Is Training A Profession ?

Answering This Question Indicates That The Trainer Of The Future Should Be A Learning Theorist, Not Merely A Training Methodologist

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The literature in the field of training repeatedly gives evidence of the yearning of training personnel for professional status. Statements, ranging from the "Wouldn't it be nice to wear a gold pin indicating membership in the 'Association of Mystic Professional Training'" to impassioned, learned pleas, can be found in the pages of this *Journal*, books on training, resolutions from chapters, various study groups and committees, and convention speeches.

Some of the critics of training and education have made jibes at such a yearning:

"Educationists are morbidly self-conscious about the standing of their profession. They exhort one another to be 'professional minded' and each feels his pulse from time to time to make sure it has the right professional beat. Beneath it all, however, is a frightened uncertainty concerning the exact nature of a profession, and a desperate longing for palpable tokens of salvation."[1]

Part of this mutual exhortation, of course, comes from three usually unspoken motivations:

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1. The desire for financial security which professional standing bids to enhance.
2. Recognition and status.
3. The lack of acceptance of the training director and his job by "outsiders" and the necessity to find solace, compassion, understanding, and assurance of his worth from fellow-sufferers.

Unfortunately, too often there seems to exist some sort of naive faith among training personnel that a cataclysmic change in public opinion, an enlightened act of legislation, or a scrooge-like change in the vice-president to whom training reports, will miraculously create a professional status for them. If there is action, it usually is in the form of passing a resolution along the lines "These are desired personal characteristics, knowledges, skills, and attitudes in a Training Director. This group affirms we believe in them—have them—and with their passage management and the public will hereafter treat us with dignity and respect and raise our salaries."

This phenomenon, of course, is not peculiar to training directors; it is the problem of every new profession. Recently we saw a group of credit managers, striving for professional recognition, who drew up a list of desired qualities, skills, and knowledges for a credit manager, and honestly believed when they submitted the statement to their company presidents it would make the president accept them as professionals. Somewhere, at this writing, there is undoubtedly a group of 25 sadly disillusioned and frustrated credit managers.

Training people, fortunately, are now beginning to realize that they will have professional status only to the extent that they create it themselves—and it is so recognized by those who employ them and use their services.

Criteria For A Profession

As we review many professions, we find that professional recognition frequently stems from four sources:

1. Persons in the profession having skills and/or knowledges that take years to acquire, are recognized by the population as being highly desirable and needed, and are possessed by few in the population. Examples are the lawyer, doctor, civil engineer.
2. Persons in the profession having skills and/or knowledges that are in short supply, with the numbers coming into the profession rigidly guarded. Certain crafts and unions are examples.
3. Persons in a field with a long history of being called a profession. The auctioneer, chimney-sweep, and circus barker are examples.
4. Persons who are especially good in any field—who excel—such as football and baseball players, sports specialists of all kinds, jugglers, salesmen, car workers, garbage collectors, well diggers, yoyo twirlers.

Such definitions, however, hardly serve us in trying to answer our question, "What is a Profession?" The National Education Association's Division of Field Service has suggested eight criteria as follows: "A profession

1. Involves activities essentially intellectual
2. Commands a body of specialized knowledge

3. Requires extended professional preparation

4. Demands continuous in service growth

5. Affords a life career and permanent membership

6. Sets up its own standards

7. Exalts service above personal gain

8. Has a strong, closely-knit professional organization." [2]

Another attempt to appraise the characteristics of a profession lists these criteria:

1. Does the profession have a well-defined function, the nature scope of which can be identified?

2. Does the profession have a philosophy, code of ethics, and other means of self-regulation which assure that its practice transcends the bounds of political, sectarian, and economic self-interest?

3. Does the profession have a unified pattern of organization that can speak for it with one voice?

4. Does the compensation received by the professional practitioners indicate that the public is willing to pay them as skilled and responsible professional workers?

5. Is the practice of the profession limited, or tending to be limited, to persons with approved general and professional preparation?

6. Is there, in fact, a recognized systematic body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which can be identified and transmitted as a regimen of professional preparation?

7. Is the regimen of professional education recognized as a quality appropriate for inclusion in the gradu-

ate and professional offerings of a university?" [3]

Flexner[4] suggests that professions have still other criteria:

1. They involve essentially intellectual operations

2. They derive their raw material from science and learning

3. They work up this material to a practical and definite end

4. They possess an educationally-communicable technique

5. They tend to self-organization

6. They are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation. [4]

One other resource, our last, to which we might turn to help us identify the criteria of a profession is to define it. One dictionary offers the following:

"The occupation, if not commercial, mechanical, agricultural, or the like, to which one devotes oneself; a calling; as, the *profession* of arms, of teaching; the *three professions,* or the *learned professions,* of theology, law, and medicine." [5]

Other criteria may need to be added to meet the peculiarities of the training profession, for example, some criteria to demonstrate conclusively that training does have a very real dollars-and-cents and quality pay-off. As noted earlier, this is an area in which the training field is trying many approaches to reach a demonstrable conclusion. Another example might be tangible demonstration that a person trained by recommended professional standards does a better training job than does the employee selected because of pragmatic reasons whose skills are mainly in his technical field, not in training. One of the difficulties we face is that training deals in

large part with human relationships and other intangibles, and everyone in the organization considers himself an expert in these fields. Opposing concepts are difficult to prove or disprove—since trainees have a way of learning even in dramatically opposite' training settings.

It is well known that a dictionary, however, is but a history of words. Current usage of the term "professional" seems to be quite casual. Anyone who specializes in a job and does it better than anyone else today seems to be entitled to use the term, but such usage does not have the element frequently mentioned in our quote, "activities essentially intellectual." [6] Accordingly, we speak of professional football players, professional baseball players, professional rug cleaners, professional cesspool cleaners.

The problem becomes even more frustrating when we find much evidence that employers follow this same pattern. When a training job opens, employers reach down into supervisory ranks and come up with an employee who seems to be able to do an ambiguous something better than any other supervisor—and we have a training director or training assistant. What it is this supervisor can do better than any other supervisor no one really can identify.

Unfortunately, as one of the criteria suggests, "Does the compensation received by the professional practitioners indicate that the public is willing to pay them as skilled and professional workers?," the customers who control our destiny are not the public.[7] We have to sell vice-presidents, company chairmen, and company presidents. What we possess must be seen and

recognized by them as being something unique and worthwhile, and in this selling we probably have a long way to go, as witness much of our activity to prove that training results can be measured and proved to be cost-reducing. Too often our employers see us only as good presenters of material, often not even as good teachers.

The field of social work has had a similar problem. Recently the professional workers in the field established a deadline date after which entrance to the professional society would be limited, among other requirements, to persons who had completed two years of graduate work in the field. Such a step connotes, among other things, (1) that the bulk of recognized leaders in the profession are in the professional society; and (2) that those who identify themselves as professionals with the professional society perform a job that is recognizably superior to the job of those not so identified.

It is interesting to note, from these limited definitions, the criteria that appear at least twice in the quoted material. Arranged in order of frequency mentioned, they are:

1. The profession has a body of specialized knowledge.
2. The profession sets its own standards.
3. Its activities are essentially intellectual.
4. The profession requires extensive preparation.
5. The needed body of specialized knowledge is communicable.
6. The profession places service above personal gain.

7. The profession has a strong professional organization.

These criteria might serve as a beginning effort to outline the directions in which training directors must channel their efforts in fashioning a profession that will be recognized by those in the field who are the recipients of our training programs.

Body of Specialized Training Knowledge

We should like to address ourselves now to the one criterion that appears in each of the definitions quoted: "The profession has a body of specialized knowledge." It is our feeling that training directors have had too limited a concept of the content encompassed in an adequate training position. Many of us remember the time when mastery of the "Phillips 66" method and JIT was considered pretty adequate background for a training director. Although the profession has come a long way from those early days, it has not yet come up with an acceptable outline of educational content. We suggest the following as essential areas of professional competence for training personnel:

1. The ability to utilize appropriate findings from the social sciences.

2. The development of a working theory about personality growth and development.

3. The development of concepts of learning based on research findings.

4. The ability to design growth—learning experiences.

5. The ability to accomplish further research on the training process.

6. The development of a philosophy of training related to our present knowledge of the individual, the group, the organization, and the community in which people live.

7. The development of progressive, planned in service growth opportunities for the individual training director.

8. A good working knowledge of accepted training methods, techniques, and visual aids, and the ability to utilize them effectively in the design of training programs.

9. The ability to sell to, plan with, and work with, the operating people on effective immediate and long-range training programs.

10. The ability to do—to teach—to train —to lead workshops. There is a difference of opinion on this area. To some it is the paramount skill; to others it is seen as of waning importance in the skill areas of the training director of the future.

If these areas are accepted as being some of the major essential ones of desired professional competency, we ought to take a look at some of the social sciences with significant contributions to make to these content areas. Following is a listing and an indication of major contributions each could make:

1. *Psychiatry*—an understanding of individual dynamics—derivations—the limits of training for the "average" and "normal."

2. *General Psychology*—an understanding of personality growth and development.

3. *Social Psychology*—an understanding of interpersonal relationships

4. *Educational Psychology*—an understanding of learning research, method, and theory.

5. *Business and Public Administration* —an understanding of the dynamics of organizations.

6. *Political Science*—an analysis of social systems.

7. *Sociology*—an understanding of the forces in the community and their implications for training.

8. *Anthropology*—an understanding of the function of a culture and the role of training in it.

This may strike some training directors as being unrealistic and too broad an educational background. However, there is much evidence to indicate that most of management's disenchantment with training has been created by training operators who turn knobs and pull controls without adequate understanding of the forces and factors they are trying to manipulate. We see the training personnel of the future, the training directors, as being *learning theorists* rather than merely training methodologists. The latter can be bought much more cheaply and should not be placed in strategic, top training roles. The learning theorist will be both comfortable in and familiar with such learning content as:

1. *The nature and scope of the learning process.* It is much larger than we usually assume—considerably larger than the organizational formal training. It embraces formal education, other job experiences, supervisory training on the job, the job experience itself, reading, family living, other life experiences.

2. *The factors that condition learning.* The individual's dissatisfaction with his own existing behavior, readiness for learning, supportive learning atmosphere, opportunities to get "feedback" of a personal nature in learning, opportunities to practice new learning, cognitive material, and transfer of learning of all factors which affect the learning process. A training director needs to be aware of factors as they relate to the designing of a learning experience, whether of a two-hour nature or a two-year plan.

3. *The factors affecting resistance to learning.* Threat to the individual's self-perception, individual's being defensive about present job performance, cultural inhibition about "exposing inadequacies," need for emotional support during learning, and numerous other factors give meaningful diagnostic dimensions for persons planning training to take into account.

As can be seen from the field of learning alone, we must bring members up to date on the recent studies of learning, effects of group size in training, concepts of mental health for the individual and the organization, and numerous other aspects of behavioral science research that affect this important field of training.

In all our endeavors we must become *professional* in our ability before we can achieve, if possible, the status of a profession.

To act as a professional demands some standards.

Trainer Characteristics

While there is no clear-cut set of standards for trainers, experience indicates that successful trainers will have some of the following characteristics. (It should be kept in mind that this is a series of proposed guideposts and not an inflexible yardstick to be applied to all training staff personnel.)

1. *Professional background.* Often people with professional preparation in one of the following fields will have attained insights helpful in preparing for the role of trainer: sociology, psychology, social work, educational psychology, psychiatry, personnel, administration. However, because of the wide variance of training, even within a given field, professional preparation does not guarantee competence, and, conversely, people can be competent without such conventional academic training. Nonetheless, knowledge in these fields is essential to a well-rounded training program, whether self-taught or in the academic situation.

2. *Group experience.* In addition to a professional background of some kind, training personnel should have met the practical problems of learning to work as group leaders. Experience with groups might simply have firmed up old habits of authority-wielding and afforded practice in ineffective work habits. Experience, then, can be helpful or harmful for a trainer, depending on its quality.

3. *Self-undertanding.* This is an absolute essential in the trainer's role.

The trainer must have sufficient understanding of his own motivations and sufficient control of his own mechanisms of defense to (a) prevent his own needs from interfering with the training process and (b) enable him to empathize with the interpersonal problems of others in the training process.

4. *Personal security.* Along with his training experience, a trainer must have sufficient personal security to permit him to take a relatively non-punitive role in the training, to be warm and accepting in his relations with others, to have a genuine respect for them, to have a willingness to share leadership roles, and to relinquish authority as training proceeds. In fact, sufficient personal security to allow the trainer to participate adequately in a rather wide range of interpersonal situations is indispensable.

5. *Training skills.* With the proper background and maturity, one probably can learn enough of the training skills necessary in modern training designs to become an effective member of a training staff, assuming, of course, that in his professional background the person has acquired a working knowledge of the process of scientific problem-solving and social change. These skills can be acquired. Obviously, the wider his range of skills, the more effective the trainer can be in applying them appropriately in the training design.

6. *Democratic philosophy.* If a person can meet to a modest degree each

of the above criteria, he will probably have as part of his behavior a democratic philosophy of leadership and work so that he can encourage learning situations in which persons learn for themselves.

Such standards, as general as they are, may not be agreed upon by the majority of persons in the training field.

Training Not Yet A Profession

In summary, training has not yet reached professional status. Some of the questions it must ask, and reach consensus upon among its own practicing members, are:

1. What is the real purpose of training? Within which specific projects, courses, and programs can it be fitted?

2. What are the roles of the training office and the training director?

3. What are the appropriate and agreed-upon criteria for professional development which are likely to determine whether or not training will be accepted as a profession?

4. How can practicing members best go about implementing these criteria?

There is ample indication that training, ill-defined as it is, has good acceptance in many organizations. Sometimes training is basically accepted. More frequently, however, it resembles a company activity we visited recently which featured a display not only of the company's manufactured items, but also those of its competitors. The rationale was that by featuring the industry all individual manufacturers gained. We asked whether there were evidence of the validity of this rationale. "Oh," was the reply, "we don't know. Frankly, we're afraid to curtail the activity because we might find out it is valid."

We in the training field cannot rest too long our professional case on this sort of evidence. Out of our huddling together, mumbling training ritualistic lingo in one another's ears, and stoutly maintaining in a blunt tone, "We *are* a profession," must come some beginnings, some actions, some planned charting, that will advance our efforts to professional status.

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