THE BEST METHOD TO TRAIN MANAGERS . . .

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Training programs for managers can vary from training in general supervision to training in specific techniques such as management by objectives (MBO). There appear to be two main approaches presently being used to train managers. One approach is to attend a management seminar/workshop/course.

Another popular approach is on-the-job (OTJ) coaching. The second approach often adds an element of the first approach by sending a small number of managers to a seminar and having them coach their subordinate managers upon their return; they obtain the information from the seminar and relay it to others in their organization. Which approach is more effective?

It is difficult to judge whether coaching or attending a seminar is more effective. Research assessing management seminars usually shows small, positive results, but personnel management books often lead us to believe that OTJ methods (especially coaching) are superior to off-the-job training methods. Some argue that coaching should be superior because of better use of important principles of learning such as "reinforcement" and "transfer of training."

To ascertain whether coaching or attending a seminar is more effective in training managers, a study was conducted. *Coaching* was defined as an OTJ training method using didactic discussions and assigned projects to enable the subordinate to gain knowledge/skill. A *seminar* was defined as an off-the-job training method where the trainer uses a variety of techniques but especially lectures, group discussions and case studies to enable the employee to gain knowledge / skill. ("Knowledge" and "skill" were considered synonymous and were the main criteria in the study. Actual performance on the job was assumed to be partially comprised of the trainee's motivation to apply the knowledge/skill — a factor not directly under the control of the trainer.)[1] The content of the training in this study was knowledge of skill in using a results-oriented system of management — "management by objectives" (MBO).

Participants in the study were randomly assigned to different groups. There were 13 managers attending the seminar (Seminar Group) and 13 managers that were coached (Coached Group). To establish a standard of comparison, both groups were also compared to 13 managers who received no training at all (Control Group).

The objectives (of what should be known about MBO) were set by experienced MBO practitioners. The seminar and coaching were designed to achieve those objectives, and to reflect typical seminars or coaching. The presentation techniques used in the seminar included lectures, large-group discussions, case studies, role-playing, a film and buzz groups. The actual supervisors of the Coached Group members did the coaching. The coaches attended the seminar to gain knowledge about MBO and be trained in coaching. Both the seminar and coaching were to be eight hours in length.

Criterion measures were given to the different groups before,

TABLE 1.

MEDIAN TEST SCORES FOR THE THREE MAIN GROUPS

Group	N	Pretest	Posttest 1	Posttest 2
Seminar	13	20.0	29.8	26.8
Control	13	17.0	18.0	19.7
Coached	13	17.0	17.0	17.0

immediately after and again one month after training to measure both learning gains from training and retention of these gains over time. All participants took a standardized, objectively scored test of knowledge of MBO.[2] Each person at the seminar completed a questionnaire rating his/her change in knowledge of MBO before/after the seminar. Each person coached completed a similar questionnaire rating the change in his/her knowledge of MBO before/after coaching and time spent in coaching. (Ratings of knowledge could range from 1, no knowledge, to 5, expert.)

Results of the Study

Table 1 shows that the Seminar Group did better than the Coached Group in test scores. Statistical tests showed no significant difference between groups before training nor between the Coached and Control Groups during the study. However, the Seminar Group was clearly superior to both of the other groups immediately after training and in retaining that gain.[3]

Both the Seminar and Coached Groups rated themselves as gaining knowledge of MBO immediately after training. Their self-ratings also showed that both groups believed they retained that gain. However, the Seminar Group's ratings gains (1.4 on the questionnaire immediately after training and 1.6 on the questionnaire one month after training) were larger than the ratings gains of the Coached Group (1.2 and .7 respectively). If we statistically correlate time spent in coaching with gains in test scores or ratings, there is no relationship large enough to be statistically significant. The managers doing the coaching estimated time in coaching and knowledge gains from coaching to be higher than did the Coached Group themselves; however, both groups indicated that less than eight hours was spent in coaching.

Why Did Coaching Fare So Poorly?

The Seminar Group gained and retained knowledge of MBO as judged by increased scores on their tests and self-ratings of knowledge. The Coached Group indicated some increase on their self-ratings of knowledge of MBO but failed to show any gain in test scores after coaching. More disturbing was that *the quantity of coaching* (whether estimated by the coaches or the Coached Group) was not significantly related to increases in knowledge of MBO (neither test scores nor ratings)!

We need to look closer at the study and coaching in general for an explanation. The study was to compare two typical approaches for training managers in knowledge of/skill in using MBO. 1) The leader of the seminar was probably more effective than those managers who did the coaching — probably a typical situation. 2) Not as much time was spent in coaching (whether estimated by those doing the coaching or the Coached Group) as desired. Attempts at coaching are often interrupted by deadlines, meetings and other elements of the job perceived to yield more immediate/direct rewards or punishments. Even though the relationship in this study between time in coaching and test scores/ratings was not large enough to be statistically significant, it was, in general, a positive relationship; it is entirely possible that more time in coaching could bring better results. 3) A possible explanation not to be overlooked is that coach-

ing, as it is typically done, is not very effective. It is possible that coaching is often done by unskilled coaches to unmotivated trainees at inopportune times with little time for practice nor little reward for using the new learning.

Implications
For Training Managers

Consider attending a seminar (that is oriented toward your specific needs). Seminars may have faults, but they can be effective. If you do decide to use coaching —

1. Make sure that the coaches are trained in both a) the subject matter and b) how to coach effectively. There is no substitute for a skilled leader. The coaches should also be motivated to do the coaching (perceive a net reward for doing it).

2. Establish an environment conducive to good coaching. Set aside adequate time and a relatively quiet location where you will not be interrupted.

3. Make sure the person to be coached is "prepared." Is the person to be coached aware of why the coaching is occurring and what to expect in the coaching process? Is he/she motivated to learn (perceives a reward for learning the new skill)?

4. Provide practice for the trainee in using the new knowledge. The person being coached needs practice to learn the new skill.

Whether you use OTJ coaching or attending a seminar off the job, relate the training to the job by providing rewards for the trainees to use their new knowledge/skill on their own jobs. Trainees lose their skills if they do not use them. They will not use them if they do not perceive a net advantage in doing so. Being told to learn and use MBO but having one's salary review based on personality traits is usually not perceived to be a net reward for taking time from the trainee's job to learn MBO. Trainees look at the end results of their actions. We must too in selecting the best method to train our management personnel.
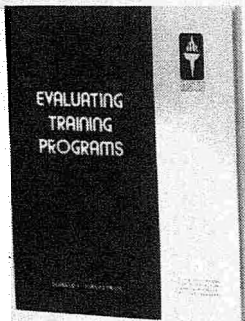
REFERENCES
1. See John N. Kondrasuk, "Selling: The Name of the Game in Training." *Training and Development Journal*, 1972, 26(6), 14-17 for a further explanation of why knowledge was chosen as the main criterion.
2. The test was initially developed on 255 management personnel with a median test-retest reliability coefficient of $+.80$ and a median concurrent validity coefficient of $+.54$.
3. Repeated measures analysis of variance and the Newman-Keuls method showed the Seminar Group superior to the other two groups at the $p<.01$ level of statistical significance both immediately after training and one month after training.

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