

News You Can Use

by Haidee Allerton

YA-HOO!

EVER BLOW ON an armadillo's rear end?

That was just one activity of the seventh annual Omni Service Champions recognition event to honor "anything but typical" employees of Omni hotels. The Sawdust Hoedown at South Fork Ranch in Dallas, Texas, included calf chasing, lessons in the Texas two-step, and awards presentations to 92 employees for exceeding customers' expectations—such as searching a hotel dumpster for a guest's lost keys, spending five hours tracking down a guest's luggage mistakenly rerouted to Lisbon, and driving a guest (in the employee's own car) who had missed the hotel shuttle to a meeting.

Omni believes that rewarding outstanding employees promotes excellent customer service. The honorees received all-expense-paid trips to Europe, Hawaii, the Caribbean, and the United States. And a lot of barbecue.

PROGRESS/REGRESS REPORT

BEFORE THE AGE of computers, faxes, and cellular phones, most Americans worked 67 hours a week, including Saturdays. By 1970, the average work week was about 37 hours. Now, most Americans put in 46 hours a week at the office and another six at home.

From Parade.

Top illustration by Bob Daly
Illustration by Cyril Cabry



Anything "butt" typical employees of Omni hotels blow on their armadillos rumps to get them to cross the finish line first.

HOME SWEET OFFICE

SOON, SCATTERED TOYS may replace potholes in your daily commute. Last year, the number of Americans working at home grew to 46 million, reports the *Washington Post*. That includes an estimated 7 to 9 million telecommuters or "hotdeskers," defined as company employees who work at home at least part-time during regular business hours.

On the home front, that

means commandeering a space for work—in the den, in the basement, or even at the far end of the kitchen counter. Then, it's off to the office-supply store. One Ohio-based company even gave each of its telecommuters at some locations a \$500 furniture allowance.

But once you're set up, needing space can take on new meaning and create domestic difficulties. Kids knock plaintively at the "office" door, your spouse runs the washer while you're trying to call clients, and you can see from the window that the yard needs raking. Or, your significant other expects you to drop work

and run errands.

And what about attire? Some at-homers love the fact that they can work in their sweats; others feel more productive if they dress as if they're going to a "real" office. One woman who works at home says she dresses in office clothes and puts on makeup because she thinks that makes her sound more businesslike on the phone. She draws the line, however, at panty hose.

Despite the dangers of disruptions and a relaxed dress code, many home-office workers say they love getting to spend more time with their families, though protocols often have to be negotiated. As for telecommuters on the go, many hotels and even airplanes are creating workareas. *HR* reports that some airlines are outfitting their Boeing 777s with integrated phone/-



@work

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To find out whether you're really happy, try the Memorial University of Newfoundland's Scale of Happiness. You can access this and other test instruments through the gopher site, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, on the Internet. You can enter by choosing #5 (public gopher) on the ASTD Online Internet menu. The Internet address is http://www.cua.edu/www/eric_ae/.

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OVERHEARD ON-LINE...

Question: "I'm a trainer. But recently, I've observed that my perception of 'trainer' rarely coincides with that of suppliers. So, what is a trainer?"

Reply: "What a wonderful question! I think it has to do with point of view. As a supplier, I'd think of trainers as those who can put across my courses or 'put rear ends in seats,' as our vice-president of marketing says. As a manager, I'd think of a trainer as someone who can present the necessary classes to help my operation. It's about the struggle of our profession to be recognized as one that solves performance problems, whatever their cause."

fax/video systems and plugs for laptops. On some craft, United Airlines will be offering such capabilities right at passengers' seats.

TREND WATCH

HERE'S SOME reconnaissance on what's happening in the field:

- ▶ Sexual harassment is the fastest growing training topic. (*Training Industry Report*)
- ▶ The use of temporary help is becoming a permanent hiring trend.

(OfficeTeam)

- ▶ The mission statement is corporate America's favorite management tool, though it can be just a quick fix. (*Knight-Ridder and Corporate Board*)

- ▶ Less than 20 percent of training is delivered by technology, though a tremendous increase is expected by 2000. The most widely used technologies are videotapes, audiotapes, and CD-ROM. (Quality Dynamics)

- ▶ Within five years, more than one-third of corporate universities expect to grant degrees in partnership with

external universities. (Quality Dynamics)

COMMON COMPETENCIES

IT'S NOT NEWS that service excellence is a key factor in customer satisfaction. But many companies still don't place a priority on training their customer service representatives in new competencies.

They should, according to a recent study by Learning International of Stanford, Connecticut. The study shows that the top performers in service organizations master an average of 15 competencies, including these in common:

- ▶ empathy
- ▶ problem-solving skills
- ▶ effective communication skills
- ▶ the ability to listen actively
- ▶ the ability to work well as part of a team
- ▶ a commitment to building customer loyalty and confidence.

THE LOWDOWN ON HIGH-TECH

"CD-ROM-based training on the desktop will replace many other training activities within the next 18 months," predicts Brandon Hall, editor and publisher of *Multimedia Training*, a newsletter out of Sunnyvale, California.

One company, Fred Meyer of Oregon, installed PCs with CD-ROM drives in the employee lunchrooms in its 133 stores for mandatory training. The company also offers gift certificates to employees who log extra course work on their own time.

Using a related technol-

ogy, Chrysler has set up a large-scale training program on CD-i for its retail salespeople. Basically, CD-i is interactive CD-ROM. Like CD-ROM, CD-i enables a lot of employees to receive training on-site at their own pace.

QUICK COURSE

HERE ARE SOME strategies for navigating the reengineering landscape, from Marc Sternfeld, president of Transform LLC, headquartered in New York City:

- ▶ Think of it as a business move, not a downsizing.
- ▶ Get power from the top.
- ▶ Make a wish list.
- ▶ Start with processes, not a department or function.
- ▶ Move fast; don't strategize every detail.
- ▶ Be willing to fail.
- ▶ Don't try to legislate results. Instead, go for performance objectives, not how they're achieved.
- ▶ Put people first by changing the way they work. Counsel and comfort them, but make sure they meet expectations.
- ▶ Test prototypes of new concepts before moving to the next step.

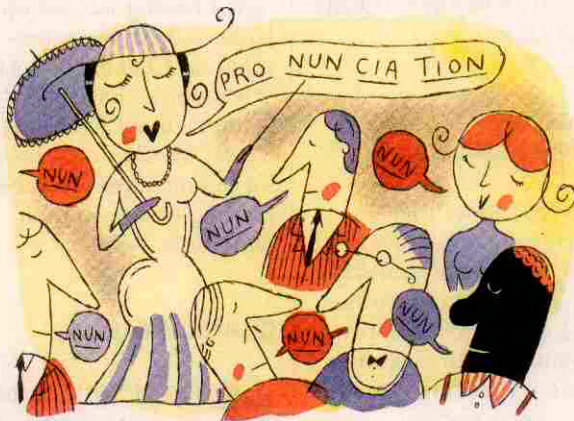
QUICK SCHMOOZE

WHEN ATTENDING a business party, suggests *Ominiafax*, position yourself near the door. That way, you'll get to talk with a lot of people for short periods of time.

BY GEORGE, I THINK THEY'VE GOT IT!

EMPLLOYEES' unclear speech can lower their morale and productivity, as

Cyril Cabry



well as the public's perception of the organization as a whole, says Katie Schwartz, director of Business Speech Improvement in Reading, Pennsylvania.

For example, a worker might not ask for help in using a new machine because he's afraid people

will laugh at the way he talks. Or, a sales manager may be asked to fire an otherwise competent salesperson because she mumbles. Speech pathologists can conduct evaluations and provide training to improve employees' speech patterns through

pronunciation training.

Such training begins with an analysis of employees' current speech, including tone, word pronunciation, muscle flexibility, rate of speech, accent, and problems due to poor hearing. Through training, employees learn to modify mispronunciations and then try new speech patterns in work-related situations.

Pro-Serve, a free referral service of the American Speech-Hearing-Language Association, provides the names of speech pathologists who specialize in corporate services. Call 800/638-8255.

Some factors to consider are:

- ▶ how much of the training should focus on employees'

work vocabulary

- ▶ what techniques will help employees apply new speech skills in their work
- ▶ whether to conduct training individually or in groups

▶ how to provide follow-up to ensure that employees maintain new skills.

Schwartz says that many people tell her they've received promotions or are doing better in their jobs because of their improved speech.

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This month's "News You Can Use" was compiled by **Haidee Allerton**. Send items of interest to "News You Can Use," 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

Illustration by Cyril Cabry

INFORMATION...

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