

## Bridge Over the River Tech

A minister friend recently bought a personal computer for writing his weekly sermons. When I imagine him sitting at his terminal waiting for divine inspiration to help him fill the screen, he is for me the very embodiment of the extent to which technology affects us all.

It would be nice to believe that we affect technology in return, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Though a minister can use a computer to process the word of God, it is unlikely that a word processing program designer thinks much about divine inspiration or any other kind of inspiration as part of the design.

MIT professor and author Sherry Turkle (*The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*) points out that everyone masters technology in his or her own way. A close look at today's hardware and software wouldn't lead you to that conclusion. Especially when using computers to teach or train, we are pretty much forced to bend the learner's cognitive style to suit the machine. It always seems to give you "ask" when you want "tell" and vice versa. We really should be using computers to create more attractive learning systems, but for the most part we aren't. Into this breach steps the trainer as a critical if sometimes reluctant link between the learner and his computer.

Part of the problem is surely the unfortunate mindset of some technicians toward some training. When it comes to training techies, they feel that only other techies need apply. I saw this dynamic in action recently at a training conference session on how to talk to techies. The trainers and the data processors in the audience quickly split into opposing camps and related to each other with all the warmth of two hostile nations.

The usual charges flew. The trainers complained that the techies "didn't understand the learning process." The techies accused the trainers of being fluff merchants, and they showed small appreciation for the trainer's art compared to what they believed to be the self-evident primacy of their science.

Finally a brave woman stood up and identified herself as a vice president for HRD in a medium-sized company. "My company is full of people like you," she said to the other side of the aisle. "And I'm charged with seeing that they get some management development." Whereupon she invited the most vociferous and disparaging techie in the whole group to sit down with her after the session and talk more about his attitudes and beliefs about training and management development: A fragile bridge over the moat into the enemy camp, but a bridge nonetheless.

Maybe you don't have these little wars in your company. Maybe you know how to make management development appeal to even the most relentlessly task-oriented systems engineer. I hope so, but I bet there are a lot of you still looking for the bridge.



*Editor*