

## New Age, New Views

*This a special "Issues" column devoted to responses to April's "Tell Us What You Think" on New Age psychotechnologies. These controversial training methods have received considerable media attention in the last few months.*

*In April the New York Times reported "In their zeal to become more competitive, American employers have turned increasingly to motivational gurus who say they can change how employees think. But now employers are encountering resistance from workers who assert that many of the training programs use 'mind control' techniques or promote values alien to their religious views."*

*In May a similar article appeared in Newsweek:*

*"Goodbye Dale Carnegie. Hello Werner Ehrhard. The New Age movement has gone corporate. Such corporate giants as Procter & Gamble, TRW, Ford Motor Co., and Polaroid have all signed on New Age consultants. By one estimate, their programs account for about \$4 billion in corporate spending each year."*

*A number of Training & Development Journal readers feel strongly enough about the controversy to wade into the fray as well. Their responses are below.—PLF*

### Sound the Alarm

I am glad to see that I am not alone in recognizing the real threat and spurious nature of New Age psychotechnologies. In the course of doing my job, which includes investigating new and emerging training techniques, I have attended several of these type of seminars. They are, without a doubt in my mind, spiritual in nature, using techniques to "get in touch" with spiritual guides, universal masters, higher consciousness, master teachers, transformational movements, etc.

Unfortunately, these courses employ techniques like visualization, meditation, and guided imagery and blend these exercises with those for goal set-

ting and decision making. Thus I see the training industry being used to proselytize New Age religion under the deceptive marketing of increased productivity, self-actualization, and self-improvement.

As trainers, I believe that we must sound the alarm about this covert missionary work. I have discussed the spiritual impact of these seminars with attendees. Some have mentioned "spiritual discomfort"; others have been swept away into vague clouds of euphoric self-worship, only to find no lasting solutions.

There is a growing awareness of the real threat of the New Age as documented by Constance Cumbey in *The Hidden Danger of the Rainbow*. I am glad to see training professionals recognizing these pseudo-training seminars for their real intent: religious conversion.

*Paul Rondina  
Digital Equipment Corp.  
Stow, Massachusetts*

As a writer and speaker on the New Age movement, my view is that New Age psychotechnologies have no place in the human resource arena for a number of reasons.

First, the imposition of such training often violates the religious beliefs of employees. Christians, for instance, can't comply with New Age programs that teach the unlimited goodness and power of the self. Additionally, if New Age programs become routine, employers will find themselves graced with a score of lawsuits. Some have already been filed. This can hardly be good for business.

These psychotechnologies are often ineffective or injurious. Some practices such as self-hypnosis, visualization, and meditation induce a trancelike state wherein one's critical faculties are suspended. Effective businesses need sharpened minds, not dulled ones.

Lastly, what is wrong with good old integrity, compassion, and hard work in business? Why impose mystical techniques when traditional Christian values will more than suffice?

The New Age in business is bad business for all.

*Douglas Groothuis  
Probe Center North West  
Seattle, Washington*

I don't believe that New Age psychotechnologies have a legitimate place in training. As a Christian, I believe this type of "training" is actually teaching a false religion. Most organizations would not try to impose an identified religious belief on their employees. To dabble in these kinds of spiritual activities under the guise of training clearly is dishonest. In addition, the use of these activities could put the organization in jeopardy by discriminating against employees on the basis of their religious beliefs.

I realize that many sincere, well-meaning individuals may be involved in these activities, and my intention is not to defame any of them. But in order to preserve the integrity of the training function, spiritual encounters should not be disguised as training.

*Lea Deo  
St. Luke's Hospital of Kansas City  
Kansas City, Missouri*

Spiritual development is important and employees tuned into their own spirituality and full potential are undoubtedly satisfied. But that personal satisfaction will not necessarily translate into increased productivity, high performance, and job satisfaction. For a company to concentrate on developing the

"inner selves" of their employees for the sake of higher performance seems manipulative.

I agree with Richard Watring: It is inappropriate for human resource development departments to take responsibility for developing the spirituality of the organization's work force. Companies truly interested in their employees' spiritual growth could allow flexible scheduling, time off, or other tangible assistance to individuals interested in the inner quest. That way the motives would be clear and clean.

*Carolyn Sorensen Balling  
Amex Life Assurance  
San Rafael, California*

A number of my consulting cases exemplify the underside of the New Age training phenomenon. Each case involved the disruption of institutional norms, was based on personal changes sought by New Age systems, and is representative of growing corporate problems. These clients suffered a number of debilitating effects including loss of logical abilities, tremors, and hallucinations after involvement with New Age training programs and New Age groups. One client actually witnessed physical punishment and others saw that this type of training clearly was a vehicle for political and religious indoctrination.

These are not isolated incidents. They are symptomatic of thousands of similar incidents—incidents not adequately reported in HRD journals. To understand why they occur requires a thorough examination of New Age training. Although such examination is impossible to accomplish in one letter, several factors do stand out as worthy items of corporate concern. These are the psychological techniques, the religious and political concepts espoused by New Age organizations, and the personal reorientation that stems from exposure to these kinds of training.

New Age training programs rely upon a controlled environment in which an artfully orchestrated sequence of

techniques is visited upon an unprepared audience. The intensity of impact may vary from course to course but the principles remain constant. The sequence attacks the conscious intellect while barraging the unconscious with suggestion and outright command. This is augmented by the arousal of uncontrolled emotion; long lectures that defy scholarship, logic, and human dignity; and subtly powerful indoctrination techniques.

The growing ranks of New Age casualties represent those people who resist the implanted suggestions. The minds of such people retain an active critical function. This conscious function can't stop questioning the artificial products of the training. But this doesn't mean that they can automatically resolve the contradictions between reality and the implanted suggestions. Their minds can't distinguish between the external world and the interior realm of imagination, hallucination, and irrationalism. The pathetic aspect of this is that the more the conscious mind is exerted, the more the New Age beliefs are activated. The ensuing terror can become so acute it leads to suicide.

Many New Age casualties aren't detectable. These people maintain a plausible facade while they hold their fantasies and fears to a manageable level. But they face an insidious crisis. At any time something unforeseen can trigger their "Transformation" and hurtle them into flights of uncontrollable fantasy or throw them into the depths of despair.

As you proceed through the New Age literature you will encounter endless variations on this theme. If the search doesn't convince you that the New Age is a suspect dream, then ask yourself why this utopian concept requires the propagating force of psychological indoctrination. Then ask if the corporate world should embrace the concept and the techniques.

Most New Age organizations now offer toned down versions of their training. This can be a communications course, a new psychotechnology, a time management course. The problem with such soft techniques is that they are used to recruit employees into the stronger practices. Several of my clients

found that a communications course led to an enclave of "Transformees" who saw the company merely as a vehicle for Transformation—a New Age social and political movement. Companies contemplating such soft New Age wares should carefully examine the product before buying. Such courses too often produce transformed companies for whom the bottom line is a yellow brick road to wizards who are not benevolent fantasies.

The fragile balance between intellect, sensory response, judgement, and action does not always survive a New Age training. For the impaired who lose a family, a business, a degree, and a sense of self there is no guarantee that the harm can be repaired. For each casualty there are several people who also suffer. The corporation that brings in the potential for such harm should be alerted to the fact that the influence of such casualties is equal to that produced by alcoholics and drug addicts. And it is equally costly.

I believe that corporations embracing new Age techniques will soon face an amazing array of unprecedented lawsuits. Somewhere, sometime, an employee will descend into psychosis, will recover, and will realize that he was misled into participating in a religious conversion experience. Somewhere, sometime, Christian shareholders will revolt over a company's support of the New Age religion.

As business becomes more technically refined the social penalties from lapses in judgement become more severe. These are not peripheral concerns. As the use of New Age training techniques increases so will the results of New Age failures. Such results will be felt in the boardroom, in society, and in the courtroom. When they are, the psychic Pied Piper will not dissolve into myth. He will demand his payment. No corporation should blithely incur this penalty.

*Kevin Garvey  
Consultant  
Carlisle, Pennsylvania*

## The Point Between Two Extremes

In order to find the middle of the road we need to know the edges. Please keep us informed. No one is asking you to endorse, just report.

Dave Esch  
Washington, D.C.

I think it is misleading to use the word *training* when referring to some New Age techniques. Instead they appear to be new money-making ventures, offering a sometimes thinly veiled agenda of spiritual or psychological conversion.

If an organization allows a pseudo-training method to be introduced to the employees, I think it should be carefully examined by the in-house human resource staff. They should clarify the true purpose of the so-called training, look for areas that may invade an employee's spiritual territory, and finally make their findings known to the appropriate decision maker.

Some techniques are better offered outside the workplace, especially when they can lead to emotional and legal issues that an organization may be unprepared to handle.

Janet Showers  
MBank Dallas  
Dallas, Texas

I hope Richard Watring's letter concerning New Age psychotechnologies does spark some controversy. This issue is long overdue for discussion.

I believe that some of the New Age psychotechnologies are helpful; but some violate conservative religious beliefs. My inclination is to evaluate new technologies carefully, looking at the long-term ethical issues. Then I use those I believe are helpful and accept-

able techniques and disregard those I believe are too trendy or violate my values or those of my trainees.

Are these techniques "vital" to HRD? Probably not. Are they useful? Sometimes. The important point is that we in HRD must begin to pay serious attention to the ethics involved in some of these new psychotechnologies; just because something works doesn't mean we are required to embrace it. It seems to me that a discussion of the ethical considerations of many of our new technologies—including, but not limited to, HRD—may well be the hot topic for at least the next decade.

Joy Brubaker  
Southern State Community College  
Hillsboro, Ohio

The essence and aim of many earnest spiritual endeavors is egolessness, the realization that as a separate entity one does not exist. This experience goes by many names, depending on the tradition through which one works.

The use of the psychospiritual techniques Richard Watring discussed in his letter in the April 1987 "Issues" department has *nothing* to do with this essential aim. The "induction of trancelike states," "monism," and "belief in spiritual or supernatural realms" are *obstacles* along the spiritual path—not the goals. There is, as one tradition expresses it, an indescribably vast difference between "experiencing the moon and preoccupation with the finger that points to it." A person's spiritual effort falls short of its singular aim to the same extent the psychospiritual techniques outlined by Mr. Watring are used. These techniques are just another way of grasping and clinging, while every fully developed religious viewpoint calls for "letting go."

This is one of the major reasons an important spiritual movement will not find a meaningful foothold in HRD—or elsewhere. The great doubt, ruthless honesty, and intense vigilance necessary for spiritual liberation are not commonplace. As an all too familiar

consequence, most of us complacently assume as our own one of the predominant and often trivial religious systems of the time: we believe in believing.

Another reason a sincere spiritual movement will not find its way into HRD is that it would be contrary to the personal characteristics so richly rewarded in our culture. Spiritual freedom inevitably transcends egocentricity and greed. The price of freedom is much too dear to those who take their personalities and "enculturation" as immutable facts.

One of the wisest men to have ever lived was asked by his friends after his enlightenment if he was a god. He assured them he was not. They inquired further if he was a saint. Again, he assured them he was not. What then, they asked, was he? He said that at last he was simply *awake*.

Most of us are quite comfortably asleep and do not wish to be disturbed. Any fears we may have about a serious spiritual movement in HRD are wholly unfounded. The path to freedom is much too uncomfortable.

In the end I think Mr. Watring and I agree, but for very different reasons.

M.W. Plyler  
Duke Power Co.  
Charlotte, North Carolina

## Utilizing the Power of Our Minds

Before America becomes a second-class nation, we'd better utilize the power of our minds as the countries with whom we are competing use theirs.

If trainers don't teach people to use their minds to their fullest potential, who will?

I have been well schooled in self-hypnosis and guided imagery and have used these techniques to achieve things even I believed were not possible for me!

Judy Paris  
Paris Training Programs  
House Springs, Missouri



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It is indeed true that a synthesis of both human resources and spiritual development are being attempted by many researchers to get the best out of each, to increase human potential. It is also true that many people back off at the sight or mention of the word *spiritual*. Therefore it would be better to use a broader term. Education in human values (EHV), which includes training, may be acceptable to indicate its universality of application.

EHV focuses, at the personal level, on certain inner and outer practices to help human excellence emerge. Many outstanding scientists and musicians have pointed out that they have drawn creativity from intuition. Therefore one has to explore specific techniques, technology, and methods of unfolding creativity rather than relying on humans inherently having it. Such an approach facilitates the development of human excellence in a natural manner.

Please note that these views and comments are strictly personal and do not represent any institution.

*Vaidy Bala  
Saskatchewan Labour  
Regina, Saskatchewan*

Regarding the issue of spirituality and the advancement of human resource potential, the training profession has always dealt with the human spirit and potential (consult Abraham Maslow and Douglas McGregor). In the future we must be open to facilitating this process in new, expanded, and effective ways tailored to the clientele. Psychotechnologies sounds like a computer game based on the movie "Psycho," but call it what you wish.

If you are just counting votes on the issue, count me to the affirmative.

*Tom Murrell  
St. Louis, Missouri*

"Issues" is compiled and edited by Patricia Fitzgerald. Send your viewpoints to: Issues, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

## Correction

On page 28 of the May *Journal's* cover story, "The Bottom Line," we failed to attribute the levels of impact (bottom of the first column) to Donald Kirkpatrick. The error was the *Journals*, not that of the authors.

We also pushed two of the authors further along their career tracks than we should have. Elizabeth Kasl is an adjunct *assistant* professor and William Waite is an *assistant* vice president.