

Training Can Be Professional

*suggestions for
what really counts in
the makeup of
a training "pro"*

Frederick H. Antil

At an ever accelerating rate those involved in training and development are trying to professionalize their calling. What this means and the reasons for it are as varied as the training responsibilities held by practitioners. However, most statements calling for professionalism seem aimed at standardizing the personal development and performance of full time training executives. We are told that unless this professionalization takes place, industrial trainers are going to lose the responsibility for developing professional personnel to educators, behavioral scientists, or to the various internal departments themselves.

Already Happening

There is abundant evidence that this is already happening and probably will continue. Many companies, for example, leave all EDP training — keypunch, operator, programmer, or systems training — to the EDP section, not because computer personnel are necessarily effective trainers but because the organization believes the task is beyond the capabilities of its training department. Similarly, marketing divisions often retain responsibility for sales training because top management is convinced that marketing is more qualified to get practical results than the personnel training department.

Many organizations automatically and exclusively consider academic courses when they plan for the development of their top management personnel. Other examples can be found in too many engineering, R & D, or other professional employee groups.

Why Training Isn't Considered Professional

The blame for this rests equally on the organizations and on those individuals who have called themselves "trainers", but who have

lacked proper qualifications. In the past the training slot was often filled carelessly, without sufficient understanding of what a trainer should be or do.

Few individuals can fly an airplane, sail a ship, practice medicine or law, build a bridge, or quarterback a professional football team without being qualified or trained in some way. But too often in training merely holding down the job and the title serves as qualification.

Many staff specialists are forced, by the shortsightedness of the organization itself, into becoming defensive empire builders. If the trainer has neither the self-confidence nor the rapport with top management to feel secure in his position, he must continually extend his control over an ever-increasing area. Whether or not this contributes to the good of the organization is not considered. What is important to the training specialist is that he is surviving.

Part of our responsibility as training "experts" is to develop organizational excellence. We must start with our own position. A mature, activist (as opposed to a mere reactor) approach to our training responsibility will pay great dividends.

Act Professional

My point is that until the trainer himself begins to act like a professional, his contribution to his organization and the respect he gets are going to be negligible. This will occur in spite of any formal "standards" devised by various associations. Until top management accepts the industrial trainer as a "professional" and expects positive results from him, he will not be one.

A few years ago Dr. William Tracey wrote "Benchmarks of a Training Director's Competency" (*Training in Business and Indus-*

try, November-December 1965), which has much applicability today. His points are valid and worth noting, but they are aimed primarily at the trainer as a manager. He said the trainer should practice the management functions in a professional, systematic way. He should be: "a competent planner," "a capable organizer," "a skillful staffer," "an able director," and an "adept controller."

What is needed in addition, however, is a re-evaluation of the role of the trainer as a change agent. If the trainer places his emphasis and job on the results he and his programs have achieved in the organization, (a measurable accomplishment), and not on the number of programs, size of staff or amount of budget, he will be more readily accepted by top management as a professional, and an equal.

Some Stereotypes

Many years of talking with top corporate officials and industrial professionals convince me that certain stereotyped trainers have damaged the trainer's image in general. My classifications are:

Psychologist. This person has read Maslow and Blake and probably has attended a _____ (fill in grid, sensitivity, KTA, etc.) course. He has taken a couple of psychology courses either in undergraduate or graduate school, and at least has reviewed films about some of the current behavioral scientists. This trainer presents a classic example of why a little learning can be a dangerous thing. Knowing the jargon or being a devotee of encounter groups does not necessarily qualify one to plumb the psyches of those he is supposed to train, or even to train them.

The Pedant. Although steeped in educational concepts, this individual becomes so involved with

the didactic process itself that nothing gets accomplished. He may feel a degree of satisfaction in receiving awe respect from line management because of his credentials and vocabulary, but he often is not called on when management has "real" problems, problems for which a training approach might often provide valuable assistance.

The "Custodian." This individual runs his training area quite efficiently. He is unfailingly helpful; his visual aids are imaginative and kept in a neat fashion; chalk boards are always clean, and order prevails. Unfortunately, this type confuses order and visual aids with being an effective trainer. This much concern for detail is pathetic when it is the trainer's only strength. Objectives, or the quality and results of any training effort, are never examined. Emphasis is put on the movie, film strip, video tape, or other audio-visual device, rather than on the purpose of the course itself.

I recently saw this training style result in the loss of a valued employee. The training department of one large company was using video-tape role-playing sessions in retraining its salesmen. A successful experienced salesman expressed vocal resentment at having to undergo this "ordeal." He did it once, but after viewing the results and being informed that there would be another session, he quit. It is a shame when methodology blinds us to what the purpose of training is after all.

The "Actor." Also known as the "Entertainer," this individual, often a consultant, is famous for his dog and pony show! Laughter from a rapt audience is all the feedback or validation his ego requires to convince him he is doing a terrific job. Of course some disagreeable pragmatist with-

in the organization may one day decide that, this trainer's opinion aside, more tangible results are required from the company's training expenditure.

Create Distrust

These are a few admittedly over-simplified portraits of ill-qualified trainers who are supposedly practicing or have practiced their trade. They are the trainers who have helped create distrust and a lack of respect for training from many managers, executives, and other professional employees.

A final general criticism, which it seems fair to level at many of us who claim to be trainers, is jumping on every new fad "bandwagon" that comes along. Is it any wonder that trainers' ideas are sometimes dismissed so readily? We are forever coming up with some technique, course, or piece of hardware that is going to revolutionize training. Eventually management becomes justifiably cynical. Our emphasis has been misplaced; it has been on techniques rather than on results.

What can Training Do?

Various management groups have been arguing the merits of management's being a profession for a number of years. Training groups are now using the same arguments they used, i.e., there is a specialized body of knowledge and a need for recognized standards and a code of ethics.

One significant distinction, however, separates line managers from most staff specialists, including trainers. Most line managers have a function that is reflected in a profit/loss responsibility. Granted, financial accountability is no sure-fire measurement of whether management is being done well or not, but it certainly does put pressure on managers to do the job to the best of their ability. Trainers could use this kind of pressure.

In spite of these general criticisms about the training profession I feel that industrial training in recent years has advanced more than academic education. For instance, training has been highly flexible and innovative in the use of audio-visuals, programmed instruction and participative learning.

“Accountability” Emphasized

Recently, however, the educa-

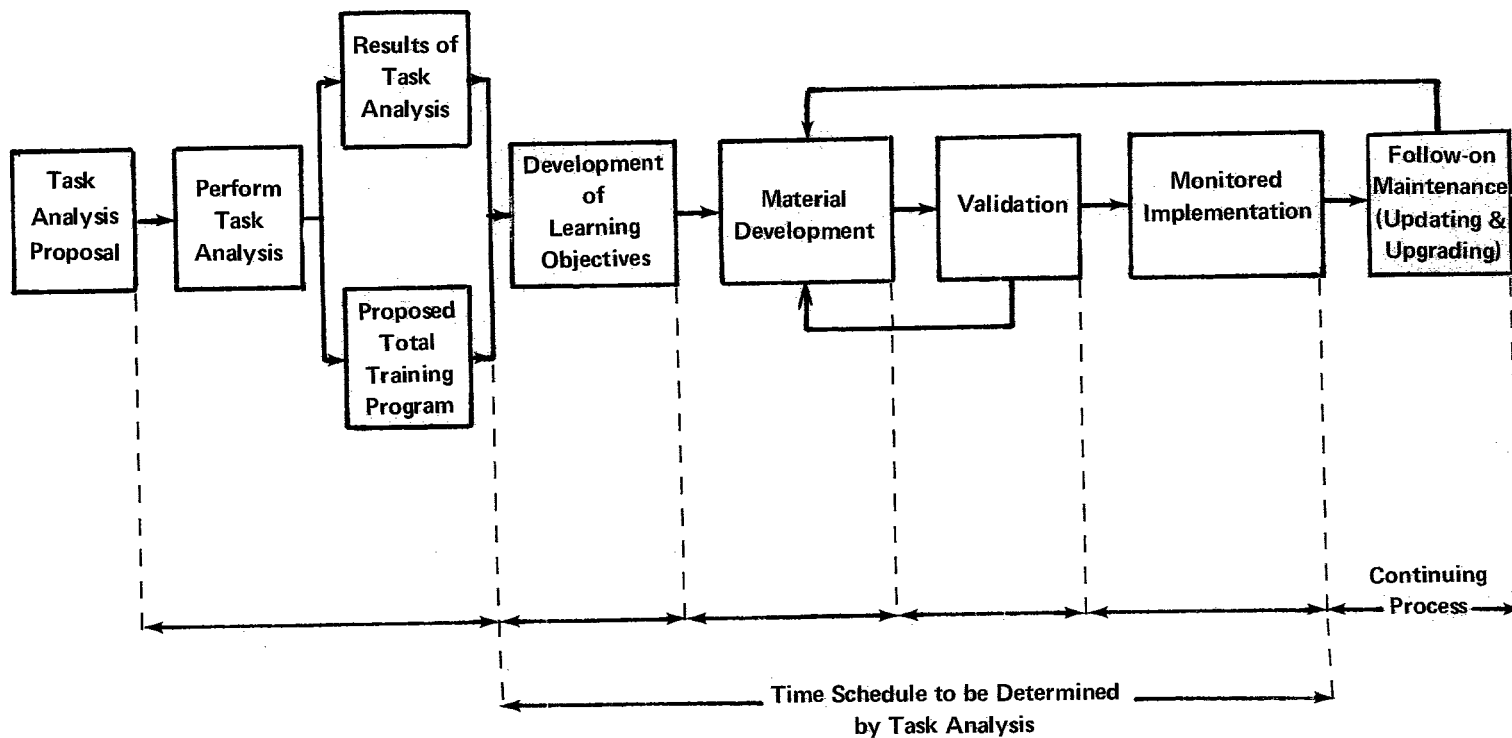
tional community has taken great strides forward by beginning to put emphasis on “accountability.” This guarantee of results is being built into everything from union agreements to performance contracts with consultants. For instance, a recent contract on the West Coast was contingent on reducing reading deficiencies 25 per cent in the current school year, 50 per cent in the second year and elimination of all defi-

ciencies in the third year.

Unfortunately, some of the early results of these performance contracts have not been impressive. There are many reasons for these failures, however, including occasional opposition from various teacher groups. The concept is sound. It has been stated that as a result of accountability, the emphasis in education will shift from teaching to learning. Training, too, must shift its emphasis.

Figure 1.

PLANNING FLOWCHART FOR TRAINING PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT



A Systems Approach

A great deal has been written recently about a "systems approach" to training — yet not a great deal of it is in evidence. Even some of the seminars and courses conducted by advocates of this systems approach and of professional training show that they are not practicing what they preach.

Figure 1 shows one method for developing a systematic training program (see chart). If the trainer understands and uses this system, or one similar to it, he can attack any training problem whether he is knowledgeable in a given area or not. Electronic data processing, marketing, supervision, or any technical subject lends itself to effective training results after (1) the job task is thoroughly analyzed, (2) behavioral objectives are determined.

Emphasis then is placed on the terminal behavior of the student and not on the program, the medium, or some other extraneous feature. With a systems approach the trainer can use his own staff or an outside resource to achieve practical, measurable results.

The Professional Trainer

The head of one large, sophisticated training department recently suggested that the auditing of both current training programs and long-range training effectiveness be removed from his control. He felt this would ensure an objectivity his own staff could not provide — a courageous and highly professional step.

Obviously he will continue his own evaluative process, but he has sufficient confidence in his programs to have the organization judge the training results for itself. Because he is a professional and has clearly-defined and agreed-upon objectives, it is clear to all what his contribution will be and whether or not he achieved these objectives.

Common standards for trainer qualification and performance must, of course, be devised. Someday there will probably be a need for accreditation. Fundamentally, however, what is needed now is an attitude change. Fancy programs, an ever-increasing staff and budget, or an esoteric mystique about the training function will not make training a profession. A hard-nosed desire to make training a productive management tool is necessary and will go far toward allowing industrial training to assume its proper role in business and society.

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