

The Training Package

Do Standardized Programs Really Serve the Purpose ?

WILLIAM A. SWANK

In this day of enlightened training it appears that many people engaged in the business of educating and developing others have not learned very much about the subject. The experience of men who have spent many years in the training field as well as the results of research seem to have made little impression on many of the people who direct the training function in their organizations. For example, consider the training packages which are used. Complete courses or programs are available from many sources. According to the literature describing these packages, all one needs to do to be a successful training director is to get the package, expose himself to the contents, and then teach it to as many people as he can. The more people involved in the training the better the training is. This approach to training appears to be used especially in governmental agencies and

business and industrial organizations where the amount of money allocated for training is dependent upon how many people were "trained" last year.

Often there are numerous problems connected with the packaged program. For example, the course may have been originally developed for a group of industrial foremen and a training man is trying to use it with a group of business office supervisors. The situations and methods of handling the problems presented are not only different because of the industrial situation involved, but also because the shop had a strong union while the office has none.

Carry-over To The Job

The packaged approach gives the training man a false sense of security. He may assume that he has done a thorough training job because he played a

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record or showed a film or series of films and had a short discussion following the presentation of each one. When the people who have attended the sessions have difficulty in the application of the material on the job, who is to blame? Certainly not the training man. It is not his fault if people are too busy or too "something else" to use their training to good advantage.

In addition to the inherent defects in the training package, the training man may present the material in a dogmatic fashion as if it were the last word in how to do whatever it is the course is supposed to do. This approach leaves much to be desired. For instance, it overlooks the all important factor of the receptivity of the members of the training group. Each person, no matter how enthralled he may be about the gems of wisdom which drop from the lips of the instructor, is free to choose for himself whether or not the material being given is acceptable to him, to his boss, or can even be applied in his job situation. In addition, his presence in the training session implies that not only should he accept the ideas presented, but also should change his way of doing things. The training man may overlook the fact that even though the individual is sitting there nodding his head in agreement with what is being said, he is free to decide whether or not the material is acceptable and whether it is worthwhile to change his way of doing things after his years of experience in managing or supervising in another manner.

Individual Needs

Too often the package approach man assumes that if every member of the

training group will accept the ideas being presented and put them into practice, many if not all of management's problems will be solved. Every member of the group must, therefore, become a particular type of individual or use these "packaged" techniques if the training efforts are to be successful.

Why is the package approach so popular? Some training men with small training staffs say it is less expensive to use programs developed by other training people who have more resources available to them. After all an appropriation can be secured to buy the package which has been prepared by a respectable or perhaps nationally advertised organization or an individual. The package materials are given, but then what, another package?

Perhaps the package is bought because some other company used it and had so much success with it. Since it worked so well for them, it is bound to be of benefit to us, too. The thing to do is to get on the bandwagon. Keep up with the industry or preferably try to keep ahead of most of the competition. Be the first to purchase a new package and put your people through it.

Another important reason for the use of package programs is pressure from top management. Profits are down, or turnover is high, or productivity is not improving—it must be a training problem. The training man is expected to come up with a program quickly which will overcome these problems in a short period of time. The package approach seems to solve the need for "quick" training.

There are some training people who because of geographical problems or failure to get line management to do the

job of individual development of subordinates, fall back on the package approach to training. Their philosophy of training would seem to say that everyone, in the long run, seems to have about the same needs anyway, so why not expose everyone to the same courses. After all it won't hurt them at any rate.

The results may not always justify the means. If people who sit through the package course are bored and disinterested, someone will suggest that the instructor probably did not have enough imagination to really make the course come alive. The instructor may then be told to develop some showmanship or to find some gimmicks to get and hold people's attention. Then the search is on.

Determine Own Training Needs

Maybe each company ought to operate in a training vacuum for a while. Perhaps each should be impervious to the training efforts of other companies or organizations for a period of time. During this time the training man should look at his own company in terms of its business, organizational, and individual needs. From this exposure could come a training program truly tailored to the needs of the organization and the people who comprise it. It may take plenty of time and effort to develop programs to satisfy the needs which are found. If, however, results are needed which satisfy the needs for more productive organization, greater profits, a better competitive position, and a greater personal satisfaction by the people who work in the organization, then the approach can be said to be worthwhile.

In all probability few package programs will satisfy the needs which are found within a given organization. If help is needed at this point, perhaps this is the time to call upon outside organizations or individuals to develop programs to be used in the company. A word of caution may be needed here. Unless the consulting organization or the individual consultant is thoroughly acquainted with the company's needs, you may get a package program. On the other hand the material prepared may be so scholarly that individuals exposed to the program are unable to comprehend and apply what is being taught.

This dilemma suggests that training needs to be tailored not only to the organization, but also to the unit and the individual who operates within it. There needs to be involvement in all phases of the training function—determining needs, program development, and training activity evaluation—by all levels of management and supervision. This is not an easy task, because the whole complex changes so rapidly. This approach takes a little longer. If, however, the training program is to be successful in terms of a real contribution to the company, this is the approach which must be used.

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