

In Practice

For Husbands Only

You're a busy guy, we know. There are only so many hours in a day and, what with budgets and meetings and softball and poker night, we recognize that your time is valuable.

But spare a minute to take a short quiz about that nice person snoozing on the couch over there. Yeah, her—the one with the briefcase at her feet, a printout in her lap, a grocery list in her hand, baby spit on her shoulder, and a worn look on her face. That's right! The little woman, your better half, your wife.

True or false: Women have no trouble balancing the twin roles of breadwinner and homemaker.

If you answered "true," put down your beer can, get your butt outta that Barcalounger, turn off the pro rasslin', and pick up your !&-? \$! dirty socks! NOW!

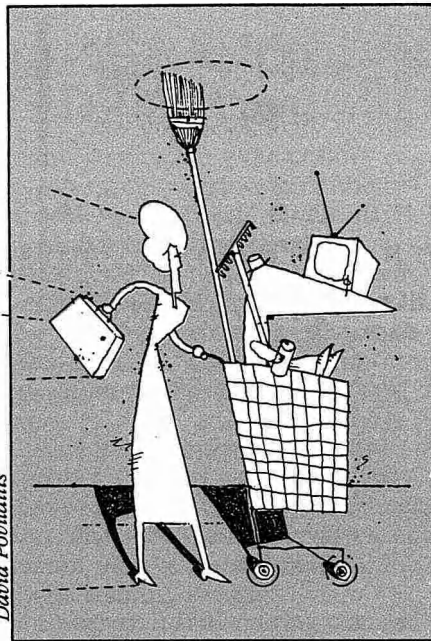
When it comes to lazy louts like you, the working women of America are ticked. The University of Oklahoma surveyed 525 of them, and it's not too hard to figure out where this anger comes from.

Three-quarters of the respondents say society in general and husbands in particular expect too much of women who work. And two-thirds report that being both wage-earner and homemaker causes significant stress and anxiety.

Fully 54 percent say their spouses never help with household duties. Thirty-eight percent say you shiftless s.o.b.s rarely take care of the kids. Women with young children report the most stress from conflicts between home and work.

On the bright side, 69 percent report that Mr. Bring-Home-the-Bacon will usually condescend to do yard work or fix the car. At least the missus doesn't have to rebuild transmissions between board meetings.

Despite obvious inequities, most



women remain committed to their careers. Although 38 percent say overwork affects their productivity to some extent, more than 90 percent like their jobs.

And given you husbands' unwillingness to pull your weight, here's the truly ironic part: 89.6 percent of the women polled maintain that their spouses want them to work.

You guys have got a pretty good scam going here. Think about it while you scrub the bathroom and change the diapers. And while you're at it, take out the trash for a change!

Elements of Style: Teaching Business Writing

Submitted by John D. Sirabell, supervisor of customer communications for Consolidated Edison Company of New York in Brooklyn.

Were the world a literary utopia, all business people would know these rules by heart:

Write in a way that comes naturally. Work from a suitable design. Write with nouns and verbs. Do not overwrite. Avoid the use of qualifiers. Do not affect a breezy style. Do not explain too much. Avoid fancy words. Do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity. Revise and rewrite.

These dicta, from *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White, capture in a nutshell the essence of vigorous and informative prose. And since business writing should inform vigorously, business-writing trainers need only have their charges read *The Elements of Style*, right? Wrong. Improving business writing requires time and energy. It requires practice.

And these days, it often requires a course in which you, the trainer, point the way to concise memos, organized reports, and persuasive proposals. To do this, you need special skills. You will have to overcome the managerial impulse to dismiss writing deficiencies as minor problems—the attitude that says, "I get my message across. Who cares if I don't put my commas in the right place?"

High-powered managers can be difficult students, but several instructional strategies will help them understand that clear and concise writing can facilitate business.

■ *Be job specific.* Managers need to feel they will gain concrete and useful information. Determine the kinds of writing common to their jobs—memos, briefing papers, forms—and focus on these. A lesson on editing a newspaper article won't help your class produce sales reports.

■ *Deal with grammar and punctuation when they come up.* Don't walk into the first session and lecture on parts of speech and semicolons. Many managers dread these topics, but they will welcome the information if you discuss it as the need arises. Presented this way,

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they're more apt to remember proper use too.

■ **Focus on structure and editing.**

Good writing is well organized. Many managers, in their zeal to list facts and cite sources, miss the forest for the trees. Emphasize the importance of sticking to the memo's goal (to inform, recommend, persuade, and the like), and work with the class to identify the structure that best serves each goal. Show why some schemes work better than others. To teach editing, have managers clean up and trim their own products. Then use group work to help people see how others deal with wordiness and redundancy. Mention that readers value concise communications because brevity saves time and money.

■ **Emphasize results.** Let managers see their improvement. Have them work on the same piece of writing and then compare the original to the much-improved final copy.

■ **Help managers improve general communications skills.** Business-writing trainers often hear managers say something like: "This format is fine, but if Mr. Jones wants answers and I don't have them, I need to make him think I do." Such comments demand discussion. Point out that writing is not always the way to go; sometimes a phone call or meeting works best.

During the session, recognize that the tone you set influences participant success. Create a careful mix of managers, and try to limit classes to people occupying similar organizational levels.

Bolster confidence by taking advantage of the participants' expertise. Ask for their help when technical matters—the most accurate description of a new product, for example—arise. Use positive reinforcement every chance you get.

Above all, avoid casting yourself as an all-knowing arbiter of writing excellence. Managers get paid to produce new ideas and innovative

suggestions, and most won't hesitate to offer them to you. Be open to their thoughts.

After all, business writing exists to promote an exchange of ideas. Equipped with the principles that create good writing and secure in the knowledge that they *can* communicate, your trainees will begin to produce effective memos, reports, and proposals.

The Eight-Hour Work Week

If it were up to America's top corporations, every day would be a Tuesday. According to an Accountemps survey, that's when workers accomplish the most.

In the poll, 100 personnel directors rated employee productivity by the day, and 59 percent said Tuesday was tops in terms of getting work done. Wednesday came in a distant second with 19 percent, and Thursday posted a mere 9 percent.

Monday was worse still, at a lethargic 6 percent, but Friday's ratings were positively comatose. Only 2 percent felt workers accomplish anything the day before a weekend.

Rx for VDT Excess

Submitted by Peter Mears and Jerald Smith of the University of Louisville's School of Business in Louisville, Kentucky.

Whether you train others to use computers or use one yourself, you've no doubt heard ominous stories about the health perils of operating in digital territory. Ailments attributed to computer keyboards, video-display terminals (VDTs), and related office appurtenances run the gamut from simple aches and pains all the way to miscarriage.

High on the list of complaints is

physical stress. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health labels computer data entry as one of the most stressful of today's jobs. The repetitive and boring work combined with long periods of motionlessness is said to cause headaches, backaches, sore shoulders, eyestrain, fatigue, confusion, anxiety, anger, and depression. Technostress—a term psychologists use to describe the dehumanization that some say accompanies computer-intensive work—may contribute to these woes.

Now, if a shop tool or a piece of manufacturing equipment were suspected of causing all these problems, the authorities would probably ban the things quicker than you can say "My lawyer will be in touch."

But scientists have proven few causal links between computers and health complaints. And until someone develops a better way of entering and reviewing data, the economics of office automation dictate that workers continue using awkward keyboards and irritating VDTs.

Fortunately, companies can employ relatively inexpensive measures to minimize harmful effects. Use this checklist to review your organization's success in promoting the ergonomic, physical, and behavioral factors that help make computer use as pain free as possible.

VDTs should

- be easy to adjust for contrast and brightness;
- have tilting screens;
- feature dust-free, nonglare screens;
- be placed perpendicular to windows to minimize reflective glare;
- be positioned at eye level or slightly lower, at a comfortable distance from the operator.

Keyboards should

- adjust to match the slope of the operator's arms;

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- not be attached to the computer terminal;
- have a dull finish to reduce glare;
- provide operator feedback with audible clicks and a good "touch."

Chairs should

- adjust so the operator's thighs are horizontal, with feet flat on the floor;
- have rounded front edges to minimize pinching;
- have comfortable backrests.

Desks should

- permit keyboard and screen adjustments;
- feature dark, nonreflective work surfaces.

The general office environment should

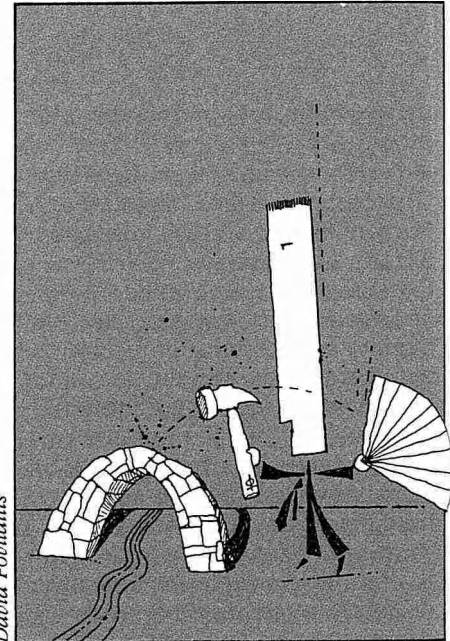
- have relatively dim lighting to reduce glare;
- allow operators to adjust lighting;
- include task lamps where needed;
- feature horizontal window blinds;
- have no reflective surfaces;
- include stenographic stands to hold source documents;
- minimize noise and distractions;
- feature a separate area for noisy high-volume printers.

Operators should

- adjust the screen, keyboard, chair, and desk as needed;
- clean the screen at least once a week;
- place the source document upright, next to the screen;
- occasionally look away from the terminal, focusing on something else for a moment;
- take a break after two hours of intensive keyboard work;
- exercise during breaks.

Turning Japanese

With jingoism characterizing much of the debate on the East-West trade balance, an obvious fact seems to



David Povilaitis

get lost in the protectionist rhetoric: American and Japanese businesspeople actually work together in a fairly efficient manner.

When World War II ended, several American companies set up Tokyo offices that have been going great guns ever since. And for the last 10 years or so, Japanese concerns have made their presence felt in the U.S., especially in real estate and banking. All the major Japanese auto manufacturers now have American plants, and Honda recently began exporting Ohio-built Accords to Japan.

To ease these transcultural shifts, most companies put their overseas-bound personnel through intensive language training. This helps foreign workers get by, but even the best programs sometimes fail to cover the idiomatic expressions that fuel business language.

For Japanese working in the U.S., phrases like *play hardball*, *float a proposal*, *run it up the flagpole*, and *make a killing* must be pretty incomprehensible at first. The same problem affects Americans going to work in the Orient.

For an excellent primer on the ins and outs of Japanese business-speak check out *Tatemae and Honne*, a

handy glossary developed by Mitsubishi Corporation (The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., 866 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022, 182 pp., \$19.95). The alphabetical listing of key words and phrases is designed to help Americans distinguish "between good form and real intention in Japanese business culture." The following definitions point out just how different the two can be.

■ **Ato-no-matsuri**: literally *after the festival*; actually means too late to be of any use.

■ **Benkyo shinasai**: literally *to study hard*; actually means "Give me a price discount."

■ **Dosa-mawari**: literally *the provincial tour of a second-rate theater troupe*; actually a business assignment away from the main office.

■ **Gomasuri**: literally *one who grinds sesame seeds*; actually a toadying sycophant.

■ **Hidari-uchiwa**: literally *to fan oneself using the left hand*; actually means to live without worries, comfortably.

■ **Ishibashi wo tataku**: literally *to tap the stone bridge*; actually means look before you leap.

■ **Koshikake**: literally a chair; actually a temporary position that will suffice until something better comes along.

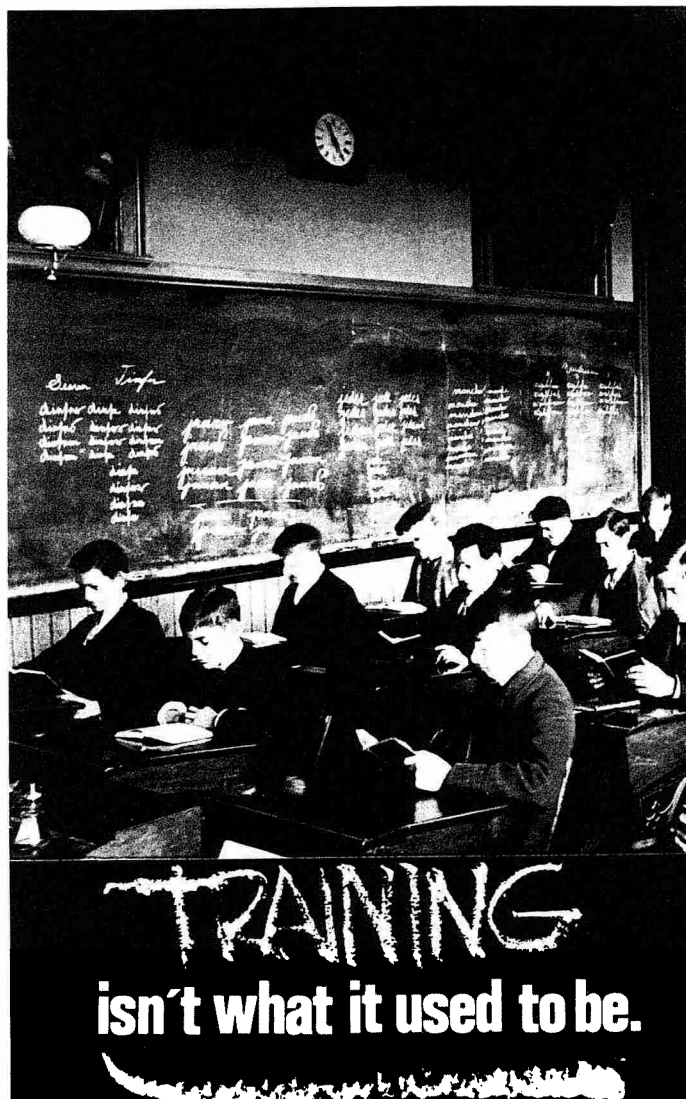
■ **Madogiwa-zoku**: literally *the tribe beside the windows*; actually refers to middle managers whose careers have stagnated.

■ **Nemawashi**: literally *to dig around the root of a tree to prepare it for transplanting*; actually refers to the consensus building that precedes a formal business proposal.

■ **Shafu**: literally *the company wind*; actually means something like corporate culture.

Subtitled "A Glossary of Behavior," *Tatemae and Honne* gives practical insights into the complex web of corporate loyalty, personal deference, formal manners, and male-dominated drinking that characterize Japanese business. All in all, a fascinating look at a poorly understood culture.

"In Practice" is edited and written by John Wilcox. Send items of interest to: *In Practice*, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.



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