

In Practice

Using the Fax to the Max

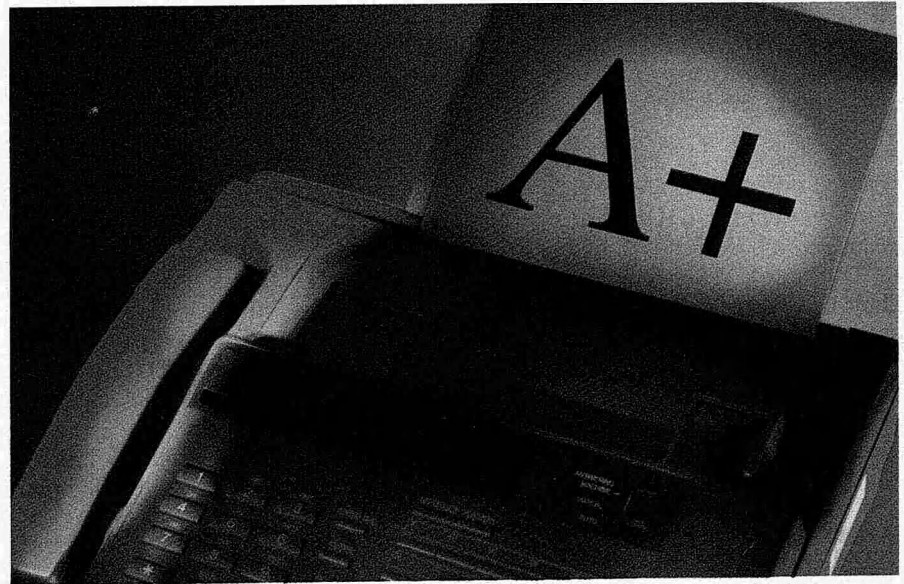
Let's say you want to train, all at once, a salesforce of 15,000 people, located throughout the United States. And let's say you want to test the salesforce on what you've taught. Plus, you want to receive the test results quickly and cheaply. Can it be done?

Cadillac found that it could—with the help of some sophisticated technology. As part of a standardized sales training and testing program called "Insight II: Commitment to Excellence," Cadillac planned several training sessions for its salesforce. Cadillac decided to present the sessions throughout the United States via satellite to nearly 15,000 salespeople simultaneously, at 1,500 of its dealerships. The company also wanted to test its salespeople on the material they learned from the sessions and certify the salespeople for successfully completing the courses.

Cadillac enlisted the help of Visual Services, which specializes in test-support, educational, and training programs. Visual Services designed a series of multiple-choice tests and developed a system to score the tests quickly, by computer.

Designing and correcting the tests wasn't a problem. The problem was getting the tests from the dealerships on the day that the tests were administered. Don Morrison, manager of advanced systems for Visual Services, says that Cadillac believed participation would be higher if dealers knew they would have their employees' results back quickly and easily. In addition, dealers wanted to know right away which information the salespeople understood and which areas they were having difficulty with.

Visual Services and Cadillac decided that the fastest and least



Michael Northrup

expensive method of sending in the test answers for grading would be to fax the information from the dealers to Visual Services. But how do you handle 1,500 faxes at once? The answer for Visual Services was to enlist the help of a company—World Data Delivery Systems in Harper Woods, Michigan—that specializes in enhanced fax technology.

WDDS would receive the tests from the dealerships by fax, translate the material into a data base, and send the information to Visual Services via computer modem.

On the day of the first session, Cadillac's salespeople met in their dealerships and attended a training session via satellite. After the session, each salesperson took a multiple-choice test. The tests varied to prevent salespeople from sharing answers.

After salespeople completed the tests, a coordinator transferred their answers to a master sheet. The master sheet was then sent by fax to WDDS.

"Up to 32 dealers could simultaneously send in their results," says Matt

Learn how Cadillac used technology to reinforce its sales training. Also, here's a quiz to test your firm's environment for women employees and the story of one company's drive to boost employees' basic skills.

Kennedy, vice-president of operations at WDDS. "The sheets that were sent by fax went directly into our computer system—we didn't receive a paper fax. Each sheet had a dealer's identification number, which the computer recorded as each sheet came in. Our computer system lifted the results off the fax and converted them into a digital image on our system. We transferred that information into a data base that we chose for this project."

After WDDS collected and processed the information from all the dealerships, it sent the information by modem to Visual Services. Visual Services scored the tests and sent the information back to WDDS, also by modem. Then WDDS sent the test results to the dealerships by fax.

The result? The salespeople saw their test scores right away. The dealers learned who knew the information and who didn't. And the people who had designed the satellite training learned about the areas in which they needed to improve.

Assessing the Gender Balance: A Quiz

Does your organization understand the needs of female employees? Does it actively work with women and help develop their skills?

Felice N. Schwartz, president of Catalyst, an organization devoted to working with businesses to help women advance in their careers, has designed the following quiz to help business leaders assess their ability to recruit, develop, and retain talented women.

Answer yes or no to each question and record your answers.

- ▶ Has your firm prepared for the fact that the current generation of entry-level managers is half the size it would have been had the baby boom continued?
- ▶ Do relatively more women than men leave your company?
- ▶ When a high-level woman leaves, do you question what your company has done (or failed to do) that caused her to leave?
- ▶ Are there specific obstacles to the advancement of women in your

company that don't exist for men?

▶ Would you advise a young woman not to remove her wedding ring when interviewing for a job?

▶ Do you support talented women who choose to limit their career paths in order to spend more time with their families?

▶ Would you like your son to be able to spend more time with his children than you did with yours?

▶ Are men reluctant to take parental leave, even when it's offered?

▶ Do you evaluate performance by work accomplished rather than by hours spent in the office?

▶ Can most management jobs be done by people sharing a job or working part-time?

▶ Could you manage your human resources more effectively if women felt free to discuss their career and family plans with their managers?

▶ Do you measure lost productivity and attrition resulting from inadequate child care or insufficient maternity leave?

▶ Do you know how much it has cost your company to replace the high-performing women you have lost?

▶ Does it cost you more to employ women than men?

▶ Can a high-performing woman work part-time for five years and return to the fast track?

▶ Do you know that only half of *Fortune* 100 companies have women directors?

▶ Do you trust a woman to be the chief liaison with one of your top 10 clients or customers?

▶ Do female and male managers and executives in your company go out together routinely for lunch?

▶ Would increasing the number of women in senior management help your company compete more successfully for the best female graduates?

▶ Can women provide you with a competitive advantage in your industry and in the world economy?

Count up the number of questions to which you answered "yes" and compare the number to the following scale.

Five "yes" answers or fewer. Score zero points. There is no pulse of interest in women in your firm. The prevailing attitude: "There is no reason to understand or respond to the needs of women."

Six to 10 "yes" answers. Score one point. You are staying one step ahead of the law. Your firm's approach is reflected in the following statement: "Women are not committed to their careers; I'd rather have an average man than a very talented woman."

Eleven to 15 "yes" answers. Score two points. You are undertaking a potpourri of responses to issues that affect women in the workplace. Your firm's attitude: "I want to do what's fair and right and avoid the resentment of women."

Sixteen to 20 "yes" answers. Score three points. You have substantive, broadly communicated programs to address women employees' needs. The general attitude is as follows: "I want to attract, develop, and retain really talented women and be fair to all women."

Notice that the highest score that an organization can earn on this test is three points—even if you answered yes to all 20 questions. Ratings of three or less reflect only part of the scale Schwartz has developed for rating the atmosphere for women employees in companies. The scale reaches to five, but Schwartz believes that no major company in the United States rates above a three. She urges all businesses to strive to achieve a rating of four or five on the scale—especially those that want to gain a huge competitive advantage in the world economy.

Here are descriptions of the workplace environments that would be necessary for a company to receive a score of four or five on Catalyst's rating scale:

▶ Four points. The firm is leveling the playing field for women. The philosophy: "I am determined to identify and remove barriers that exist for women but that don't exist for men, and to institutionalize flexibility without penalty for new mothers and parents who want it."

▶ Five points. The firm is elevating the playing field for women. The company's attitude: "I am gender blind. I believe this will enable me to mobilize all the talent I can."

(The quiz is adapted from the December 1992 issue of Perspective, with the permission of Catalyst, 251 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003-1459.)

Media Management

A reporter from the local newspaper calls your company to discuss rumors of a relocation. A trade-publication editor calls to get more information on a new product. A business journalist seeks a statement on company earnings. Are your spokespeople prepared to offer the information in a way that promotes your company?

All too often, companies fail to take advantage of media inquiries. Spokespeople go through interviews unprepared and unfocused. Or they stay on the defensive, determined to say as little as possible so that the press won't "put one over on them." As a result, they miss out on one of the most powerful vehicles for promoting their companies or products—the power of the press.

When the press comes calling, what can you do to help managers and spokespeople respond effectively? The following three-point plan will put you on the road to media success.

The first point is preparation. Before any interviews, block out some time with the spokespeople to develop a game plan. During this preparation session, you should aim to cover the following:

- ▶ An interview agenda. As a salesperson does for an important sales call, a spokesperson should have an agenda of issues to cover in an interview. Remember that an interview does not need to be a one-sided cross-examination by the journalist. Think of it as an opportunity for the spokesperson to tell the firm's news in a focused, informative way.

- ▶ Key message points. The spokesperson should decide in advance on three or four key marketing points to make about the company or products. He or she should write them down, discuss them, refine them, and sharpen them.

- ▶ Focus on the audience. Who reads the trade publication, business journal, or newspaper that is featuring your firm? What are those readers' interests and concerns? Review them with spokespeople to help them decide, for example, how much technical information is relevant. Look for ways to make your company or its products meaningful to readers.

The second point is rehearsal. Practice with the spokespeople to see how well they can work the key messages into an interview. In a role-play session, you take the role of the reporter and pose relevant questions to the spokesperson. Give him or her the following instructions:

- ▶ Take the initiative. Spokespeople should be able to respond to ques-

tions. But more important, they should be able to guide interviews. They can't wait for reporters to ask the right questions. It may never happen.

- ▶ Stress the benefits. Remind spokespeople not to lose sight of the basic need that a product or service fills. For example, a manager might try to give a reporter all sorts of technical information about a new automated

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system. That level of detail may be interesting to a systems expert, but it is beyond the scope of the average reader. It's better to stress the benefits that the new system offers to customers, such as quick access to data.

► Be positive. There are strong, positive statements to be made about your company and products. But a reporter won't know those points unless the spokesperson mentions them in the interview.

► Be a marketer. Stress to your spokespeople the importance of using the name of the company or product. They shouldn't always refer to "we," "it," or "the company." Remember that a good part of the reason for doing an interview is the visibility.

The third point is anticipation of the unexpected. An interview request may seem straightforward, but there is always the possibility that difficult or sensitive questions about your organization may be raised.

If your company's earnings are low or the company has downsized, a spokesperson may be asked about it, even in the midst of an interview on an unrelated topic. Be sure spokespeople have a standard-policy answer to such questions or are prepared to refer reporters to an appropriate person.

Remind spokespeople that they do not have to answer every question a reporter may ask. It is perfectly acceptable to explain politely that certain information is proprietary. If a reporter asks a technical question that your spokespeople can't answer, he or she should offer to find the answer and call the reporter back.

Success with the media doesn't happen by luck or accident. It happens through careful preparation and planning.

— **Deirdre Peterson**
communications consultant
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In-Sightful Training

Duke just finished a four-month course that trained him to open a whole new world for his employer. Only 300 trainees graduate from this rigorous course every year. (Another 700 drop out each year because of medical or

physical factors that make them unsuitable for the awesome responsibilities of their profession.)

Duke is a guide dog. He was trained at Leader Dogs for the Blind, in Rochester, Michigan.

Now that the Americans With Disabilities Act is business-as-usual, people with low vision are increasingly likely to be present in the workplace and in other environments that used to be closed to them. Some will be accompanied by dogs like Duke.

You may have seen a dog like Duke in your office or on the street. Leader Dogs for the Blind suggests the following tips for interacting with a person who uses a guide dog:

- ▶ Never rush up and startle the person by grabbing his or her arm. Simply ask if you can help.
- ▶ If a person needs help, approach on the right side of the person. The guide dog will usually be on the person's left.
- ▶ Never take hold of a guide dog's harness. Doing so will confuse the dog and startle its owner.

▶ If the person welcomes your help, offer him or her your left elbow. He or she will drop the dog's harness handle as a signal to the dog that it is off-duty temporarily. If the person wants help in crossing a street, take him or her all the way across and then up onto the opposite curb, where the dog will resume its duties.

▶ Do not offer food to a guide dog. Owners look after their dogs' diets carefully. Their animals are well-fed and perform more efficiently when they follow a recommended diet.

▶ Consult the owner before petting a guide dog.

For more information about Leader Dogs for the Blind, call 313/651-9011.

The Feds Survey Training

Ever since the election of Bill Clinton as U.S. president last November, the national interest-in-training barometer has seemed to point toward the positive. Time will tell.

So, perhaps, will a new survey of employer-provided training programs, being launched this spring by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The survey is the first comprehensive look at training by a federal statistical agency. In the first stage of the survey, the BLS is surveying 12,000 employers about their training programs. The BLS plans to publish data on the number and types of internal and external training programs that are provided by employers in various industries. The first report from the study is expected to be released in early 1994.

The second stage of the project will be an ongoing survey of businesses, based on a sample chosen from the first survey.

This month's "In Practice" was edited and written by Craig Steinburg. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

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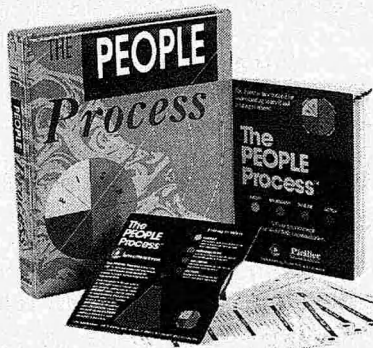
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