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Hop to It

Carol Burnett once did a routine in which the low-brow, shrill Eunice character invites her long-lost brother, an artist, home for the holidays. After presenting him with his Christmas gift—a paint-by-the-numbers set—Eunice asks about his career.

He explains that he works as a freelancer, taking periodic assignments from many different clients. "Huh," Eunice snorts, "still can't hold a job!"

Eunice's idea of proper work—one job, one employer, one lifetime—doesn't jibe with reality. Statistics show that today's worker can expect to have not only several jobs, but several careers before reaching retirement age.

Even so, conventional wisdom says that society disapproves of people who move from job to job. Informed wisdom, however, says that few so-called "job-hoppers" actually suffer because of their career mobility.

A survey conducted by the National Institute of Business Management implies that most colleagues, supervisors, and prospective employers no longer view negatively people who change jobs frequently.

In fact, 87 percent of the survey's 434 respondents believed that changing jobs every two or three years accelerates career progress, broadens work experience, and provides greater satisfaction than more traditionally stable careers. Said one woman, "Changing jobs frequently has brought me security, but more so, a sense of control in my life."

Other respondents—ranging from middle managers to a prison superintendent to a high-school principal—expressed similar sentiments.

While most said advantages outweighed drawbacks, they did note some problems attendant to frequent career moves. Many cited the difficulty of adjusting to different

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work cultures, as well as family frictions caused by relocation and piecemeal retirement preparations.

But highest on the list of job-hopping woes was frustration at finding the same poor management practices at each new job.

Use Desktop Presentations for PC Training

Submitted by Robert S. Woolman, manager of presentation technology for Eastman Kodak in Rochester, New York.

Not too long ago, the fanciest machines in most offices were electric typewriters.

Now secretaries use desktop computers for word processing, communications, and a host of routine tasks. Accountants have traded their calculators for spreadsheet programs, and managers with little computer experience casually use

PCs to crank out sophisticated financial models and five-year plans.

But widespread acceptance of desktop automation, and the nonchalance with which most users approach their keyboards, mask a disturbing reality.

Most PC users tap only a small percentage of their total hardware and software resources. Office automation technology was created to enhance white-collar productivity, but PC-equipped organizations often fail to realize efficiencies because their people have neither the time, the inclination, nor the aptitude to master more than the basics.

Fortunately, the same machines that seem to create this problem can help solve it. PCs make powerful training tools, and computer-based desktop presentations can teach most PC applications.

A desktop presentation resembles a desktop publishing exercise. But instead of using a PC to generate printed materials, a desktop presentation creates an audiovisual learning environment using electronic transparencies. And these transparencies, produced on a PC monitor and thrown onto a large projection screen, can be used in real-time, interactive training programs. Desktop presentations elevate traditional audiovisual instruction to new heights of sophistication.

The principle is simple: If you can make an image on a computer monitor, you can display it on a projection screen.

You'll need a PC and an ordinary overhead projector. You will also need an interface that converts the computer's digital data to an analog graphic display. These devices, connected by cable to the PC, have a liquid crystal display (LCD) pad that sits on the overhead projector's platen.

Kodak and several other manufacturers produce these pads. Apple computers usually require pads that are different from those used with IBM-compatible machines.

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When all the equipment is powered up, the PC sends digital information to the pad. The computer data shows on the LCD pad, and the overhead throws the pad image onto the projection screen where everyone can see it.

This system makes good training sense. Just as training for a plumbing apprentice should involve wrenches and solder, PC training for office workers should involve computer hardware and software. Desktop presentations take advantage of our society's visual literacy and the fact that people remember what they see longer than what they hear or read.

Desktop presentations are also inexpensive to produce and easy to revise or update.

Trainers have several options when it comes to preparing and using desktop presentations. They can work from programmed presentations stored on floppy disks, which can hold 100 or more computer images. Programmed presentations work effectively when all trainees need to receive identical instruction.

Interactive programs, featuring actual data or text entry during the training session, can operate through one or more PCs, or a more powerful computer, connected to the LCD pad. Programmed and interactive presentations are often combined.

Interactive programs work especially well for question-and-answer sessions and for demonstrating complex points. During a lesson on spreadsheets, for example, the trainer can use the PC's keyboard to enter new data and instantly change the display on a related chart. This helps the audience visualize how one change affects others in this type of software.

During practice exercises, instructors can use a switching box, connecting all computers to the LCD pad, to display what trainees are doing at their individual PCs.

Desktop presentations can make
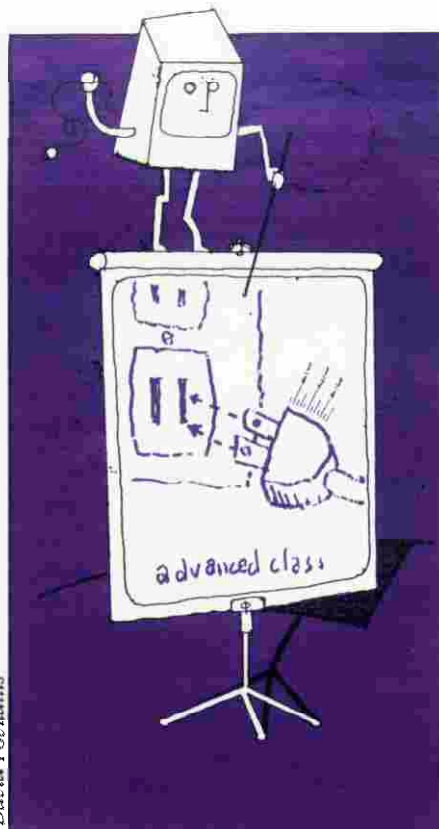
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training easy and effective, but you still need to apply sound instructional design principles: Know your audience, define your objectives, and state your objectives.

Beyond these basics, three rules will help you make the most of a desktop presentation:

■ **Keep it simple.** Use no more than six lines of text on a screen. Use simple graphics. Remember, less is more when you are delivering a visual message. Resist the temptation to use every available icon and text face. Just highlight the key points trainees need to remember.

■ **Keep it legible.** Use large, bold type. The people sitting in the back row need to be able to read your message easily. Before your presentation, take a seat in the last row. If you can't read the image display, adjust the chairs or the projector until you can.

■ **Play it safe.** Make backup diskettes in case one set is damaged or lost. Test the PC, the pad, and the projector before the training begins.

Keep an extra projector bulb handy. Also, make a dry run of all software to make sure it does what you want it to. If you planned on using an interactive presentation, have a programmed version available in case your PC connections fail.

These rules will help you make an effective training tool even better. The PC revolution has converted millions of new users to the power of desktop computing. Through desktop presentations, trainers can use that same power to help new users get the most from their PCs.

Training Scarce for Foreign-Bound Employees

Fewer than 17 percent of America's biggest companies have formal programs designed to prepare employees for overseas assignments. So says a study conducted by Forest Zimpfer and Robert Underwood, both business professors at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

Only seven of the 43 *Forbes*-100 companies polled offered training for outbound workers—most often those headed for Japan. Forest and Underwood found that most such programs focused on family relocation issues, cultural differences, and cultural sensitivity.

Trainees who did receive formal training generally served as upper- and mid-level managers.

Among Forest's and Underwood's recommendations: Create a central resource network "in which all training materials developed by the 100 largest multinational United States corporations would be included. . . .[T]hese materials should be made available to all companies."

Good Questions

Submitted by John Lawrie, an organizational psychologist and president of Applied Psychology,

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Inc., in Crawfordsville, Indiana.

A management supervisor approaches you one day and says, "You know, I think we should get Joe to sign up for that budgeting seminar in Chicago next month. I went through it a couple years ago, and it did a world of good for my department. Besides, he's done such good work lately, he deserves a career-development break."

Thus begins one of the corporate world's most honored tribal rites—the training tradition. For many reasons, some programs become so embedded in the organizational mind-set that they become habit-forming. Time after time, managers send their charges off to a workshop without considering whether or not it really serves the trainees'—or the company's—development needs. And this can mean wasted time and wasted money.

To match training activities with organizational goals, trainers need to ask a few timely questions. The next time someone comes to you and suggests sending a particular employee to a particular training session, gather as much information as you can and then drop by the supervisor's office for a chat.

The supervisor's answers to these questions can help determine what the seminar offers, what Joe needs, and what the company needs.

■ What are the knowledge, skill, and attitude targets of this program? All management training efforts aim to provide knowledge, improve skills, or change attitudes. What does this program purport to do? How?

■ Is there any reason to believe Joe needs to develop the knowledge, skills, or attitudes this program addresses? Worthwhile training and development programs create positive change. Does Joe need to change?

■ Will Joe participate in this program solely to help him do his current job better, or will the training continue to pay off throughout his career?

■ When the program is over, will we be able to see a change that indicates Joe benefited from attending?

■ Will we be able to measure—by any means—the changes in Joe's behavior?

This questioning process effectively acts as an audit of the employee's and the organization's training and development needs. If the Q&A session makes it clear that the program cannot meet these needs, responsible trainers will seek alternate interventions.

If, on the other hand, the fit between employee and training event seems good, make the necessary arrangements.

But before you wish Joe *bon voyage*, make sure he knows the results of your chat with his boss. Trainees need to understand what the company wants them to gain by participating in a training program. Learning targets help focus the training experience.

And questioning supervisors helps trainers focus their own activities: they learn more about what management and the organization want subordinates to gain from training.

Pick Up Your Pencils

Submitted by Allan Cox, Los Angeles Times Syndicate management columnist and president of Allan Cox & Associates in Chicago. His new book, The Achiever's Profile, *will be published this month by AMACOM.*

Here's a quick quiz for all human resource executives:

1. Do you see your role as that of a facilitator?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

2. Do you coach your executives to think "career" instead of "career path"?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

3. Do you see your associates as customers who are counting on you to deliver the goods?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

4. Do your views and opinions matter to your CEO?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

5. Do people confide in you, and do you keep such confidences as a trust?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

6. Do you make yourself vulnerable by confiding in others?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

7. Are you proactive? Are you an advocate? Do your initiatives generate enthusiasm among your associates?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

8. Do you practice an unrelenting commitment to your own personal development as an executive?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

9. Do you exercise vision as understanding rather than clairvoyance?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

10. Are you committed—and do you prove it by your actions—to team management in your company?
Usually/Often _____ Sometimes/Seldom _____

The right answer to all these questions, from this observer's point of view, is "Usually/Often." If you answered all 10 correctly, you're a superstar in the galaxy of human resource executives. If you missed one, you're still tops. Two wrong, you have some growing to do. Three wrong, you're not as value-added as you should be.

If you missed four or more, you don't understand your job. Let's review the quiz material.

Facilitator. Authoritarianism is a bygone mode. It's appealing but mistaken to think that all top executives should be General Pattons

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barking out orders. Charisma is overblown, and its value is often short lived; some of today's stupidest and shallowest executives ooze with charisma. On the other hand, we all know the perceptive Steady Eddies—and Edies—are the ones who carry the day, winning respect and a following over time.

To be an effective human resource executive, share yourself, your time, and your information. Encourage your associates to act on their unique strengths and refine their gifts. This attitude—that of a facilitator—serves as a powerful management model on which subordinates and superiors can base their own behavior.

Career. Effective HR executives are teachers, adopting the entire corporation as a classroom. One of the most important lessons you can teach? It's imperative to think about careers, not career paths.

The next decade will test young employees. They'll have to work harder and earn less in real terms than their predecessors. Teach these workers that performance, rather than advancement, will define the workforce's best and brightest.

Your customers. As an HR executive, you seldom come in contact with your organization's ultimate customers. Nonetheless, you meet customers at every turn, and your commitment to customer service needs to be as strong as the manufacturing or marketing manager's.

Your customer is whoever appears next to you on the management organization chart. If you don't serve him or her, you fail in your own marketplace.

Opinions that count. When you meet with your management peers, do people pick lint from their clothes, check their nails, or stare out the window? Does the CEO call you in for frequent counsel when the company faces serious people, organizational, or business decisions? Does it matter that you come to work?

The name of the game isn't absolute power—no one has that—but the power to influence. You need to be able to deliver well-reasoned views at the proper time. To become an effective human resource executive, think hard about the strategic trade-offs the CEO faces. Put yourself in his or her shoes.

Trust. It is one thing to seek trust. It's another to extend it. If your views are respected, and if you wield influence, you will become a sought-after giver of advice on a wide variety of matters. When company executives confide in you, you must keep these confidences as an inviolable trust.

Vulnerability. It is one thing to extend trust. It's another to seek it. Strength sometimes flows from a discreet show of weakness. A fortress invites attack. Play the impenetrable city, and some Joshua will see to it that your walls come tumbling down.

We build linkages with others—and reduce the pressure we put on ourselves—by admitting that we don't have all the answers, that we blew it, that we need help. Seek balanced trust.

Proactive advocacy. Impressive HR executives discover and declare what they care about. They get behind an idea and take a stand. Projects get support not because they are always brilliant, but because the HR executive will grab an idea and press to make it work.

Don't wait for the CEO to complain that top executives have become complacent. Rather, anticipate the problem and head it off with an executive development program that challenges people. Help top brass put excitement back in their jobs by helping them reclaim strengths they've allowed to go dormant.

Your own growth. Too many human resource executives fail to act proactively to develop themselves. Rightly concerned about the entire organization's growth, they

neglect to ensure their own.

In order to remain a front-line contributor, you must chart your developmental objectives and eagerly stretch yourself. Otherwise, you'll become an unfortunate example of the Peter Principle.

Vision. A Chinese proverb proclaims, "If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed." Organizational vision does not require clairvoyance. It requires an understanding of place and direction. To affect the business's long-range quality, you must challenge management to answer two questions: "Where are we now?" and "Where are we headed?" Don't let the company seduce itself with some grand vision based on empty rhetoric or wishful thinking. Instead, help thinking managers forge collective insights about actions taken today that will guide the company to a realistic destination tomorrow.

Team zeal. Today's galvanizing concept of corporate effectiveness revolves around teams. Effective HR executives strive with every fiber in their bodies to instill the idea that every team member at one level is a team leader at another. Therefore, make every meeting a training laboratory that helps people learn how to work, laugh, cry, and accomplish together.

Teamwork is more than just a nice idea. It is a compelling vehicle for executive growth and better quality. It represents the means of survival. Failing the challenge of teamwork is the guarantor of mediocrity or worse. As a client of mine tells his people, "We are the competition."