

The Discipline of the Training Man

Training Growth Dependent Upon Serving Real Needs

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Popularity these days seems to be achieved by thinking "big." The "Great Society" is designed to bring greater benefits to all citizens of the nation. The military might of the country is prepared to battle with any aggression on a global basis. The United Nations is prepared to deal with world problems. Labor unions, corporations, educational institutions, even the American Society for Training and Development is concerned with becoming bigger. The old cliché—"if you don't grow, you die" never seemed to be more popular.

The growth idea has moved into many companies' training programs. The objective seems to be to have the biggest, the best, the most sophisti-

cated training program in the industry. Hire the best training people that can be found; develop programs that have real "meat" in them. Put all eligible employees through the program. Develop objective means of proving to the controller just how valuable the training program is. The cycle can then be repeated. The training function becomes more indispensable; the training director a more important member of management in his organization.

All of these ideas concerning being big and being the best are commendable whether reference is made to the nation as a whole or individual companies. Yet there appears to be a trap that remains hidden. The benefits of

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the "Great Society" are to be made available to all on a national level. Unfortunately the areas of the country who could benefit most from it appear to be the least capable of helping themselves. The military might of the country is prepared to ably defend the country in an all-out confrontation, but questions have been raised concerning how well it can do in the "brushfire" type of conflict. The United Nations, too, has and is having its problems.

Biggest vs. Best

What does this have to do with the training director? Simply this. The biggest and best training program does not automatically guarantee the most success. Just as world and national bodies have tried to meet worthwhile goals, and have fallen short, so have company training programs. The reactions to people throughout the country and the world to what various political groups have done is very apparent to anyone who reads the news media or watches television. The reaction to a company training program is apparent to most everyone in the company, except perhaps the training director. Just as some newspaper readers see the world as a beautiful place to live, others see it in its worst light, so the training director can choose. He often chooses to see it in its most favorable light when such may not be the case at all.

How does the training department carefully devise such a trap without realizing it. The easiest method to use is that of developing a company training program that is based on what the training department "knows" that all levels of company management and employees need to know. The next step is to get everyone into the program. This is usually done through training committees or through the personal charm of the training direc-

tor. If suggestions are made by line managers that the program seems too long in view of production requirements, or that perhaps a more flexible training schedule could be arranged, they are quickly brushed off with comments to the effect that the training program would quickly lose its effectiveness if these and other suggestions were incorporated into the program. The net result comes out something like this, "We know what's good for you and the most effective way of presenting it to you."

The line manager may be "too busy" with organizational problems to find time for himself and his subordinates to attend the program. If he is forced to attend by "invitation" from the chief executive officer or his assistant, he will do so the first time, but what about the future? Will it take an "invitation" every time to get him there? Will the "invitation" insure his being at the training session, or will urgent production problems prevent this in spite of the "invitation?"

Back to Basics?

Despite the fact that this training program was the most elegant one ever developed, the one that would really "stretch participants' minds" like they have never been stretched before, the program fails because there is no one there to have his mind "stretched." If employees do attend, they are likely to be the perennial student type—the kind who always is learning but does not make much progress up the management ladder.

Perhaps every training director should adapt President Kennedy's admonition of "Think not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" not only to personal responsibility as a citizen of this nation, but also as a member of the organization which employs him. The training director should set his

sights high, but he must modify them on the basis of the needs and experiences of the organization and the people in it.

For example, Job Instruction Training may be "old-fashioned" from the viewpoint of some training directors who prefer to teach a more sophisticated form of educational psychology—although it may not be labeled as such. While no one would perhaps question the value of teaching the more advanced concepts, the training falls short of what the line manager needs. His objective is to get subordinates into production as quickly as possible. To do this, the subordinate must be taught the job. Job Instruction Training principles do this as effectively as anything that has been developed. JIT has gone out of style and is not available to the line manager because training department instructors get bored with teaching the subject and want to move on to something "more sophisticated, more challenging." While the instructors become more experienced they forget that new people are continually moving into the organization and into supervisory and management positions. These people do not have the experience, knowledge, or skills that the training department quite often assumes they do.

Real Carryover?

Another example is in the area of leadership. There are many approaches to this subject today. A great deal of research has been done to broaden this field of knowledge. The training director is often quick to seize upon the newest approach and set up training programs to get company personnel exposed to it.

What happens? The line manager often fails to grasp the full implications of the methods being advocated. He goes back to a different job environment than that found in the train-

ing conference room. Working under pressures he cannot effectively control, he finds himself not using the leadership style shown to him in the training session to be the "best" way, but falling back on a style that he has almost always used and which has gotten him results thus far.

The line manager may very quickly assess the value of future training sessions to himself or his subordinates. He will probably feel that knowing what certain research or experts in the field of leadership indicate the best style or styles of leadership to be is valuable of course, but not being able to apply it, whether he wants to or not, becomes extremely important.

The end result may very well be that he and his subordinates decline future exposures because of the "pressure of production." Again the training director finds himself in the position of having a fine program, well thought-out, in keeping with the latest educational techniques, but without participants.

Training To Fit The Need

Sophistication has its place. Unless, however, the training director can unbend a little, he may be engaged in a futile attempt at the training function in his organization. There should be no attempt at mediocrity in the training program. The most effective methods of supervision and management should be taught. There should be no compromise with quality. Programs should be geared to the actual needs and schedules of participants.

If a high concern for people is being taught to line managers in an organization that has an executive group who have a high concern for production rather than people, how effective will the training program be? The training director must assess the climate, the needs of the organization, the styles of leadership being em-

ployed by the top management, the production schedules of the organization, educational level of its members, the length and degree of experience in the job individuals are assigned to do, and other factors such as these. The training program should then be worked out with the people who will be in it. Flexibility has to be the keynote.

If training programs are prepared around the specific needs of members of the organization, if the material, no matter how boring it is to the training

specialist, is geared to the level of comprehension and application of the participants, and if programs can be scheduled during lulls in the production cycle or at other times convenient to the group, training efforts will be quite fruitful. If the training director turns from the role of telling production people what they need and how he will give it to them to that of asking what their needs are and how he can best help satisfy these, the role of the training function in the company will be an expanding one.

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