



1980s— Decade of Change

Expectations, titles, and compensation of workplace trainers blossomed during this decade.

By Paula Ketter

Throughout 60 years of T+D magazine, industry experts have forecasted the conditions and requirements that trainers would face in the coming decades. Sometimes these predictions have been easier than others—like the ones for the 1980s—because they were projections of firmly established trends.

The 1980s brought about significant changes in the training and development industry. The status of trainers within the organization changed, often leading to a change in title and compensation. The 1980s also examined key strategies for retraining and retaining employees and new ways of achieving worker competency, and created flexible learning opportunities so employees could gather new information at times, places, and paces convenient for them.

The 1980s saw changes in company structure and productivity, as witnessed by the articles mentioned below.

July 1978

In “Gearing Up for the Eighties” a *Training and Development Journal* article, Malcolm S. Knowles wrote that the biggest change trainers needed to adjust to in the 1980s was a shift away from the “knowledge and skill transition model” and a movement toward the “competency development model.”

It has been clearly demonstrated that increased knowledge or skill does not automatically assure increased ability to perform, especially in complex operations. ... We need to get on top of the concept and theory of competency development and incorporate this system of thought into our philosophy of training. Then we need to master the tech-

niques of constructing competency models for various roles we are supposed to help people learn to perform.

We need to become experts in constructing and using criterion-referenced diagnostic and performance-assessment instruments. Finally, we need to learn new ways to design and deliver competency—development learning resources.

March 1981

In “Productivity in the ’80s—Are You Ready?,” a *Training and Development Journal* article, Glenn H. Varney wrote that trainers must be ready for the changes that would take place in the 1980s.

During the decade of the 1980s, the training role, as we have known it in the past, will change substantially. Training people will find themselves reporting at a very high level in the organization. ... The titles which will be associated with the new training role will be such things as vice president of human resources development, director of organizational development and perhaps, assistant to the chief executive officer responsible for organizational change. ... The typical functions of a trainer will be training, education, management development, career planning, organizational analysis, change strategy planning, and change implementation.

February 1982

Jane Raitt wrote in a *Training and Development Journal* article titled, “Retrain or Retain: A Prescription for the 1980s,” that economic swings of the 1980s, coupled with the rapidly changing technology, forced companies to restructure their organizations and that led to company downsizing. That downsizing forced companies to invest in the retraining of their workers.

This massive, structural unemployment has led to the creation of a new phenomenon: the displaced worker—the permanently laid-off employee who has a positive work history but is out of work because of company downsizing. These individuals lack the transferable skills to compete in a tight, competitive labor market, where highly technical skills are in great demand. ... Companies must change the way they do business, and consequently, trainers will need to change their employment attitudes and training philosophies to better achieve their employment goals.

In the 1980s, a corporation’s competitive edge was defined by the quality of its workforce—employees who had the right combination of analytical and affective skills and who could help bring new products to market faster for a more demanding, more diverse generation of consumers (“The Future of HRD,” June 1989 *Training and Development Journal*).

This decade started a major shift in a company’s expectations of workforce training and development.

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