

"THERE IS A SERIOUS TENDENCY FOR TRAINERS TO OVERLOOK THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGEMENT MODELS IN PROVIDING A RATIONALE FOR THEIR TRAINING PROGRAMS."

TIME MANAGEMENT: FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE

BY R. ALEC
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When asked by the *Training and Development Journal* editor to address the principles and practice of time management, I was both surprised and pleased. My surprise arose from the continuing neglect of fundamental principles of management on practically all managerial fronts. The pleasure lay in the opportunity presented to expose the problem bluntly to those best positioned to do something about it and to suggest a course of action which could help rectify the situation.

A Wasteland of Neglect

My interest in principles of management dates back to my first efforts to chart on one graph the entire management process. The results of this effort were published in the *Harvard Business Review* ("The Management Process in 3D"¹) and later in the *Training and Development Journal* under the title "A Management Process Model for Training and Development Directors."²



"How many trainers can list the managerial functions with confidence that they have not omitted several?"

The American Society for Training and Development's interest then was to point to the great need felt by training and development practitioners for a model or rationale for training programs. The success of that model is due in no small part to its continuing use in management development programs.

Yet, there is a serious tendency for trainers to overlook the importance of management models in providing a rationale for training programs. Equally serious is the tendency to overlook fundamental principles which give meaning to each of the functional areas comprising the management process. It amounts to a virtual wasteland of neglect!

I base this conclusion on a dozen years of full-time effort in the fields of research for extensive writing and speaking, of conducting studies in organizations, of developing programs for foundations, universities, and the largest management development association in the world. I have presented seminars on leadership and time management in 23 countries, offering a continuing laboratory for observation and discussion of management practices and the understanding of management principles.

These discussions occur in seminars with managers, outside seminars with trainers, program directors and, of course, program participants ever anxious to explore

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special problems. In addition, the reading of everything you believe to be important in the field keeps you in touch with new developments and the trends which occasionally bestir the tides of management thought.

A growing conviction has emerged from this continuing involvement in the field of management: that management principles not only are *not* understood by the vast majority of managers at all levels . . . they also are not understood by the vast majority of trainers! In fact, surprisingly few persons in either category could name a single principle of management correctly. In seminars, I have asked who can name one principle of management. Rarely does a hand go up to volunteer. In one session of 300 chief executives, I asked the question without obtaining a single response. In another with 450 senior executives and trainers the same question elicited the same response.

Examination of the literature of management is scarcely encouraging. A recent text by a best-known publisher on the subject — principles of management — contains not a single reference to principles either in the table of contents or in the index. The book does deal very effectively with the functions and activities of management, while totally neglecting the principles. The title appears to have been chosen because it would sell.

A recent article in one of the most widely read management periodicals refers to "the principle of addition." The author does not tell us what that principle is, and it is quite clear from the context that he is referring to the principle of consolidation. Thus many authors, encouraged by uncritical publishers, are wittingly or unwittingly engaged in worsening the wasteland of neglect. The near bankruptcy of knowledge and understanding in this arena should be of

paramount concern to trainers. They are surely well-positioned to do something about it . . . if they would.

Responsibility of Trainers

What is the responsibility of trainers in this appalling situation?

- To understand what a principle is and to identify the most important ones in each of the functional areas of management.
- To relate principles to practice and to understand why an understanding of principles is essential to effective managerial performance.
- To understand why, contrary to popular belief, there is nothing more practical than a sound principle.
- Contrary to the approach generally being adopted by trainers today, since time and life are indivisible, to recognize that the man-

agement of time essentially is the management of oneself and therefore ought to be approached from a "mastery-of-the-principles" viewpoint.

A "principle," according to Koontz and O'Donnell, is "*a fundamental truth applicable to a given set of circumstances which has value in predicting results.*"³ Principles have also been termed fundamental rules; standards for measurement; guidelines for conduct; and the basis for planning.

The most interesting and helpful definition of a principle is "*the relationship between a cause and its effect.*" This definition is most useful since it explains the intensely *practical* nature of sound principles. Let's examine two principles that every trainer will instantly accept, although few will be able to identify the functional area of management in which they fall or state

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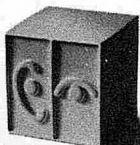
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them precisely.

• *Principle of Management Development:* Results will tend to vary directly with development programs aimed at improving abilities of managers in the present position, at making them promotable, and at involving them in the process.⁴

• *Principle of Reinforcement:* One of the most important requisites of effective training and development is reinforcing of lessons learned through review and practice on the job.

These principles clearly fall within the functional category of "staffing."⁵ Note that both principles state a cause and an effect. The *causes* respectively are (a) development programs aimed at improving abilities of managers in the present position, etc., and (b) reinforcement of lessons learned through review and practice on the job. The respective *effects* are results that vary directly and training and development that is effective. The practicality of these principles should be self-evident. Yet trainers who are not familiar with these precise statements will not be able to use them for the most practical of all possible results: the persuasion of managers as to the imperative need of effective training and development and the justification to top management of a training and development program.

"No Wonder Budgets Are Cut!"

No wonder training budgets are among the first to be cut. Who wouldn't cut a budget which had never been rationalized or justified to their satisfaction! Yet how many trainers *can* present a persuasive rationale for their program? How many trainers can list the managerial functions with confidence that they have not omitted several? How many can identify which functional area of management is being advanced by *each* of their training programs? How many are following the two above principles in their own programs?

Let me relate a very sad experience in two Fortune 500 companies, each of which had spent in the vicinity of six-figure budgets on a time management program con-

sisting solely of a series of seminars mostly conducted for random groups rather than functional groups. I requested of each that we run a follow-up study to determine what results had been obtained with all the money that was being spent.

In one company where reluctance was extreme, I offered to run a one-day follow-up seminar without charge for anyone who had attended a previous seminar in an effort to check results and to provide an opportunity for reinforcement. My offer was refused in both cases but requests for seminars continued. In other words these trainers believed they were getting their points for the *number* of people they ran through my seminar, not for the *results!*

Contrast this reaction with a more recent one of a head trainer who, after a time management seminar, observed: "*There are three things I particularly like about this program. First, it is totally reinforcing of all of our other programs because it identifies time wasters in each functional area and develops solutions, thereby improving performance in all of the functions of management. Second, it can be implemented immediately by the individual without waiting for corporate approval. Third, the individual can measure his or her own progress with regular follow-up assignments which provide extraordinary reinforcement for anyone who is really interested in improvement.*"

One of the most devastating conversations I've had with regard to the wasteland of neglect problem occurred recently with an experienced trainer who had served with national and multinational companies in the U.S. and abroad, in a variety of training and development positions. I told him of a new position I had begun to take with trainers inquiring about my program . . . that I would refuse to accept assignments to present seminars without an agreement in advance for a follow-up program to measure its effectiveness and to validate the guarantee of two hours saved per day per participant. The response of this trainer

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startled me, but confirmed my worst suspicions. He said, "It's the only way you'll ever get them to do it. Notches on the belt is the name of the game." By "notches on the belt" he meant numbers of attendees at seminars, of course.

The benefits of principles need to be understood and appreciated by trainers before they can hope to become advocates. Koontz and O'Donnell cite the following important benefits of principles:

(1). Simplify the practice of management by identifying causal relationships applicable to different situations.

(2). Avoid mistakes by utilizing guidelines derived from the experience of others.

(3). Improve solutions by transferring lessons learned in terms of fundamental principles to new situations.

(4). Improve effectiveness by applying better solutions in less time, saving needless research or trial and error.

(5). Improve adaptability to changing conditions by knowing not only what to do — but why.

(6). Permit the teaching of others by packaging experience for easy transfer to others.

Why the Peter Principle is Not a Principle

The perceptive reader will have no difficulty in determining, on the basis of what's been said above, the reasons for rejecting the now famous *Peter Principle* as a principle. It is one of many so-called "principles" which are really a misuse of the term, or so weakly supported as not to merit serious consideration.

Professor Peter's assertion that managers tend to rise to their level of incompetence and therefore, ultimately, top levels in organizations will be filled by incompetent managers is partly obvious and partly absurd! It is obvious that managers tend to rise in organiza-

tions and that every manager could be said *at a given point in time* to have a certain level of competence. It's absurd to assume that the level of competence of all managers remains static and, therefore, that all positions will ultimately be occupied with incompetent managers.

This conclusion ignores factors which should be particularly sensitive to trainers since they affect competence levels . . . experience, reading, training and development programs, attrition through retirement, departure for better jobs, promotion to other departments and the refusal of promotion. The real danger of so-called "principles" is that the obvious aspect of the true portion misleads

many people into uncritical acceptance of the absurd portion. The end result may be a serious disservice to the field of management. One obvious result of uncritical acceptance of the Peter Principle has been to encourage readers in the conviction that their bosses were over their levels of competence and therefore they should be even more critical of them.

Putting Time Management Principles to Work

Over the years I have sought to collect, formulate and catalog by function a list of the fundamental principles of management and time management. By researching the best-known texts in the field, I have accumulated a list of more

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Figure 1.

Function	Name	Principle
Planning	Priority	For optimum results, time available should be budgeted or allocated to tasks in ordered sequence of priority.
Organizing	Consolidation	Similar tasks should be grouped to economize time and effort by eliminating repetitive actions and interruptions.
Staffing	Orientation	The more a person knows about the work and its environment, the more intelligently the work can be done.
Directing	Delegation	A manager's effectiveness will vary directly with his or her ability to delegate effectively.
Controlling	Planned Unavailability	Managers who plan for periods of uninterrupted concentration achieve better results.
Communicating	Brevity	Economy of words and actions conserves time while promoting clarity and understanding.
Decision-Making	Procrastination	Deferring, postponing or putting off decisions can become a habit which loses time, causes lost opportunities, increases pressure of deadlines and generates crises.

than 100 such principles. Reducing that list to those directly related to time utilization, and adding a few of my own, I now work in seminars with a list of 59 *Principles of Time Management*. An example of one from each of the functions of management is found in Figure 1.

To demonstrate the practical nature of sound principles participants in time management seminars are given two assignments.

The first is a team assignment which requires the initial step in solving the top time waster of a team to be the identification of the principles of time management most applicable to that time waster. Invariably, having identified the most relevant principles, the teams have no difficulty in identifying the most important causes of the time waster because the most serious causes usually result from

Figure 2.

Principle	Action Item
Priority	Get priority list approved by boss and use it to say "No" to less-important requests for my time.
Consolidation	Group activities into a "typical" day — dictation, calls, quiet time, meetings, "to do" items. Advise those significantly affected — secretary, boss, staff, peers.
Orientation	Orient organization to district goals and plans. Visit five minutes with three employees per week until entire staff covered.
Delegation	Have C.B. write weekly report from now on instead of doing it myself.
Planned Unavailability	Have secretary take all calls and implement a "quiet hour" for me immediately. When she needs catch-up time arrange "quiet hour" for her using lunchtime replacement or taking calls myself at low traffic time.
Brevity	Describe or report results only, not activity. Avoid temptation to show off verbally.
Procrastination	Schedule difficult and unpleasant tasks first instead of putting them off.

the violation of one or more fundamental principles. Once the causes are clarified, the solutions are generally self-evident. Like a problem well-stated, it is half solved.

The second assignment in seminars is for each participant to select from the 59 Principles the 10 most important to him or her individually, and to identify one action item suggested by that principle. Typical examples of action items selected by participants from England, Canada and the U.S. for each of the principles named in Figure 1 are found in Figure 2.

Reactions from participants and trainers to this emphasis on principles and their practical application in terms of "action items" varies from one of interest and surprise to astonishment and excitement. The percentage of attendees who carry out the assignment overnight ranges from 90 per cent to 100 per cent suggesting that they tend to take it very seriously and expect that it will have value for them. When asked for their reactions to the assignment, typical responses will be: *"Interesting . . . Provided a reason for a lot of things . . . Some new insights . . . Reinforced some actions I've needed to take."*

A trainer in Seattle attending an open seminar said she'd stayed up till three a.m. working on the assignment. When asked why, she responded that as she got into the assignment she realized she was finding principles to support most of the actions she'd wanted to take in the past year and not been allowed to. She got so excited about it that she couldn't stop.

Steps Trainers Can Take

Since trainers are in an ideal position to do something about the wasteland of neglect of management principles, what course of action is open to them?

(1). *Review the Management Process Chart (Harvard Business Review, Nov.-Dec., 1969) and develop from it a rationale for your training and development program.* Place each course offered in its appropriate functional area (e.g., transactional analysis falls within the Communicating function). *Understanding of the man-*

agement process at all levels and mastery of that process for senior levels should be a categorical imperative. *Career development programs* should be keyed to the functional areas of greatest importance to the individual (a) in his/her present job and (b) in the preparation for promotion.

(2). *Review principles of management by functional area.* The book by Koontz and O'Donnell⁶ is best. Categorize these in appropriate functional areas (planning, organizing, etc.). Discuss these with speakers on various topics to insure their understanding of and willingness to present them and to discuss practical applications of them in their presentations. Trainers giving courses themselves should base their presentations on the fundamental principles involved, with practical applications being the focus of the entire presentation. Handout materials should be reviewed for applicability to both principles and practice of management.

(3). *Follow the Principle of Reinforcement in your training programs.* Since this principle is universally recognized in the training profession, but practiced very little, take it seriously. Stop counting "notches on the belt" and start reinforcing! Instead of booking five seminars on a subject like time management, book one seminar and require of the presenter a follow-up program to reinforce lessons learned. At a given point from three to six months out, test the results, measure the progress. How much changed behavior has occurred? How much of it has persisted? What results can be observed in controlling major time wasters?

(4). *Take performance auditing seriously by requiring of yourselves and speakers criteria for measuring effectiveness.* (See "Measuring Managerial Effectiveness" chapter in *New Time Management Methods for You and Your Team*, Dartnell, for method of auditing effectiveness in controlling top time wasters.) A speaker should be asked how to measure improvement in his or her subject area three to six months later.

(5). *Insure that time management programs reinforce your training program* by reviewing the functional areas covered by the time management presentation. Avoid the "quickie" approach to saving a few minutes here and there with the cafeteria approach of "hot tips." Remember, we waste time whenever we do anything less effectively than we could. Thus we can instantly identify time wasters in each functional area of management.

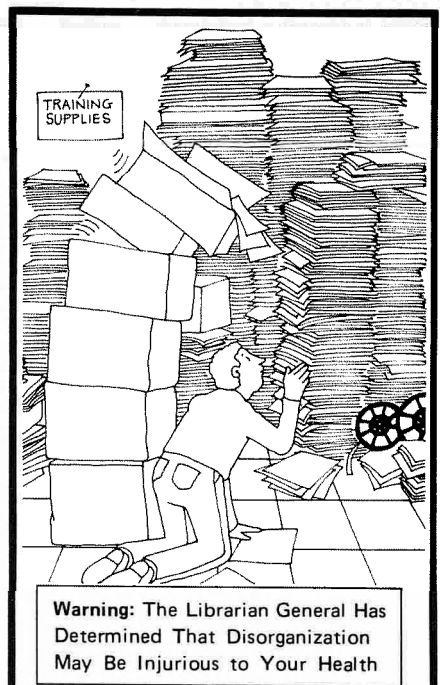
Analyze the functional areas covered by your time management course. Insure maximum coverage by that course to broaden the reinforcement of your entire program. Be sure the subject is approached from the viewpoint of emphasis on the fundamental principles and practice of management.

Finally, to insure substantial amounts of time saved aren't wasted, you should require that participants *first* decide how they plan to *use* time saved most productively. By starting with fundamental principles and developing "action items," there is almost no limit to the number of practical applications one can identify.

Indeed, there is nothing more practical than a sound principle. Since our time is our life, when we manage our time well, we manage our life well. At work and in our personal lives it's simply a matter of putting into practice a few basic principles we know so well, but somehow continue to neglect. Trainers should be leading the way out of this wasteland.

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Dr. R. Alec Mackenzie, president of Alec Mackenzie and Associates, Inc., has been actively promoting the management education and professional development of senior executives through publications, tape cassettes, films, seminars and lectures throughout North and South America, Europe and the Far East. His seminars on Time Management and Developing Leadership Skills have been presented in 21 countries. His publications include four books: *Managing Your Time*, Zondervan; *The Credibility Gap in Management*, Van Nostrand Reinhold; *The Time Trap*, American Management Associations; and *New Time Management Methods for You and Your Staff*, Dartnell.



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