

Fresh Air for Management Training

Imaginative Practices Used at Lockheed-Georgia Sessions

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How many times I have attended a management training course, walked in the door, and had the eerie feeling that I had been there before. I knew I hadn't of course, but the very air seemed to have been breathed before. It was stale.

Even non-training people can tell you with uncanny accuracy what to expect. They only have to attend two or three conferences to get the hang of it. There is a dull uniformity, if not in the subject matter, at least in the mechanics and administrative details.

At the risk of turning your stomach let me quickly run down the first exciting moments of one of these seminars.

There will be a registration desk which may be elaborate and covered with stacks of colorful literature and banners or it may be a rusty card table back in the corner; but fancy or plain

it is inevitable. As everyone knows, here your name will be checked off the roll sheet, you will be equipped with a name tag and a straight pin and you will be given a package of reading material and blank note paper.

As for being greeted, you won't be. The coordinator who should be doing the greeting is rounding up more straight pins for the name tags, a job he would have given to someone else if he practiced the delegation principles he'll be discussing in class that afternoon.

There'll be lots of free coffee. You'll get some before class, if the budget allows. A water glass, turned upside down, will be at your place at the conference table. A pitcher of tepid water will sit at the other end of the table, out of reach. The table, by the way, will be covered with a dark green

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cloth. You will sit at your place, open the cover of your notebook and glance over the mimeographed list of your fellow captives, er . . . participants. (You notice that they've spelled your name right but botched your title.) Next you find a list of instructors, guest speakers, staff members, and their biographies. (Looks like a dull bunch.) Then you come to the agenda. (Ah, the agenda! So this is what I'll be subjected to for the next few days.)

A Slow Start

The coordinator has by now found his straight pins and has enticed the stragglers away from the registration desk. It looks as if we're going to start, and only 10 minutes late.

As the man on the street can tell you, the first hour will be devoted to announcements. The order in which they are given varies from seminar to seminar but the content is predictable. Here we go:

1. Coordinator will give a statement of purpose and objectives of the course.
2. Participants will be asked to stand and introduce themselves.
3. Coordinator will introduce his assistant (to give him exposure and initial "rapport" with the group.)
4. Coordinator will announce last-minute additions, deletions, and substitutions to the list of participants.
5. Coordinator will announce a change in the agenda for Tuesday morning. He adds that other changes will be announced, as necessary.
6. Coordinator will describe location of men's room.
7. Coordinator will describe the school's efficient method for delivering urgent messages to participants and how participants may reach their respective offices.
8. If participants are from out-of-

town, someone will announce the hotel's check-out policy. (After all, check-out is only three days away.)

9. Assistant will announce that coffee is being served just outside the door.

By this time we're 30 minutes behind schedule, an hour older, and no better off than when we walked in the door.

Did you feel any twinges of guilt as you read over the order of business? Sure you did; admit it. I admit I've done some pin-searching myself. I have nothing against coffee, name tags, or dark green table cloths; but when I see seminar after seminar all with the same trappings and ceremonies I begin to wonder if there is any thinking going on or if we just follow the same undeviating pattern, like going through some ancient holy ritual. Let's examine some of these familiar practices, swallow our nostalgia, and find some ways to inject fresh air into the programs we run.

Agendas

Let's be absolutely clear on how students feel about printed agenda. They want one. Desperately. They consider it one of their inalienable rights. You'll have a small riot if you don't hand one out. I know, because I never do. Between sessions, my trainees cleverly try to weazel information out of me. I caught one man feverishly searching through my brief case for my confidential copy. On the final day, ask the group for their suggestions for improving the course, and they will holler in unison "Hand out an agenda!" At our management training courses at Lockheed-Georgia this is quite often their only recommendation.

Here's why I never hand out an outline:

1. A man in a management seminar notices on his agenda that Perform-

ance Reviews is the subject scheduled for 1 p.m. on Wednesday. Reviews are one of his headaches. He admits he needs help, but he's already begun to dread 1 p.m. Wednesday. So you jazz it up and call it "New Views on Reviews." But it still doesn't affect his adrenaline. Right after "New Views on Reviews" is a filmed case study, "The Case of the Frustrated Secretary." The student is momentarily titillated but his past experience tells him that his sex glands are becoming unnecessarily active. This session, like the rest, will be dull he tells himself. You, the trainer, know it will be superb but he doesn't. He has a mental set that is working against you. So don't give him material that dredges up his negative thinking.

2. You've laid out your training program and you know exactly what you expect to happen every minute. Mind you, that's what you expect to happen. What you don't expect is that Instructor Spelnik's car won't start one cold morning. Mr. Lipscomb, your star guest speaker, phones at the last minute to say he is inextricably tied up in labor negotiations and cannot possibly get away. And the film you ordered two months ago is sitting in a box car on a siding somewhere in Wyoming. Announce just two or three changes in the agenda and the whole class knows: Something is wrong! There is chaos in the wings. The plan didn't work. And you just don't have the nerve any longer to conduct that session on "Planning: The Most Crucial Part of a Manager's Job." But if the boys aren't even expecting to hear Spelnik and Lipscomb you can make quick substitutions and save yourself the embarrassment of apologizing. They'll think your substitution was planned for weeks. One of the greatest compliments I was ever paid was when Pete, one of our department

managers at Lockheed, told me when he finished our eight day seminar, "How did you fellows make everything go so smoothly, without a single hitch?" What Pete didn't know was that in spite of our careful planning, there had been no less than six major crises that our management training staff had covered beautifully.

3. And my third reason for not handing out an agenda is that everyone expects it. That's reason enough.

Greetings

Just before the curtain goes up on your training program you, as coordinator or instructor, have no more important task to perform than to greet the conferees as they arrive. You are on home ground and you are the host; they are your guests. You may have to limp out of bed at 4 a.m. to set up the room and your visual aids, but doctors have to get up in the middle of the night too and you're no less professional than they.

Announcements

By now, you've suspected that I'm against an opening session on "Announcements, Administrative Details, and Miscellaneous Trivia." You're right. I tolerate announcements only because they are necessary evils. I believe I have an obligation to a man who has just walked in to one of my courses. I must involve him and interest him immediately; not in 15 minutes or 30. Immediately. I mustn't give him time to be bored. I mustn't give him time to convince himself that coming to my class was one of the biggest mistakes of his life. I mustn't give him time to ponder the morass of management principles ahead of him. I simply get on with it.

As for those announcements you can't escape, don't make a fanfare of each one. State them simply, directly,

and for heaven's sake, concisely. Time your announcements appropriately. Don't describe hotel check-out procedures on the first day. The attendees just checked in! Check-out is the furthest thing from their minds and you'll have to repeat the whole thing later for those who weren't listening.

Statement of Course Objectives

It is nothing short of heresy to suggest that we not tell the folks the purpose of our management training seminar. But hear me out first, disagree with me later. An understanding of course objectives must be very firmly embedded in the trainer's mind. It is the *sine qua non* of a successful program. You know this as well as I do. We communicate this understanding through every discussion, every lecture, every activity in that course. Everything that happens in the conference room leads to and supports that objective. We do not communicate it by stating it in so many well-chosen words during the first ten minutes.

Does a playwright begin his drama with a bald statement of the play's truth? Does an author preface his novel with a vague, general description of his purpose? Of course not, because to do so would deprive us of the excitement of discovery. Let your training course speak for itself and don't exalt it falsely by using high-flown language. Besides, stating your purpose to the trainees will have absolutely no meaning to them initially. They simply won't know what you're talking about and they certainly won't care. They're uncomfortable and bewildered and they're not ready to listen to your promises to make them better managers.

If you are determined or forced to state course objectives, save your pronouncement until after the first or sec-

ond session. You'll probably be wasting your breath but at least your conscience will be eased. Or, save it until the end. If you're courageous, ask the fellows in the class to state it for you, and then you'll see if you got through to them. Of course, by this time if you didn't get your message across, it's too late anyhow.

Introducing the Staff

Why parade the whole instructing staff in front of the crowd the first day? Keep a couple of the boys in hiding until the second or third day, then bring them out on the platform for a surprise. And even then, don't introduce them, unless they're guest speakers. They're big boys and if they can't handle themselves they wouldn't be teaching for you. Let them introduce themselves. Too much formality is deadening.

Urgent Messages

If you're running a seminar that involves participants from many companies, skip this paragraph. But if you're in charge of an in-house program, read on. Are you running a message center for the men in your classes? Do you feel you are performing a valuable service for them by allowing them to be called out of class because of a crisis? You're not, and you and your associates are running your feet off needlessly. At Lockheed-Georgia we have partly solved this problem by taking our management training classes 13 miles away from the plant to a motel conference room. But there is still the telephone, and we would defeat our purpose if we allowed unlimited telephone usage. So before a man is called to the phone, his boss's boss must approve the call. That discourages a lot of calls, believe me. We make a game of it too and any man who places or receives a call—for any

reason—is fined 25 cents. The fact that a phone call is an interruption of the class is of secondary importance. We are really trying to practice what we preach: that no man is indispensable and that a subordinate who is sitting in for his manager who is in a training class must be allowed to operate on his own.

Continuity

Let's say you've decided that the subject of authority is worth four hours in your training course. Why give it to them all in one gulp, just for the sake of Continuity? Sure it looks better on your outline to tackle authority in one lump. Everything is symmetrical and logical; one subject flows beautifully into the next. But how many in the class are accustomed to concentrating on and wrestling with one single problem for four hours at a stretch? Most of our first-level supervisors at Lockheed-Georgia aren't even accustomed to sitting down for that long. The attention span of the average adult is surprisingly short. So we concentrate on pace, and we change it frequently. Continuity suffers a little, it's true, but at least it's a pace geared to the man who's doing the learning, rather than to the instructor.

I'm not sure that Continuity is a god we must worship in management training. When our management people are on the job who orders the universe for them? Who separates their problems into neat little bundles called Authority, Reviews, Communications, Decision Making? Then why should our courses for them be slavishly organized around some logical progression?

Breaks and Lunch

How long a session should be has nothing to do with training theory. It's a question of pure physiology.

Blood stops flowing and a symptom known as "numbness" sets in. Also, medical science has proven that the capacity of the human bladder has certain limitations. Whether we like it or not, those are the facts, and their relevance to management training programs has been grossly overlooked.

No session should last more than 90 minutes. Between sessions, let the men stretch and encourage them to go outside for deep breaths of God's fresh air. If you're doing a good job in the classroom your students are working parts of their minds that have grown rusty. That's hard work and they need a breather before the gears start clanking again. Sometimes I include a very short "vertical" training session, meaning everybody stands up for fifteen minutes. I have several two-minute physical exercises designed to get the blood stream flowing again. Everybody in the class thinks I've lost my mind, but they enjoy it and I never fail to have an exhilarating session immediately afterwards.

If you feed them lunch give them just that and nothing else. No luncheon speaker, please. Let them eat their fried chicken in peace. They've earned a little rest. We give our management training classes an hour for lunch. Since it only takes 40 minutes to get the food down, they have time left over. They've begged us to cut the lunch period and thereby shorten the day. But they need time to chat, to read the newspaper, stroll, or play cards. Then, when we start again in the afternoon, they're refreshed, renewed, and anxious to go back to work again.

You're Smarter

Take out your planning sheet for the next course you're responsible for. Examine each item on it and ask yourself "Why am I doing it that way?"

