

# In Practice

## Lights Out

If you've ever nodded off during a boring business presentation, a new survey reveals that you're in good company.

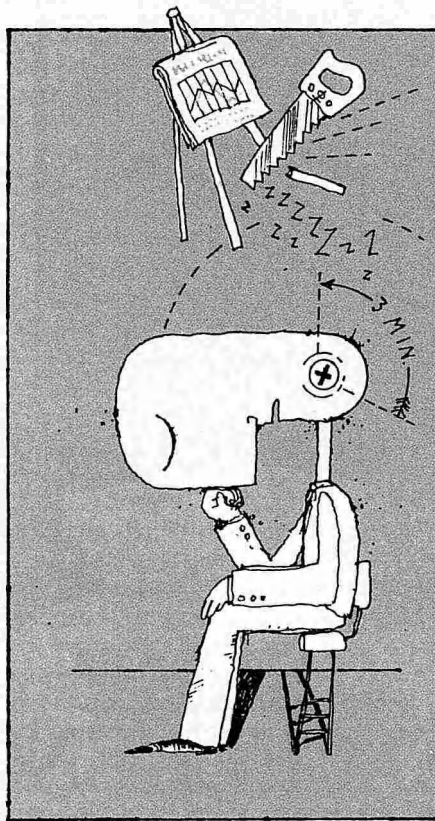
Four out of 10 top executives admit that they have fallen asleep during office presentations, according to Motivational Systems, a management-development and sales-training organization.

For nap-prone execs, narcoleptic interludes can be a blessing or a curse. After an exhausting morning of wheeling and dealing, a short snooze during a sales call can provide a much-needed pick-me-up. On the other hand, workplace health and safety authorities warn of dangerous side effects, not the least of which are the nasty welts produced when Mr. or Ms. Blue Suit executes an R.E.M.-induced full-frontal faceplant onto the desk blotter.

Those whose presentations cause their listeners to break out the No-Doz face even more dire consequences, warns Roger Flax, president of Motivational Systems. "When your audience is tuning out, sales are lost, vital information is poorly communicated to managers and employees, training programs fail, company policies are improperly implemented, and productivity and efficiency suffer."

Considering that 44.5 percent of the 200 vice-presidents polled rated most formal business presentations "boring" or "unbearable," all of the above probably occur with alarming frequency.

What can speakers do to keep the snoring to a minimum? Flax says the first 15 to 30 seconds of a presentation are critical. "The moment the group's attention and interest start to wander and eyes begin to glaze over, you may have lost your audience for good," he cautions. "Eye contact and rapport must be established immediately. You should stimulate your listeners, introduce your main point,



David Povitlatis

arouse audience interest, and get the adrenaline going."

Flax maintains that applying the following tips will keep eyelids from drooping during your presentation:

- Know your subject matter and believe in what you're saying. If you don't, your listeners certainly won't. Project confidence.

- Don't read or memorize your talk. It reduces eye contact and invites boredom. Avoid excessive rehearsal. You need to be prepared, but you don't want your words to sound canned and stale. "An oral presentation is really an enlarged conversation," Flax notes. "It should have the same spontaneity, enthusiasm, body language, and intensity you use in everyday conversation."

- Accentuate and modulate your voice with highs and lows, and louds and softs. Speak rapidly sometimes, but slow down to emphasize key points. Use your voice to project enthusiasm and build interest.

- Use what Flax calls "periodic power pauses," brief verbal breaks that give you time to think and your audience time to digest information. They drive home your point and add a dramatic touch.

- Move naturally during your talk. Use hand and arm gestures for emphasis, and vary your facial expressions. Smile at times, frown or look surprised and quizzical at others. Don't get stuck behind the podium either; you'll come across as a more dynamic speaker if you move around during your presentation.

- Avoid excessive, complex, or unnecessary visual aids. A picture can be worth a thousand words, but don't include charts, graphs, or pictures unless they actually convey critical information. Visual fluff is just as boring as verbal fluff.

Flax notes another drawback to using slides and overheads: the room has to be dark. And when you turn the lights down, you can bet some of your listeners will grab the chance for some midday shut-eye.

## Banking and Basic Skills

It's been clear for some time that basic-skills deficiencies have a negative effect on business success. The news is that some industries have finally begun to respond by sponsoring remedial programs.

Nowhere is that truer than in commercial banking, where 38 percent of all companies have established basic-skills education programs for their employees. That's the encouraging word from a survey recently released by the American Institute of Banking. According to the study, another four percent of commercial banks plan to begin similar efforts soon.

The objective of the survey, based on a representative sample of 391 banks, was to define the industry shortage of "prerequisite skills in math, reading, writing, oral com-

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munication, or general problem solving required for an acceptable level of functioning in a specific job." It polled midlevel bank managers working in a variety of disciplines including human resources and operations.

Of the banks that conduct basic-skills training, 37 percent have internal programs, with line units having primary responsibility for providing the training. The 63 percent that rely on external training sources most often turn to packages provided by the AIB. Thirteen percent send employees to courses at local col-

leges and universities.

The average amount spent on basic-skills training programs in 1988 was more than \$2,300 per bank—about 23 percent of each bank's total training budget. For the entire commercial banking industry, that represents an investment of more than \$32 million, a figure twice that reported in 1985.

More than eight of 10 respondents reported that some of their employees had poor basic skills, especially in positions the American Bankers Association considers most "at risk." Those include tellers,

bookkeepers, customer-service representatives, and secretaries.

The move to establish basic-skills programs comes none too soon, according to the AIB. Its research indicates that

- Deficiencies in basic skills affect operations and customer service. Employees with poor basic skills are more likely than other workers to produce cash-drawer imbalances and misunderstand procedures. Such errors often cost banks money.

- Basic-skills problems are growing more severe. Since 1985, the skills-test scores of newly hired

## NATIONAL HRD EXECUTIVE SURVEY

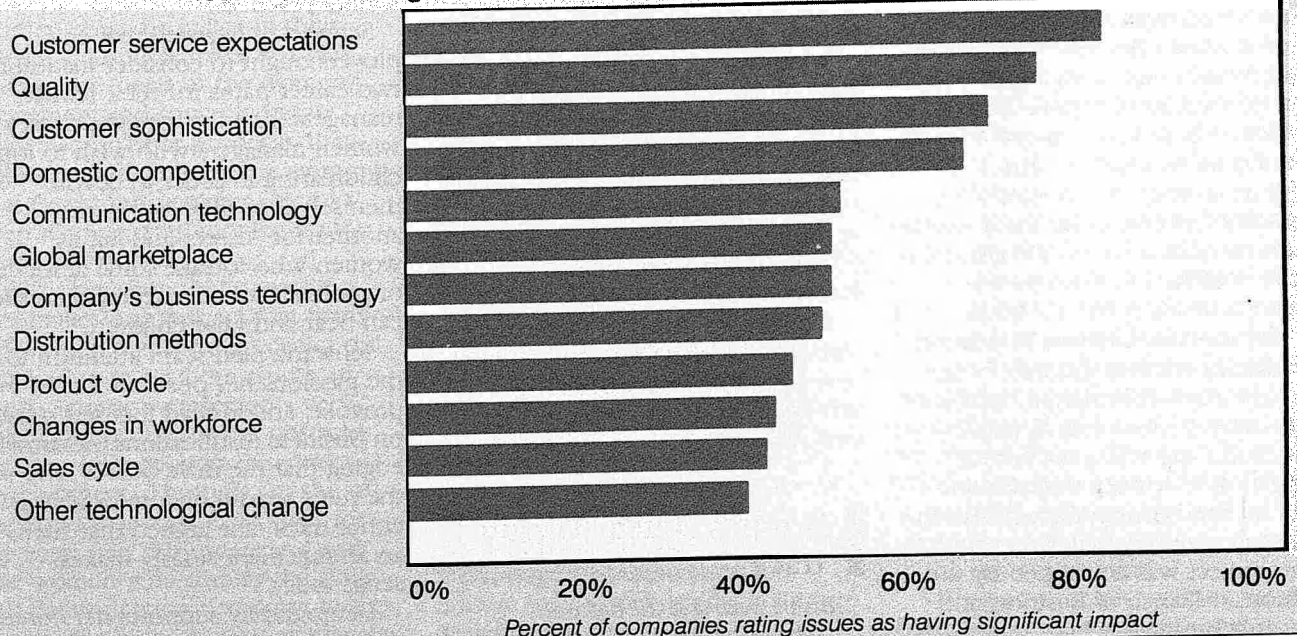
### Customer-Service Expectations Top List of Sales Training Issues

Rising customer-service expectations will have the greatest impact on salespeople's effectiveness over the next three years, according to the senior-level training and development practitioners polled for the latest edition of ASTD's HRD Executive Survey. Customer expectations and the other 11 issues presented below should provide plenty of instructional topics for everyone involved in training the nation's salesforce.

That's a diverse group, the survey found, because responsibility for sales training varies among the companies polled. Field sales managers are in charge of sales training in 27 percent of companies, while HRD staff have responsibility in another 25 percent. Marketing managers preside over the instructional effort in 22 percent of the firms, with corporate sales managers, product managers, and others directing sales-training programs in the rest.

No matter who directs the effort, it seems clear that sales trainers face significant challenges. Seventy-one percent of survey respondents said their salespeople will need more highly developed skills by 1992.

### Issues Influencing Sales Effectiveness Over the Next One to Three Years





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employees have declined slightly, and the percentage of job applicants turned down because of poor basic skills has increased by about five percent.

■ Oral and written communications are the areas in which bank employees most often show deficiencies. Especially for tellers and other employees who deal with the public, communications shortcomings can seriously impair job performance.

Mirroring the recommendations of the American Society for Training and Development's recent research into basic-skills issues, the AIB concluded that basic-skills training for bank personnel needs to be job-specific. "Job-specific training... reduces the instructional time needed for performance gains and enables participants to transfer learning to the job more readily," it reported.

## Trading Places?

A lot of TV and newspaper reports lately have trumpeted the demise of selfishness and the rise of a new altruistic spirit among today's young people. Most folks who hear about that trendlet just yawn "Yeah, sure" and go back to polishing their Porsches. But every once in a while, one wonders. Listen to this:

This summer, 20 Harvard MBA students forswore Wall Street internships to work in nonprofit organizations dedicated to education improvement and school reform.

The 10-week Business/Education Leadership Project, funded by the H. Ross Perot Foundation, examined corporate involvement in public education and will soon issue a report on how the business community can become more active in improving the nation's schools. The project was developed by the National Alliance of Business and Harvard Business School.

Students began the summer by attending a three-day seminar designed to introduce the key education-reform issues. Then they headed off to Atlanta, Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., to work for local education-related nonprofits. During their time there, they tried to foster additional corporate support for education-improvement efforts, using their business skills to help design, refine, and implement business/education partnerships.

At press time, the students were busy developing recommendations on ways to strengthen similar cooperative arrangements.

## Random Stats

### What substance abuse costs

Costs associated with employee drug and alcohol abuse average out to three percent of payroll for American companies, and consultants at Mercer Meidinger Hansen say costs will keep rising. Twenty-two percent of 265 CEOs, governors, and mayors polled told the firm that they consider substance abuse a "very significant" problem in their organizations.

When workers misuse drugs and alcohol, their employers pay the price—in medical benefits, absenteeism, and declining productivity. Nationwide, the substance-abuse bill comes to a staggering \$177 billion, according to government statistics quoted in Mercer Meidinger Hansen's *Bulletin* 164-165.

Almost two-thirds of the leaders surveyed say they currently compel new hires to take drug tests, or will begin to do so within the next two years.

## Mommy Track, Daddy Track

*"You've heard it all before:  
"The employee needs the day off*

*to stay home with a sick child.*

*"The employee needs the morning off to attend a child's school play.*

*"The employee needs to leave at 5 p.m. on the dot to make it home in time to relieve the babysitter.*

*"And finally... The employee wants to work part-time for a few years while the children are young, so they do not spend so much time in the care of a substitute parent.*

*"Yes, you've heard it all before. The only difference is, the employee is a man."*

Thus begins a thought-provoking report, *The 1990s Father: Balancing Work and Family Concerns*, that sounds especially timely in the wake of last spring's Mommy Track uproar.

When Felice N. Schwartz, founder of the women's career development organization, Catalyst, published "Management Women and the New Facts of Life" in the January-February issue of *Harvard Business Review*, the sounds of gnashing teeth and defensive protests overwhelmed her main point: that current conditions compel employers to come up with innovative personnel practices.

Schwartz suggested that employers ought to consider instituting two career paths for their female managers: one for "career-primary" women managers who wish to forgo childrearing in order to devote themselves to their work, and another for "career-and-family" women who forsake some amount of professional advancement so they can bear and raise children.

Schwartz paid scant attention to the passions her position would provoke, and instead focused strictly on business justifications. Acknowledging that the male bosses who set the rules remain uncomfortable with either track, she argued that such an arrangement simply makes sense today.

Demography supports her contention. Given that women will out-

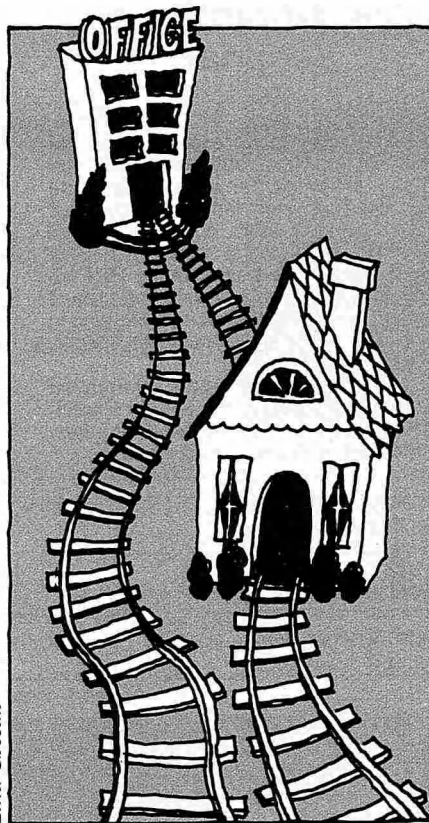
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number men among new entrants in the employment marketplace, and that the increase in women graduating from top universities (the traditional spawning grounds of managerial talent) is much greater than the increase in the total number of graduates, companies must hire vast numbers of women managers to remain competitive. Employers that stubbornly insist on recruiting only male candidates, Schwartz maintained, will find themselves scraping the bottom of the barrel to fill positions that used to go to the high performers.

Companies serious about working productively and profitably will hire the best-qualified applicants regardless of sex and organize themselves in ways that make it possible to retain *all* those people—even if it means offering novel work arrangements such as flextime, parental leave, job sharing, and, yes, an alternative career path for those unwilling to give up family life for the sake of 70-hour, CEO-bound work weeks.

After *Harvard Business Review* published "Management Women and the New Facts of Life", much howling ensued. Some working women sensed a traitor in their midst, accusing Schwartz of perverting the ideals of the women's movement and squandering its gains. Doesn't her proposal, they asked, provide exactly the ammunition fat-cat businessmen need to keep women from moving up the corporate ladder?

A fair question, but a question that makes one suspect that many of Schwartz's most strident critics did not bother to read the article. Indeed, Schwartz presented a very clear-eyed picture of the obstacles that can impede women's career development. Throughout, she recognized that male executives for the most part misunderstand and fear women who display the skills and determination necessary to succeed at the highest corporate levels,



Lina Chesak

while simultaneously dismissing as uncommitted women whose allegiances are split between the demands of their careers and their families.

Schwartz argued that business must adopt dual career tracks in order to attract and retain both career-primary and career-and-family women. And if enlightened self-interest is what it takes to get employers to institute progressive personnel policies and job-design practices, well, that's better than no enlightenment at all.

Running beneath the issue of career-primary versus career-and-family-oriented is a nagging question: Has it not always been thus?

Male managers also must decide whether they want to focus solely on professional success or whether they want lifestyles that include a career and family. Granted—and this is too huge a consideration to dismiss lightly—a business culture designed by men confers on men

much more choice in the matter.

Until recently, most managers were married to women who, by convention or by choice, stayed home and cared for the kids. Fast-trackers could put in those 70-hour work weeks in the quest for promotions and prime assignments, receiving as a reward a senior-executive slot.

Fathers who put their families first—who were willing to read to the children at bedtime or attend PTA meetings or turn down a promotion that required relocation—knew they did so at some expense to their careers. Commercial jingles notwithstanding, they realized they could not have it all, and they settled into midlevel positions that provided secure incomes, reasonable professional challenges, and time for their private lives. In the fifties, sixties, and even the seventies, to be a businessman or a family man was a choice.

That's not the case anymore. Only 3.7 percent of today's families fit the traditional working father/stay-at-home mother model, according to *The 1990s Father: Balancing Work and Family Concerns*.

The 32-page report, issued by the Bureau of National Affairs (phone: 800/372-1033), states that as economic and social forces place more women in the job market, fathers are beginning to take on greater family responsibilities. Although women continue to be the primary family care-givers, men now have a growing stake in promoting parental leave, child-care leave, flextime, and job sharing—the very practices Schwartz advocated in her article.

Experts interviewed for the BNA report maintained that many of those fathers, and men younger than 35, expect their employers to understand when they need to stay home with a sick child or knock off at 5 so they can avoid overtime charges at the day-care center.

"We tend to think working moms have a monopoly on guilt, but it's





# Project Management:

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Dr. Harold Kerzner, Lee M. Ekstrom, and Harvey A. Levine will be giving a seminar for five days on September 18-22, 1989, in Chicago, Illinois featuring effective project management methods essential to high productivity.

Harvey A. Levine, a past president and chairman of the Board of Project Management Institute, author of the book entitled "Project Management Using Microcomputers", and founder and principal of the Project Knowledge Group will present two days on selecting and implementing project management software systems.

Dr. Harold Kerzner, one of the world's foremost authorities and authors on project management, and Lee M. Ekstrom, president and founder of the management consulting firm GPMT, Inc., and a certified Project Management Professional by PMI will present three days on tailoring project management to your needs, bringing in projects on schedule and within budget, and much more.

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not true," said James Levine, director of the Fatherhood Program at Bank Street College. "They're feeling that they're repeating the same pattern as their fathers, not being around enough," he said.

Du Pont Company is one organization that is looking for ways to help male employees balance career and family pressures. The chemical manufacturer recently extended from two to six months the amount of parental leave available for mothers and fathers after the birth of a child, according to the report.

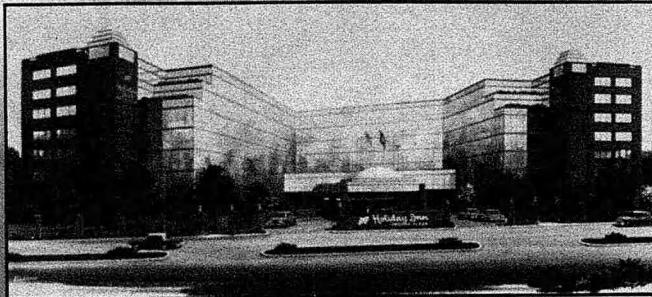
Earlier this year, Du Pont released a study showing that men as well as women consider their families when making career plans. The study found that nearly half of those who use or plan to use child-care services are men. In addition, more than a quarter of those surveyed said they have thought about leaving the company for another firm that provided more job flexibility.

To be sure, corporate concern for male employees' family obligations is a relatively new thing, and workers and bosses have yet to embrace the idea wholeheartedly. Many of the companies discussed in *The 1990s Father: Balancing Work and Family Concerns* reported that men are reluctant to take paternity leave, in spite of generous policies.

But corporate concern for female workers' needs is also relatively new, and as the Mommy Track debate has clearly illustrated, individual employees, the business community, and society have a long way to go before any agreement is reached on critical work and family issues. Despite the controversy that accompanied Felice Schwartz's article, it appears that the disparate interests are on converging courses, and that's cause for hope.

"In Practice" is edited and written by John Wilcox. Send items of interest to *In Practice*, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

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