

# IDEAS THAT WORK

*Each "Ideas That Work" will feature one or more fresh ideas that have been successfully applied to the human resource development environment, and, in most cases, have saved organizations money and valuable time through increased productivity.*

*If you would like to share a working "idea" with other members of the profession, please submit it to: Training and Development Journal, P.O. Box 5307, Madison, WI 53705.*

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## **Personal Journals in Training: Get More Mileage Out of Your Training Programs**

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Are you becoming more energy-conscious these days? Are you also conscious about the energy you may be wasting in human relations group training due to participants' failure to implement the insights they have gained in the course of your training program?

In these times of increasing concern about getting higher mileage with the fuel we use, shouldn't we also have a consistent desire to maximize the positive effects which group training has upon learning and personal growth? The use of personal journals or diaries as part of group human relations training designs represents a helpful step in stretching the influence and impact of our training programs.

A major reason for the positive appeal of human relations training stems from the participants' discovery of new and helpful insights which bring light to cloudy or fuzzy problem situations. Participants become enthralled with the new concepts or viewpoints they receive. They often elevate their esteem for their enlightening trainer to a level fitting a guru or prophet. Nearly everyone seems to receive a high dose of positive reinforcement for attending a

training workshop.

I have frequently heard participants during the course of a training program exclaim something like, "Hey, I never realized that about myself," or "Now I'm beginning to see why we're having trouble as a committee in reaching decisions." Yet, weeks or months after the workshop, new learned behaviors aren't ventured upon or practiced, and key insights are forgotten. Not much trace remains of the impact of the "mind-expanding" workshop.

The issue of back-home transfer of workshop training introduces the frustrating problem of learning "wash out," or the learning transfer gap. Partial solutions for bridging the transfer gap include (1) selecting for training high status individuals who tend to set the back-home standards of behavior (Miles, 1965), (2) emphasizing application of training to home situations (Blumberg, Golembiewski, 1976), and (3) training a "family" or entire work unit (Parlour, 1971).

Oftentimes it is inappropriate or impossible to select a family training group or only individuals with high organizational status as participants in a training program. It may also be very difficult due to time constraints to incorporate actual home applications in the training design. However, trainers may well be able to increase their home transfer impact by building participant journal or diary recording and reporting into the training designs.

For example, at the start of a workshop, while you as the trainer are unveiling your agenda (should you wish to do so), you could mention your desire that participants record the insights about themselves and relationships with

others which they reach during the course of training. It would probably help to distribute a "mini-journal" to each participant for recording purposes. Participants should record these insights in detail in relation to the back-home situation. You could schedule time at the end of each day of training for participants to share particular insights, again as they relate to the back-home situation. Create the expectation that each participant will be accountable to you (not necessarily before the group) for the entries he or she makes in the personal journal.

At the close of the workshop, leave time for each participant to write you a brief report to summarize insights which she or he gained with regard to specific problems or concerns. You may even be so bold as to request the journals for your scrutiny and comments. Tell participants to keep the journals, and to add to them periodically their descriptions of successes and failures in implementing the insights they gained from the training program. Tell them that after a certain amount of time, such as one to six months, you will send a follow-up survey to assess their progress with the insights recorded in their journals. A Hawthorne Effect of concern over evaluation will likely tend to discourage insight forgetting and failure to practice new learned behaviors.

As trainers, if we really desire to try to make lasting positive changes in participants' lives, we must try to overcome the participants' powerful tendency to "return to normalcy" after the dazzling aura of the training program has passed. Do we want to be just purveyors of glamorous dog and

pony shows which have no long-term positive effects upon the participants?

Mark Twain once said that a pencil and paper make the best memory. Participants may continually refer to recorded insights in their personal journals as they attempt and practice new behaviors learned in workshops, and thus reduce the risk of washout of new skills due to forgetting and lack of practice. By building journal recording and accountability into our training designs we may greatly enhance the duration of our positive training influence.

#### REFERENCES

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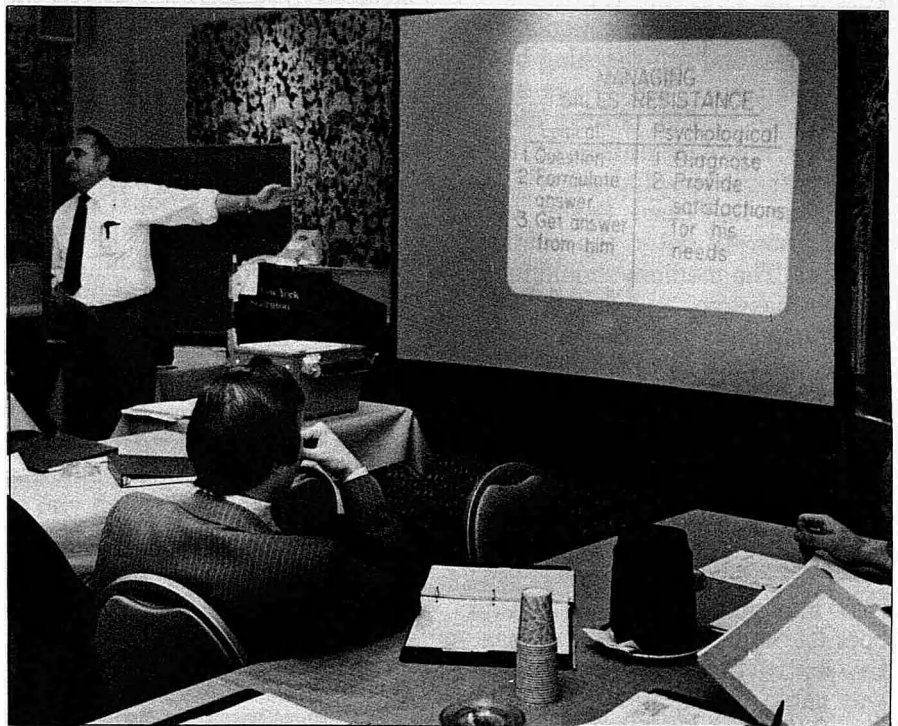
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#### Refresher Training: Learning HOW to Think

Corporate training departments and outside instruction organizations are placing increasing emphasis on two and three-day programs that refresh and revitalize business people and return them more productively to their jobs.

These programs, designed to help participants get out of ruts and break bad habits, appeal to both companies and prospective students because they offer concentrated relearning in minimal time away from regular work.

"Refresher training has one primary objective — teaching participants how to think better," says Charles M. Lawrence, director of continuing education at Sales and Marketing Executives International, a professional society of 22,000 members, which has produced refresher training programs for salespeople for more than 20 years.



"Refresher training has one primary objective — teaching participants how to think better!"

"In a two-day classroom setting, we could never hope to duplicate real sales situations," Lawrence says. "We also know there's no right or best method for solving a problem. Instead, we train people to think problems through. They learn to approach their job problems logically, to sit down and think about what they're doing and why. We try to replace reflex with reason."

At the workshops, students present sales situations they've faced or soon will face. Instructors ask questions that force students to (1) define *key* elements of the problem and (2) develop logical step-by-step solutions.

Lawrence outlines four ingredients that stimulate students to think through problems:

- *Student Interchange*: Refresher training brings students from different backgrounds together. Representatives of small eastern firms crossruff with large western companies — and vice versa. Industrial exchanges with consumer. Students with contrasting sales methods interrelate.

- *Participation*: Instructors insist on a flexible class structure. Students are encouraged to relate experiences and isolate problems. When ideas flow freely, thinking is

active and progress marked.

- *Learning not Entertainment*: Cassettes, film, videotape and

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audio, filmstrips, multimedia presentations, and self-teaching books are all helpful, Lawrence says, when each is the most effective way to make a point. If they merely dazzle the student (which is too often the case) flashy techniques merely deter the thinking process. The medium should never be the message.

• *Challenge:* Instructors challenge students to challenge them. The net effect: independent thinking.

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### Training Firefighters Via Cable TV

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A four-year project to design, operate and evaluate an interactive instructional system on a two-way cable system in Rockford, Ill. has concluded that two-way communication in cable is practical and that the training through such a system is effective.

The study, conducted by the Michigan State University Depart-

ment of Telecommunication, Rockford Cablevision, Inc., and the Rockford Fire Department under National Science Foundation funding, is used for training firefighters in their station houses.

The entire instructional system, including attendance-taking, video instruction and questions, feedback, and individualized reports, is automated. Firefighters respond by punching buttons on a modified cable channel converter.

The system continues in use in Rockford for firefighter training and teacher development, and has been demonstrated through one of the hospitals for continuing medical education.

The initial experiment was a 12-lesson series on "prefire planning" for firefighters. In the two-way version of the training experiment, firefighters "logged-in" by entering a three-letter code in the response terminal. As soon as the last letter was transmitted, code letters appeared opposite the fire-station number displayed on the television screen by a character generator. Instructional programs, on 3/4" videocassettes, were conventional instructional television with the exception that every two to five minutes a question was asked about the content. In this respect the tapes were much like a programmed instructional sequence. The firefighters responded by selecting and transmitting one of four answer options. The videotape was paused until all of the firefighters who were logged in had responded.

As soon as all responses were received, each response was displayed on the screen for each individual by code letter or the responses were aggregated indicating the per cent responding to each of the options. The videotape then proceeded.

At the end of each lesson, after several questions and responses like the one just described, a "quick quiz" appeared. The quiz reviewed all the previous material and presented a drill on the identification of prefire planning symbols that were in the videotape and previously viewed tapes.

The quick quiz was different from the interactive questions in

the body of the lesson in that the tape ran continuously through the quiz, allowing the firefighters only five seconds to respond to each quiz question. At the end of the quick quiz the per cent score for each participating individual was displayed on the screen. This was followed by a display of the overall score, combining the quick quiz with all the other interactive questions. Finally, each individual's score on the series to date was presented.

Immediately after the instructional tape concluded, a computer print-out was provided which included each individual's item-by-item and total score. A second print-out reported scores by individuals in each lesson in the series. Blanks in the report indicated that an individual missed a lesson, either because of sick leave, vacation or the station received a call during the lesson. This print-out was used for scheduling make-ups.

The training experiment compared one-way television to the two-way instructional system. In both experimental conditions, firefighters received the same videotape materials, including all the questions. The 100 firefighters in the two-way television version learned more from the 12-lesson series than did the 100 firefighters in the one-way, no-feedback version.

After six months, both groups retained most of the information, with the two-way interactive participants still superior to the one-way learning group.

Cost of the instruction, using rates published in Rockford Cablevision's lease plan, was about \$5 per lesson per person assuming the videotape materials could be purchased from an outside source. This was about twice the cost of one-way television, but substantially less than the cost of lectures at the training academy or lecture at the station houses by academy personnel. The costs are reduced somewhat if the series is repeated for refresher training and new recruits. For a larger department of 1,000 firefighters, with repeated use of the series on two-way cable, the cost could be as low as 77 cents per person per half-hour lesson.

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