

## Robotrainer

I read a comic book last night to my eight-year-old son about a robot who is called in to straighten out a troubled empire on a distant planet. He flies in, chats up the head of the empire, collects some data from the citizens and puts them through an exercise suspiciously like team building. They pull together, defeat their common enemy, and the robot goes home feeling terrific.

This gave me the idea for Robotrainer, a robot action figure like the kind so popular with kids right now. They're so hot in my part of the country that you can't buy them unless you have a connection or you happen to see them being sold from the back of a truck on a downtown street. At a local store, a woman was trampled by Christmas shoppers going after a particularly popular robot. Surely Robotrainer is an idea whose time has come.

Here's what the promotional literature would say.

Robotrainer is an action figure from the Planet of the Presenters. It can train anyone to do anything. It can transform a whole organization with a single intervention. It understands business, any business, and it can calculate the return on a training investment in nothing flat.

Robotrainer comes in corporate-culture-related styles from high tech (can project a hologram of itself to a remote training site) to no tech (can project a humanoid voice to the back of the room without a mike).

Robotrainer's special features include a built-in needs assessor and a voice-activated flip chart that not only catches key words but spells them right. A special interspecies adapter allows Robotrainer to reinforce learning by sending a pleasing electronic impulse to the learner's brain when a skill is learned correctly and two pleasing impulses when it is transferred to the job. It is extremely learner friendly.

The mere sight of Robotrainer, which is less than lifesize but larger than life, commands respect. When Robotrainer emits, bosses listen because everything it says is backed up by data.

Robotrainer isn't afraid of new technology, being a piece of new technology itself. Being neither male nor female, it avoids all stereotypes and it makes a perfect mentor. It doesn't need a salary or a performance appraisal, just a periodic circuit check.

Robotrainer has mastery of hundreds of languages. It can speak intelligently to macroeconomists and neurolinguistic programmers—in the same sentence. It is the only off-the-shelf training product that is self-customizing.

A limited edition model, Super Robotrainer, can make human resource development relevant to any business function. Just its presence in the board room increases productivity.

I confess that the idea of Robotrainer didn't just come from a comic book but from the sense that trainers see themselves sometimes as superheroes—able to accomplish anything. They take on tasks, like changing behavior or transforming organizations or improving productivity, that would stop a lesser mortal in his tracks. While this kind of zeal might be a good thing, I have learned from reading fairly extensively about superheroes that they are very one dimensional. They are super. Period.

If there were to be a glut of supertrainers on the market, how tired we would all become of perfect performance. Robots don't make interesting mistakes or profit from flashes of intuition. They just keep achieving their goals without learning anything from the experience. The difference between Robotrainer and the consultant who comes in to do team building, is that the latter goes home not only satisfied with a good performance but wiser for it. A robot is a dull plodder compared to a real live trainer. It might have plenty of competencies, but it would have no soul.

Even though Robotrainer would probably be so popular that there would be Taiwanese knock-offs sold on street corners, I'd just as soon leave it in the world of fantasy, where it clearly belongs.



Editor