

GEARY A. RUMMLER



The performance technology movement had many parents, but few who cared more deeply about its future or worked harder to advance its application than Geary Rummler. He was among the first to use instructional and performance technologies to move the needle on organizational effectiveness and he never stopped trying to focus the training profession on results.

Last year, *T+D* magazine had the pleasure of interviewing Geary for The Long View—a series of profiles of industry leaders. Our reporter learned that Geary’s fascination with organizations as systems began during a summer job as an industrial engineer in a Western Michigan automobile plant. In the 1960s, working with George Odiorne at the University of Michigan, he learned that the important thing about organizations is that they should produce results. He used to say, “Put a good performer in a bad system, and the system will win every time.”

If you survey the last 40 years of the profession, you will see Geary Rummler’s influence everywhere. He was the founder or founding partner of such firms as the Praxis Corporation, the Rummler-Brache Group, and the Performance Design Lab. He was president of Kepner-Tregoe Strategy Group, and co-founder, with George Odiorne, of the University of Michigan’s Center for Programmed Instruction. He helped clients in dozens of industries and wrote many influential books, including *Improving Performance – How to Manage the White Space on the Organization Chart*, with Alan Brache. In 2004, he wrote *Serious Performance Consulting – According to Rummler*, published by ASTD and ISPI, two organizations he served in many leadership roles. He served on the ASTD Board of Directors. His achievements and contributions were recognized by many organizations.

Geary could be feisty. He railed against fads and the “phony research” he thought were ruining the profession by turning it into an end in itself. “Training and development is a solution in search of a problem,” he would say. Who else worked so hard to keep us honest? An inveterate engineer, Geary could depict almost anything as a process diagram. He sometimes seemed to be a right-brained visionary in a left-brained profession. For ASTD, he once diagrammed the editing and publishing process for turning ideas into their creative expression in print. The diagram, with its many parts and subparts between input and output, looked like the streets of Los Angeles seen from an airplane.

Geary and his wife Margaret have collected the paintings of a Tucson artist, many of whose large canvases depict impressionistic renderings of buffalo, an animal that Geary particularly liked. This week, I’ve been thinking about one of those paintings in the Rummler’s living room. It’s a large buffalo, painted in bright red, who seems to defy extinction. It’s a fierce, intense image, full of energy and fire. You can’t forget it.

Pat Galagan, Editor-at-Large, ASTD

Leave your thoughts and memories of Geary A. Rummler on the T+D Blog at <http://tdblog.typepad.com>