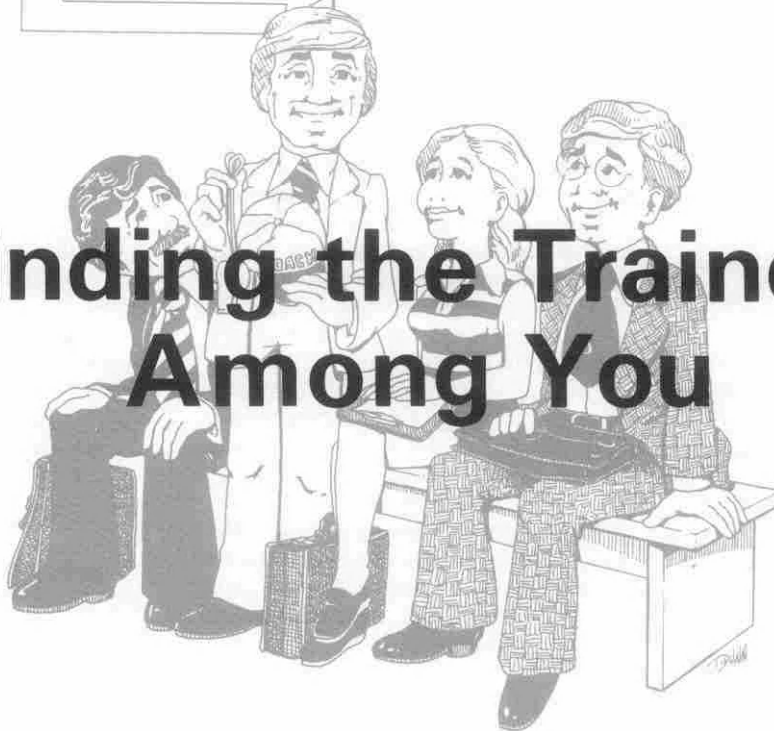


# Finding the Trainers Among You



every organization has people with the characteristics

Charles E. Kozoll

Effective trainers are born and made. An organization which has a strong program for developing its staff has methods for identifying personnel from among experienced employees capable of conducting training sessions. There are various ways of looking for and looking at the type of person who is most productive in correcting, stretching and developing staff.

One approach is to compare a trainer with an outstanding athletic coach. Certain techniques of a coach who connects should be ones used by any effective trainer. There are six which stand out:

1. *Circumscribed unit:* Not too much was introduced at any one time. In any sport, there are many different motions or maneuvers to be learned. All require some movement of the body. More than

likely a coach selected only one for mastery. Stance in golf, follow-through in tennis, handing off a football or positioning a glove to catch a softball are examples of a skill that was learned to the point of automatic response — certainly before a more complicated next step was introduced. Good coaches know what the outer limits of exertion are, and usually don't go further. The assumption is that if an individual is pushed too far, only confusion will result and it will be necessary to start from the top and re learn.

2. *Clear description:* The effective coach shows exactly how to do any new exercises or steps. Usually, the demonstration is at very close range. Most often the coach did it himself/herself, emphasizing the correct form and me-

thod. *The best never showed the wrong way!* One way and one way alone was the right way. And the athlete had to master that one.

3. *Immediate trial:* This is just what it says. No sooner was the correct procedure demonstrated than an athlete was called upon to make an attempt. Emphasis was on closely following exactly what the coach described and demonstrated. A first trial was made, a second and perhaps an unlimited number. Repetition, an opportunity to ask the coach again, and a review of each step made the trial carefully controlled and well-supported.

4. *Immediate Correction:* One strength of the trial method was the coach standing nearby, ready and willing to correct what was being done. Suggestions were made

on slight changes and they were valuable because correction occurred close to the point of error. In many cases, an athlete was stopped, and told to go back and start once again. There was no opportunity for bad habits to be adopted, because close supervision reacted at any indication those habits were beginning to appear.

5. *Constant Support:* In addition to correcting any bad habit which might emerge, a good coach also was available to compliment. Expressions such as "that's fine, now try it once more" or "you're really beginning to get a knack for this" were heard a great deal. Constant evaluation was combined with constructive criticism and compliments. Confidence was consistently bolstered.

6. *Regular reinforcement:* Once a technique was learned to a lesser rather than a greater extent, the coach didn't disappear. He/she was always around, usually within clear view of the athlete. Occasionally, there was encouragement. Corrections and suggestions for improving style are constantly offered. The individual is more on his/her own but knows help is not too far away.

#### Four Functions

All of those six facets of coach operation should be present in what a trainer does. In addition, there are four functions which should be performed in support of the distinct training role. They are:

1. *The trainer as non threatening observer.* The fact a trainer is watching individuals perform from a distance should not produce nervousness or unusual performance. The observation could be for specific training purposes or just to keep alert to what employees are doing on the job. Most importantly, no one bothers to look up and what is done is done normally.

2. *The trainer as keen problem spotter:* A continuing history of

observation in different settings should develop an ability to spot problems very easily. In addition to looking at the current problem, there is an ability to look back on comparable situations which were handled and those which were not. Here the trainer is like the sophisticated athletic coach, who intently studies every move of a performer and then is able to say: one specific element is missing or wrong; correcting it will be an essential ingredient in future success. The critical step is focusing on one and perhaps two areas needing immediate correction.

3. *The trainer as a shrewd judge of character:* The trainer makes an assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as the potential of individuals to change. Observation and hopefully past experience will tell:

a) how well a criticism offered is accepted;


b) how many times a particular process or technique has to be reviewed before understanding is achieved;

c) how simple or complex an example can be in order for understanding to be achieved.

4. *The trainer as outstanding model to copy:* He/she knows exactly what to do and how to do it smoothly and clearly. In addition, there is an ability to reduce speed to slow motion so that employees to be trained can follow with no difficulty what is being demonstrated. A good trainer undoubtedly knows the short cuts but retains the complete knowledge of an entire process so that it can be established as a necessary base for operating before any deviations are allowed or made. Most important, the supervisor knows exactly how each step is correctly done and can explain each step while performing it.

#### Savings Occurs

Trainers who can operate in the four realms just mentioned produce a lot of economy. First, minor

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problems are solved, almost as they appear. They do not become ingrained habits which are hard to cure, and, as a result, there is probably a money-saving benefit to the organization.

A second saving occurs because training does not become an activity apart from the normal daily operations. No great planning is necessary and large seminars are the exception rather than the rule. Little time is lost through employees and supervisory staff leaving the job. A third saving results from an employee theoretically doing a job correctly after instruction was received.

Fourth, through observation, training personnel can make some decisions about what future instruction and development will be required. Some errors made by a consistently large number of employees would justify a concentrated period when they are removed from the job-setting and subjected to proper explanation, with an opportunity to practice before returning to the job.

### Common Sense Dictates

In addition to the coaching perspective and the second view which emphasized realms of operation, there is a third way to examine trainer operation. This is from the view of characteristics which an individual should have. Common sense really dictates these characteristics and careful selection requires they be observed before any final selection is made. Nine are presented here.

1. *Empathy* is an ability to place one's self in another's shoes. It is facility for recognizing fear and uncertainty a new employee faces or any staff member encounters when learning additional techniques or skills. Empathy comes out clearly when a trainer charged with the responsibility of demonstrating or teaching puts the learners at ease by pointing out personal difficulty encountered in a similar situation

some time ago. Empathy is definitely not a function of age.

2. *Honesty operates on two levels*. First, it requires a facility to speak truthfully to those employees being trained. Not very difficult — a new technique could either be simple or complex. People should be told just that. The hard part of honesty appears when a trainer indicates to someone they may not be capable of moving to the next highest level, based on past performance and observation. The second level of honesty concerns an individual trainer and includes such things as an ability to recognize personal strengths and weaknesses in this role and to admit both of these to personnel being trained, for their own benefit.

3. *Patience* is a quality that other people are told to have, but is one rarely boasted about. Unfortunately, many "bright" people do not have it. They can master material so quickly it doesn't occur anyone would have difficulty learning. Repeating instructions, breaking down a task into small units and allowing time for learners to try out are included here. A willingness to compliment slow progress and refrain from anger when mistakes are made also is necessary.

4. *Pace* is integrated very closely with empathy and patience. This is an external speed governor which acts more to slow down than to speed up. By reducing speed, this quality operates to remind the trainer that he/she is going too fast; if necessary, it is a caution to those employees who are learning. This quality underlines what was mentioned concerning a coach: it is far better to move slowly and attain complete mastery, than push for rapid and sloppy completion.

5. *Democracy* is a catchword used to describe how an effective trainer operates. It relates to the kind of atmosphere created when learning takes place. While the

trainer, an experienced employee given a responsibility for instructing has most of the information, he/she should be supportive and nonthreatening in presentation. Further, the tone of voice and facial expression should lead those learning to feel: comfortable in raising questions; able to offer suggestions; open about reinterpreting instructions in their own words; and generally being relaxed while they learn.

6. *Purpose* emphasizes an element of tenacity. A job has been presented and this individual has the task of seeing it through to conclusion. When combined with pace, it means a good trainer conscientiously moves a group of learners along to a preset destination. There may be stops and shifts along the way, but the eye is always fixed on a certain performance standard or level which must be reached. A group learning some new tasks may be confused and shaken at a particular point and it may even be necessary to go back for a restart. That presents no difficulty, because the trainer still has his/her eye on a goal and is willing to move along toward its completion.

7. *An ability to listen* cannot be taken for granted. A trainer must hear questions raised by employees and understand if the question reflects other problems not being mentioned. In addition, it must be possible for the trainer to understand how an employee describes what he/she will do in his/her own words. Finally, the trainer should have the posture of a listener, through turning toward the speaker and maintaining constant eye contact.

8. *Respect for experience* is very closely allied to the democratic spirit mentioned earlier. But its unique importance requires some special explanation. All of the individuals to be trained will be adults. As such, they will learn more effectively if respect is given to

whatever experience and qualifications they can bring to a position. That demonstration will doubtless encourage greater participation and activity by an employee. Absence of it does create ill will and hard feelings which could have easily been avoided.

9. *Prestige* is the single quality that differs markedly from the other eight. And though a dispensable one, it is worth considering. It indicates a trainer is regarded with respect by colleagues in the organization. With that regard, the training program will be strengthened by its acceptance among older and experienced employees. They then will be willing to provide additional support.

In the selection process, it might be useful to examine each potential trainer in light of the following questions:

1. How well can the individual explain a complicated technique? Is he/she a communicator whose explanations of anything produce clarity or confusion?

2. Is the individual's pace of explanation too fast for understanding, too slow for alertness or the right speed for learning?

3. Will the individual stay close enough to a learner to provide help when needed but not too near to suffocate?

4. How well can the individual spot problems which could be remedied by some type of preferably on-the-job training?

5. Does the individual perform his/her duties well enough to serve as a model for new employees to imitate?

6. Can this individual (probably an experienced employee) remember his/her own earlier mistakes enough to empathize with new staff?

7. Is this individual honest about his/her own strengths and weaknesses?

8. Is the individual job-completion oriented or likely to be distracted along the way?

9. Is the individual a good listener who demonstrates this quality to people with whom he/she works?

10. Does the individual have prestige within the organization among fellow experienced employees?

What is sought? An individual who has basic qualities which stimulate staff to "learn along" with a supporting but demanding trainer. Every organization has people with these characteristics who can be chosen and involved to the long-range training benefit of the organization.

**USEASTO**

Charles E. Kozoll is associate director of continuing education and public service, University of Illinois. He has been a consultant in management training and executive secretary development programs for the federal government. He received the Ph.D. in political science and adult education from Columbia University, New York.

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