

# Training & Development Journal

Published by  
The American Society for Training and Development  
1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313

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Training & Development Journal, vol. 44, no. 9  
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## Tell Us What You Think

This month, we are asking questions that are more along the lines of "Tell us what you're doing" than "Tell us what you think."

*Business Week* reported (on May 28, 1990) that some 5,000 Soviets are currently studying business in Europe and the United States.

Two such students are Viktor Manucharov, a production manager from a Soviet space research center, who is spending a year in West Germany, and Joseph Bakalyenek, one of the first four Soviets to attend Harvard Business School's MBA program. The Soviets will be taking courses such as management, finance, and marketing. (Several Moscow schools are instituting crash courses on the same subjects.)

Along with the university programs, many companies in the United States, including American Airlines and Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation, are providing internships for the visiting managers from the Soviet Union.

Although many of the Soviet students speak several languages, marketing concepts and business terminology are often perplexing to them. They also worry they may not be able to use their new skills when they return to the USSR. In their factories back home, they face a stalled *perestroika*, a lagging market economy, and an entrenched commitment to the status quo.

We would like to know if your organization is training Soviets in management. Tell us what you are doing and how your program addresses such problems.

Send your letters to "Issues," *Training & Development Journal*, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.

## Shocking and Stimulating

This letter and the one that follows are in response to the article "Culture Shock," by Jean McEnery and Gaston DesHarnais, in the April 1990 issue.

I am in statistical shock. I fear the authors of "Culture Shock" may have been carried away into the never-never land of scientific obscurantism.

I'll bet it took a lot of your readers as long as it took me to decide that 75 percent of the columns in Figures 1 and 2 were of no significance. The average rating was all that mattered. And when I got to Figure 3, I had to learn all over again what the numbers meant.

I don't think anyone should use the tables in those figures as models for visual aid design, but I do think the article was stimulating. The insensitivity of some U.S. managers to other cultures is astonishing.

A recent newspaper article quoted several executives who had quit or been fired from Japanese "transplant" companies. They complained that at meetings Japanese executives would discuss points among themselves in Japanese. How rude! When U.S. executives are in charge—in European countries, for example—we think we avoid being rude by conducting meetings in only one language—ours!

**David N. Mitchell**  
*Masco Corporation*  
*Taylor, Michigan*

## Cultural Differences Make a Difference

In "Culture Shock," the authors say U.S. employees have more difficulty than Japanese employees adjusting to life and work overseas. They attribute the difference to the better training and more support they say transplanted Japanese employees receive for their "expatriate" assignments.

Their conclusion overlooks some significant cultural differences that may also affect the adjustment process.

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For one, Japanese are greatly influenced by a fear of failing to meet one's obligations to others. In American culture, I believe there is an underlying tolerance for having tried and failed that doesn't exist in Japan. One could conclude that Japanese are more motivated by a strong sense of duty to their employers than Americans are, and therefore try harder to adjust to their overseas assignments.

Second, it is my observation that the Japanese tend to compartmentalize their lives into work and family more rigidly than Americans do. Therefore, when a Japanese executive who is married has an overseas assignment, often the spouse and children will remain at home, mainly so the children can continue their education in Japan. For those reasons, the separation is considered normal and even desirable.

Americans, however, usually take their families with them on overseas assignments, and the family unit as a whole must adapt. Therefore, the transplanted employee has two concerns: how he or she will adapt to the new workplace, and how the entire family will adapt to a new lifestyle and an unfamiliar environment. Even if the transplanted employee begins to adjust at work, a family that is not adjusting can affect the overall success of the assignment.

**Elaine Vocl-Reed**  
*Japan*

## Pay for Performance: Communication Is Key

An item in the May 1990 "In Practice" under "Lip Service" implies a contradiction between the claim of 84 percent of small and medium-size firms that they believe in tying pay to performance and the fact that only 34 percent say they have written, formal performance review procedures. I think a lack of formality may be a strength, not a cause for concern.

At Air Products, we are currently in the process of revising our performance management system. Although we are making changes

on the ratings and forms, one of our key objectives is to place greater emphasis on communication between manager and employee. We believe a concern with ratings and forms gets in the way of honest dialogue, which we are trying to promote.

Small firms that are successful in rewarding performance most often demonstrate the following qualities:

- a well-defined vision
- clear expectations of employees
- frequent, direct feedback on performance
- recognition and reward tied to company and individual performance.

Having those criteria in writing may enhance their effectiveness to some degree, especially as organizations increase in size. But effective communication and fairness to employees are stronger demonstrations of a company's commitment to a pay-for-performance system.

**Marilyn L. Marles**  
*Air Products*  
*Allentown, Pennsylvania*

"Issues" is compiled and edited by **Haldee Allerton**. Send your views to *Issues*, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.