

WHICH ROLE FOR TODAY'S TRAINER?

do you fit into one of these trainer categories?

The training literature is full of articles which discuss, debate and delineate the roles of the training man. Similarly, rare is the conference for training people which overlooks this topic. The roles are described variously as "new," "emerging," "broadened," "challenging," "changing," "demanding" and "urgent."

While the concept of the changing role of the training man is a valid one, what may be overlooked in these discussions is that the trainer may, in practice, be saddled or enamored with a plethora of other less attractive and less effective roles. This concept had been brought home to me very poignantly while conducting (four times in the last two years) a course for the Graduate School, U. S. Department of Agriculture entitled "Seminar for Employee Development Officers." Some of these roles reflect attitudes and practices of members of those seminars; some were suggested by seminar members as role descriptions of other trainers they had seen in action. In any case, a number of these roles are discussed below. They are merely meant to be suggestive. The reader will readily call to mind a number of other roles which he has encountered in his training experience. Hopefully, he will use the "mirror technique" to ascertain whether he is filling one or more roles which is vitiating his effectiveness; if so, perhaps he can take appropriate action to assume other more meaningful and productive roles.

THE REHABILITATION OFFICER

One of the more demanding roles which the training man often rallies to fill is that of the Rehabilitation Officer. The opportunity arises when management presents the trainer with this kind of challenge: "Les Wurk has been aboard 14 years now and in this period of time he hasn't done anything for us except produce delays, consternation and embarrassment. We've tried everything, so now it's your turn. How about sending him off to a year of advanced study at Retread U? It may do him some good, and even if it doesn't, we will have him

out of our hair for 10 or 12 months." So the university catalogs are dusted off and a suitable academic tour, or possibly a series of short courses, is found for Les.

A variation on the Rehabilitation role is that of Morale Building. Thus, employees may be generously included in training courses because they are unhappy over a promotion which they didn't receive, or because long-service should be rewarded, or because they are members of a minority group, or because they haven't had any training for a good while, or because they are in grades or types of jobs which don't ordinarily receive training opportunities. The Morale Officer role can be rationalized away, of course, as a means of "improving relations with management." Conveniently ignored are the facts that employees quite often see through these devices or that the shot in the arm is of very short duration at best.

Oddly enough, employees also may be sent off for training, not as a bonus or reward, but as a punitive or disciplinary kind of thing. Thus, in the Employee Development Seminar cited above, one participant cited a case of a West Coast manager who had been requested in writing twice to attend a two-week leadership course, but which he assiduously avoided over a two-year period. When the organization head learned that his training instruction has been skillfully ignored, he ordered the man to attend an eight-week (!) course in the East (!).

THE TOURIST REPRESENTATIVE

The training department is in a unique position to aid or frustrate the vacation plans of management and its employees. Thus, with a cooperative attitude it can send staff members to training courses to Florida in the winter and to Maine in the summer. Or, as a special kind of case in point, if Electrical Engineer Short has a daughter in college in Texas, there is no good reason why Short shouldn't take in a training institute in the Southwest rather than in Philadelphia where he is located. The fact that Engineer

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Short has been dodging training courses for years is not particularly significant for we, as trainers, do want to capitalize on this new-found motivation.

THE STATISTICIAN

Collecting training statistics was, in years past, a very minor sideline for the trainer. This collecting urge, if unfulfilled, often produced great frustration. But now that the computer is so readily available, the statistically oriented trainer is really in his element. The assumptions now are that (1) we must program everything for "you'll never know when it may be needed" and (2) "since management is footing the bills it is entitled to know" (or is it snow?).

Thus a great deal of energy and ingenuity is devoted to producing tons of printouts which can advise management of vital quantitative tidbits such as:

- The number of middle-level managers between 30-33 years of age in Kansas City who have had training in high school algebra but not in sociology. This datum obviously can be compared with other age groups, with other levels of management, with those at other geographical locations, with height, weight and family size, and with almost anything else.
- The annual cost of all training in Better Report Writing since 1960 compared to the annual cost of carbon paper for the same period.
- The number of man-hours spent in formal training programs, broken down (unimaginatively) by department served, types of training provided, cost per trainee.

However, collecting data is only half the task. Additional energies also must be devoted to the production of eye-catching graphic presentations in multi-color, all designed to prove to one's superiors that "training is really paying off."

In general, data such as the number of heads in the classroom may be of interest to management. More significant, of course, is the number of management problems solved.

THE CHAPLAIN

Although effective training ordinarily relates to fairly concrete end-results, the training man may find that his occasional successes and apparent general exper-

tise push him into the added but less precise role of the Chaplain. This develops since he often is presumed to be an "expert" in human relations (at least he teaches the stuff). Thus, people may gravitate to him with their troubles. The trainer obviously doesn't want to appear aloof or to be a possessor of tunnel vision, so he may readily fall into the trap of serving as a wailing wall. Thus the disgruntled, the disenchanting and the part-time workers (paid full-time, of course) may come around for all kinds of advice or to present criticisms of management operations, or more precisely, to achieve some kind of catharsis for themselves. At the outset this role may have some ego-gratifying value for the trainer. But as more important chores are left undone, he may develop some awareness that he's caught in a bind. He thus may have to rationalize this and say to himself after a 50-minute listening bout: "Wonder why he wanted to tell me about this? Oh, well, I suppose it gives one some added insight into the climate of the organization."

THE INSTRUCTOR

Confusion between the role of instructor and trainer is hardly a new problem. Stated simply, the Instructor is the chap who is concerned with "giving people the word." He operates, as he sees it, from the vantage point of his accumulated knowledge.

He thus has a compulsive need to share (transmit) this knowledge to others. He thinks in terms of lectures, blackboards, slide talks, overhead transparencies, formal classrooms, detailed agendas, and handouts in support of lectures. Conversely, he is less likely to think in terms of trainee involvement, trainee responsibility and trainee growth. Learning as a shared process would hardly be a key concept to the Instructor. There is also a good likelihood that evaluation of end results and the use of varied methodology, with a heavy emphasis on group work, would not loom very significantly in the Instructor's approach to training.

Since the Instructor's needs are best met by a highly-structured program and by personally functioning from the lectern, his potential for growth is limited. A re-assessment of this role, although vital, all too often doesn't take place. Instead, energies are directed to "pepping up" lectures or disguising them by terming them "talks" or "lecturettes."

THE ELECTRONICS SPECIALIST

One of the hazards of the training business is that the trainer may become overly intrigued with the electronic hardware available so abundantly today. Thus, he may become an expert on video tape units, transparencies, film strips, tape recorders, projectors, carousels, teaching machines, tachistoscopes, electronic lecterns, microphones, speakers and the latest marvel, the compact, complete, self-contained, multi-purpose mobile, electronic training unit.

There's nothing wrong, obviously, with using up-to-date audio-visual equipment where appropriate. But what may well be overlooked is that the bright, dazzling and costly gadgetry are essentially devices for one-way communication. In fact, if I had my "druthers" I would opt for trainee-involving methodologies such as buzz groups, role playing, dyads, triads, in-baskets, exercises, games, the laboratory method, etc. and wager that adequately respectable end results would ensue with a minimum of paraphernalia.

THE EVANGELIST

Another role which the trainer may assume is that of Evangelist or Preacher. His function, as he seems to see it, is to uplift the organization via a lofty doctrine or philosophy which he is quick to expound in depth. The exact nature of the dogma is not significant, so we'll let you, the reader, call on your own experience to cite a specific example. What *is* important is that it has (presumed) high moralistic, ethical and/or quasi-religious overtones.

Remember the old definition of a zealot? Well, it's simply the guy who in-

creases his enthusiasm as he loses sight of his objectives. Nuf said?

THE PROFESSIONAL

A role which some trainers endeavor to fill is that of the "professional." This role encompasses much verbal obeisance to the "Professional" nature of the work. With great flourish, the professional presents at every opportunity his impeccable (to whom?) credentials of an academic, experiential and/or literary character. Memberships in numerous organizations of a management and academic sort are touted to the impressive. Attendance at conferences, courses and workshops is exploited to the extent that the budget will bear. Approaches to problems are presented with such opening gambits as "from a professional training standpoint . . ." or "it is widely recognized in professional circles . . .,"

In general, the hallmark of the professional is a high concern with image development, all too often forgetting that one is evaluated essentially by what works, not by the ruffles and the flourishes.

THE INTELLECTUAL

The knowledge explosion in the behavioral and management sciences since World War II has provided the trainer with new concepts, new language and new goals. All of this is helpful to the Intellectual to enable him to present an image of knowledgeability, currency and professionalism.

It thus is not unusual to hear the trainer talking glibly in terms of models, behavioral objectives, systems, real time, operational definitions, self-perceptions,

other-directedness, O.R., 9-1, Theory Y, encounter groups, cognitive needs, role theory and the like. And when in doubt, one can always name-drop Likert, Herzberg, McGregor, Bradford, Argyris, McClelland and Maslow. Unfortunately, confusion on the part of line managers, who may be subject to this vague verbiage, will probably be regarded as proof to the Intellectual of the dated character of the line managers, rather than as cues or vital feedback for the communicator to soft pedal his pontifications.

THE VENDOR

All of us have encountered the trainer who is enamored by the new. He thus is constantly "selling" his training wares on the basis of "this is the latest thing." He thus rides one band wagon after another, constantly hawking the virtues of the new, the novel, the latest, the most promising.

He readily rationalizes this approach by using cliches such as "shopping the competition," "adjusting to change" and "functioning on the frontier." His highest skill is quietly burying yesterday's fad for the enthusiasm of the moment.

THE "HOBBY HORSE" RIDER

All of us, as trainers, have preferences as to what courses to teach and what programs to emphasize to the organization. However, not uncommon is the trainer who rides with a vengeance a particular training hobby horse. This is not to say the training being favored is not useful. But what goes awry is a sense of balance. Thus, in adopting a molecular rather than a molar view, the overall needs of the organization tend to suffer.

In time, operating officials realize that they are dealing with a "specialist's specialist" and comments may be made such as: "There's no point talking to Carrithers about any training programs unless you're willing to settle for his help on his own hobby horse."

THE BROKER IN COURSES

Our roles gallery would not be complete without at least a brief reference to the chap who serves as a broker or middleman in training courses. He thus can quickly provide the line man with course brochures from the AMA, NTL, and many colleges and universities and allied institutions. His only hangups are that:

1. He doesn't have a real fix on the merits of one course versus another.
2. Or for that matter, he doesn't know what the course will really do (end results), nor does he know what past attendees think of the course.
3. He thus cannot assess for the organization the value, dollars-wise or in any other way, of the course.
4. He also ignores the possibility of doing some of the training in-house for more measurable results at lesser cost.

Our discussion of roles is hardly complete. In fact, it is intended to be suggestive rather than encyclopedic lest the author find himself unwittingly in the role of the Hypercritic. But if we, as trainers, can't step back on occasion and look somewhat detachedly at ourselves, even if it pains a bit, can we in good conscience encourage the people we train to assume the vital role of Self-evaluator?

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