready for this program, because the manager was not fully committed to the idea.

This kind of situation is frustrating because I know that people such as this manager need this training more than others. There is a price you pay for excellence, and it is one of those self-imposed traps that we've got to watch out for. You can't live life for other people. If they're not ready, they're not ready. And yet our survival in doing business depends on bringing about the changes that point to excellence.

W. Lee Davis
U.S. Office of Personnel
Management
Baltimore, Maryland

The Real Thing

Recently, in a number of training publications, I have read several articles on performance management. To my dismay, none of the articles really addressed the true nature of performance management. Most of

the articles I have seen are simply a hodgepodge of helpful management hints or only focus on the performance review process.

Performance management is much more than this. It is a powerful, systematic approach that managers can learn and master which essentially guarantees them the results for which they are accountable. It is important to stress here that performance management has to do with making the right things happen from the front side of the process. Being able to manage the human performance process is the *primary* role of managers, and they are getting paid to get results!

Managers must learn to manage the five components of the human performance process: expectations, resources, support, feedback, and consequences. The irony and power of this approach is that managers are forced to manage their own behaviors and skills more effectively in order to properly influence the performance of another human being. The emphasis in this approach is given to managing the system or process, in which the employee is just one of many variables. While human behavior is quite complex, the manager can readily deal with any situation by plugging it into this five-component framework. Once managers see just how much they can accomplish using this approach, they are eager to continue to master the process and the many skills it requires. There is nothing more exciting and empowering than being able to make the right things happen repeatedly!

In order to gain a more complete understanding of what performance management really is, I suggest reading articles and books by people like Lawrence M. Miller, Geary Rummel, Thomas Gilbert, or Robert Mager. Organizations such as the Performance Management Institute, the National Society for Performance and Instruction, GP Courseware, Inc., and GP Management Development Group offer free and

low-cost publications on performance management.

Bren D. White
GP Management Development
Group
Columbia, Maryland

Service = Success

[The following are still more responses from the November 1987 "Tell Us What You Think" question. It's unanimous: The key to success in the workplace today lies in an organization's emphasis on customer service.—PLF]

I believe that every employer has an obligation to provide customer-service training to all employees for three reasons: self-interest, employee relations, and civic duty.

Self-interest is best served by equipping your people to do their jobs in the most profitable ways. The courteous treatment of both internal and external customers results in higher profits and lower operating costs. This has been proven repeatedly by organizations such as Nordstrom, The Sharper Image, Sears, IBM, and American Airlines.

Employee relations are greatly influenced by training. When that training leads to improved customer relations, the employees get the reward of pleasant relationships and, therefore, feel better about themselves, the customers, their jobs, and their employer. Note the employee attitudes at Disneyland and other organizations where customer-employee interactions are consistently positive. Self-esteem is also improved because the ability to meet job expectations improves with training.

I mentioned civic duty to remind employers that the way their people treat the public determines the quality of life in their community. If your business is done primarily outside your own city, then your "community" includes all the areas in which you do business. How often is your entire day ruined by a tension-filled service experience on the phone or through the mail?

When employers acknowledge responsibility toward the public and

train their employees to respect and serve all customers well, this will truly become a prosperous economy filled with self-respecting, courteous workers.

Jim Catbcart
La Jolla, California

Should every organization provide customer-service training to their employees? Positively! Training is an essential ingredient in a successful service strategy. Excellent service depends on people—from the "front line" sales and service representatives who interact directly with customers, to all other employees as the existence of their positions ultimately depend on the customer.

It is a tragic organizational error to assume that all employees magically possess the skills and knowledge to serve their customers effectively. If organizations see the need for leadership, technical, and sales training, why should customer service be left off the list? A number of areas can be covered in customer-service training, including:

- customer interaction skills;
- establishing customer-service standards;
- handling customer complaints and objections;
- customer service policies and procedures;
- telephone "manners";
- cross-selling.

These essential skills can and should be taught to all front-line service people. Others in the organization, from the boardroom to the loading dock, should be trained as well, although perhaps in somewhat different knowledge and skill areas. This training might include defining internal customers, problem solving, and communication skills. In addition to customer interaction training, internal interaction training is also important. After all, the way employees treat one another in an organization has a direct impact on how they treat their customers.

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Is training alone the answer? Positively not. Training must be part of a total service strategy and system. Alone, it will not improve an organization's customer service. For example, we believe that to be effective, service employees must have a combination of skills, knowledge, and job motivation: the *desire* to want to help others, solve problems, and be responsive. Job motivation cannot be taught and, thus, must be incorporated into an organization's selection and promotion system. Similarly, poor organizational systems such as "red-tape" policies, insufficient rewards, and lack of management support can devastate any efforts made on the training front.

In summary, *every* employee in an organization should receive appropriate customer-service training. As training professionals, we owe it to our customers and our employees—after all, aren't they our clients, too? But like all organizational and human resource systems, training is only one piece of the customer-service puzzle.

*Richard Wellins
Development Dimensions
International
Pittsburgh*

And the Winner Is . . .

[The following is in response to the "Tell Us What You Think" question on who should be responsible for training: line managers or training professionals (December 1987).—PLF]

Who should do the training? The answer is obvious when you consider the current mentality of the line manager. They are concerned with controlling, delegation, trend analysis, get-well plans, cost containments, departmental budgets, and establishing accountability by deciding who will do what by

when. In summary, they have enormous everyday pressures.

When line management chooses to use these skills in terms of training issues, the logical conclusion is to *expect* them to delegate the role of training with emphasis on project management and the importance of monitoring results for effective feedback on the new trends. Line managers have a role in the scheme of profitability and customer satisfaction that should be valued and not diluted.

*Roger Keranen
Professional Pathways
Oak Park, Michigan*

Tell Us What You Think

Without a doubt, the word of the year for 1987 was "competitiveness." It was hard to turn around without meeting it in conversation, headlines, and advertising. ASTD got into the act with "Can America Compete?" a report on training and development solutions to the U.S. competitiveness crisis.

Do you think competitiveness is a serious issue for HRD professionals or one that's been talked to death? Does the "C-word" really have the urgency the media would have us believe? If so, what is training's role in keeping American business competitive?

We'd like to hear your opinions and learn about your company's use of training to be more competitive. Send your viewpoints to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

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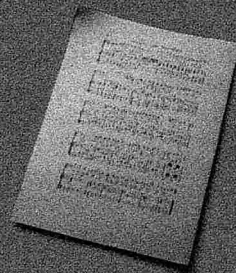
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