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# In Practice

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## What's the Buzz?

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Many buzzwords do not translate from one language to another, points out Peta Penson, a principal with Co-Development International, a global management-consulting firm.

When describing corporate philosophies and plans, choose your words carefully, she cautions.

"You can't just pick up the latest management best-seller and start using the buzzwords with employee groups in other countries," Penson says. "If you do, you run the risk of alienating the people you're trying to inspire to better performance."

For example, Penson says, Asian workers respond to the notion of alignment with the company's goals, while U.S. workers "bridle at the thought of being 'aligned.'" They prefer to stay attuned to goals.

In the United States, employees might welcome empowerment, but in the United Kingdom, they want to be authorized, Penson notes.

"When managers are telling their people to do things differently or to think in new ways, employees naturally become nervous and fearful of what the changes mean," Penson says. "They look for nuances in every word and for hidden signals in nonverbal communication. It can make a tremendous difference to the chances of corporate change succeeding if the words used to describe change are the ones that appeal to that particular group."

## Good Offices

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A good office has a window. An office also can serve as a window on the evolution of social and material values. At least,



that's the case made by an exhibit at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City, New York.

Barbara Presley Noble reported on the exhibit in the December 18 *New York Times*. *Good Offices and Beyond: The Evolution of the Workplace* explored the connections among design, technology, and everyday life.

The exhibit, which closed in February, featured two time lines of artifacts. One time line portrayed technological events and types of work, and the other provided the social and cultural context.

Artifacts ranged from century-old office standards, such as staplers and typewriters, to such modern tools as laptop computers and ergonomic office chairs. An entire display case spotlighted examples of time-management systems, such as Filofax and Day-Timer organizers.

The exhibit's narrative noted that as the end of the 20th century nears, current workplace trends recall the

*Beware of buzzwords when your training programs go global.*

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cottage industries prevalent at the century's dawn.

Noble observed, "As we head toward the end of the millennium, we're doing piecemeal and worrying about Serbia. What exactly was the point of the 20th century?"

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### High-Performance Skill Survey

The U.S. Department of Labor will conduct the first-ever assessment of the skills necessary for success in a high-performance workplace.

The department describes high-performance workplaces as those that treat workers as assets; that invest heavily in training and continuous learning; and that encourage workers to solve problems, manage themselves, and develop an entrepreneurial attitude.

The Labor Department says findings from the National Job Analysis

### HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKPLACES TREAT WORKERS AS ASSETS

Study will help employers and employees make the transition to high-performance workplaces and will enable industries to set world-class standards for high performance.

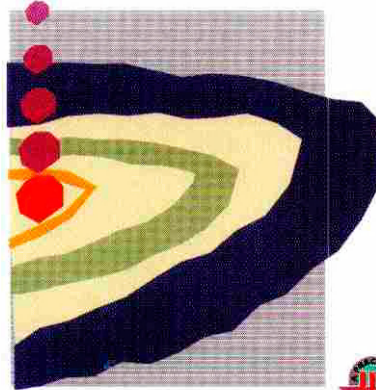
American College Testing will conduct the \$1.4 million, two-part assessment. The Labor Department is cooperating with the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to produce the study.

ACT will survey approximately 18,000 people employed in 164 occupations. During the first phase, ACT will survey 12,000 employees about general work activities, such as analyzing data, conducting research, setting goals, and making decisions. ACT will use the findings to refine the survey, and then will administer it to another 6,000

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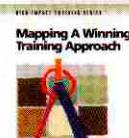
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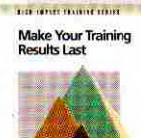
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employees in the same occupations.

During the second phase, the employees surveyed also will answer questions designed to identify respondents who work in high-performance workplaces. According to the Labor Department, the survey findings will

- ▶ identify the skills necessary for entry-level to expert-level jobs in the targeted occupations
- ▶ provide a statistically reliable baseline for relating occupational job skills to the skills required in high-performance workplaces
- ▶ provide a common language for communicating skill requirements and standards across occupations and industries.

"The study results will guide educators and trainers for years to come as they redefine skill requirements for occupations, set skill standards, develop training programs, and design school curricula linking education to the world of work," says U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich.

## Republicans Ponder New Workplace Policies

The Republican-controlled U.S. Congress will try to consolidate, and possibly cut, federal job-training programs. The 104th Congress also might consider using tax policies and innovative financing strategies to encourage businesses to train their workers.

Congress and the Democratic White House have pledged to cooperate to cut individual income taxes, trim federal spending, lower the federal deficit, and foster economic development.

Some Republican and White House proposals overlap. Both have proposed tax-deferred savings accounts as a way to help people pay education expenses, and both want to give families with children a tax credit.

Some Republican members of Congress have floated such policy options as tax breaks and government-guaranteed loans to encourage private investments in job training.

House Republicans have been focused on passing the components of their "Contract With America," a

## Training the Anxious Class

Building U.S. citizens' workforce skills will create a new middle class, one that can capitalize on changes in the economy rather than be buffeted by them, according to Secretary of Labor Robert Reich.

That's why policies that would help people pay for the training and education they need to get better jobs and higher pay form the core of President Clinton's plan to bolster the earning power and economic security of U.S. workers.

President Clinton's "Middle-Class Bill of Rights" includes the following elements:

- ▶ Taxpayers could claim a deduction for tuition and other qualifying expenses for postsecondary education and job training.
- ▶ Citizens could draw on tax-free or tax-deferred savings to pay for education expenses.
- ▶ People who earn too little to benefit from the proposed tax breaks could apply for federal "skill grants" to pay for education and training. Those who need help to stay afloat financially while they study could apply

for income-replacement loans.

In one of a series of speeches leading to the release of President Clinton's proposal, Reich argued that eliminating the federal deficit, downsizing the government, and reducing taxes—while important—won't reverse the long-term decline of the nation's middle class.

"It used to be enough to keep your shoulder to the wheel and be loyal to your employer," Reich said. "Now you need to make your own way in the economy, learn new skills throughout your career, and be ready to apply them in new ways in new settings."

Reich urged businesses to invest in a new "social compact" with their workforces, "for profitability, for shared prosperity, and for an easing of economic anxiety and the social tension it spawns."

Reich said government can remove the obstacles to skill development by improving public education, by encouraging voluntary skill standards, and by improving the transitions from school to work and from job to job.



U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich: Promoting "a new social compact" for workforce training.

GOP campaign platform crafted and championed by now-House speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Georgia).

The House and the Senate have approved measures to ease mandates imposed on state and local governments. Separately, the House has passed legislation to put a moratorium on new government regulations. House Republicans also are pushing legislation that would cut the capital-gains tax by 50 percent and would offer tax breaks to encourage businesses to invest in new plant and equipment.

House Republicans say their policies will help U.S. wage earners by spurring the capital investments that create new jobs.

The Clinton administration says the Republicans' strategies will cause the deficit to skyrocket. The adminis-

tration also says that cutting business and capital-gains taxes will not help the "anxious class"—middle- and low-income Americans who have seen their real incomes stagnate or decline since the late 1970s, and who have seen cyclical bouts of unemployment become permanent.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich presented the administration's viewpoint in testimony before key Senate and House committees in January. Reich talked about the need for a lean, efficient government that plays an activist role in ensuring the well-being of workers.

Reich outlined the administration's proposal to improve the economic lot of the middle class by increasing individuals' access to education and training through a package of tax breaks, loans, and grants. The

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administration proposes to fund the training grants by consolidating and redirecting funds currently spent on federal job-training programs.

In a statement released after the January hearings, Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas), chair of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, said the idea of replacing the current array of federal job-training programs with individual training grants had "some merit" but that Congress "should proceed cautiously."

"We cannot afford to replace an unworkable system with one that is completely untried," she said.

Both Kassebaum and William Goodling (R-Pennsylvania) have introduced separate bills to consolidate federal job-training programs. Goodling is chair of the House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee (formerly the Education and Labor Committee).

## Soundbite

*From an editorial by Jodie T. Allen, former U.S. Department of Labor analyst and Washington Post editor, in the January 22, 1995, edition of the Post.*

“Over the last couple of decades, training of humans has been proposed as the solution to a host of knotty problems, from saving the redwoods and the spotted owl to reducing the underclass, deregulating airlines, cleaning up the air, downsizing defense, and passing NAFTA.

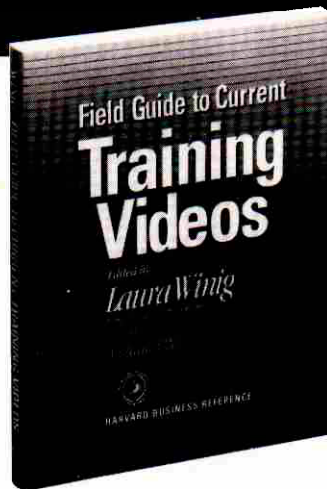
“To that list the Clinton administration would add the concerns of what Labor Secretary Robert Reich calls the ‘anxious class....’

“That’s a pretty tall order for programs that despite the outlay of hundreds of billions of dollars over the years have a very modest record of accomplishment....

“Job and training programs are no Prozac for an anxious age. But the record does suggest that, if ambitions are suitably modest, there are important economic and social gains to be made through a more sensible restructuring of employment programs, as the Clinton administration and others before it have proposed.

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As Brookings Institution labor economist Gary Burtless once famously remarked, "Job programs can work. They just can't work miracles."

### Help for School-to-Work Programs

Practitioners charged with creating and coordinating school-to-work programs can find help in a new resource kit.

The new *School-to-Work Toolkit: Building a Statewide System* provides analyses of critical issues, describes best practices, and provides tools used by practitioners across the country. Jobs for the Future developed the tool kit as a companion to its *School-to-Work Toolkit: Building a Local Program*. JFF is a national nonprofit organization devoted to helping students move from school to careers.

To order, contact Jobs for the Future, Publications Center, 1 Bowdoin Square, Boston, MA 02114; 617/742-5995.

### Keys to Empowering Employees

Hawthorn Suites Hotels, headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts, believes that empowering employees holds the key to keeping the quality of customer service high and employee turnover low.

Sue Gordon, director of marketing and operations services for Hawthorn Suites, offers the following tips to ensure that empowerment training makes a difference.

Require managers to participate in the training. Employees are more likely to take lessons to heart if they see managers demonstrating their commitment to empowerment. Joint participation also helps break down barriers and foster trust between managers and staff.

Show employees how they benefit the bottom line when they are empowered. For instance, in her training sessions, Gordon analyzes the costs involved when a guest asks for a room change. In one scenario, an empowered employee immedi-

ately authorizes the change and sends a fruit basket. The cost to the hotel for this transaction is \$4.58. In another scenario, the employee must involve a manager, which delays the resolution of the problem and disgruntles the guest. The guest complains to the hotel's proprietor. The hotel winds up refunding the cost of the room, and the hotel is down \$141.93.

When a business vests employees with responsibility, it also must arm them with resources. Make sure that employees know where to turn for help when they need it, Gordon advises.

### On-Line Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy is testing an on-line network designed to give literacy trainers access to information and materials from the Library of Congress, the Training Technology Resource Center, the National Center on Adult Literacy, and other resources.

The prototype involves four discussion groups on the Internet covering the following topics: workplace literacy, English as a second language, learning disabilities, and family literacy. For information, contact the National Institute for Literacy, 800 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20202; 202/632-1500.

### Basic Skills Training on the Rise

Corporate remedial training in basic skills is a growth industry, according to the American Management Association. An AMA survey found that among responding companies that sponsor basic-skills training, 70 percent launched their programs within the last five years.

But many firms that aim to bolster their employees' basic skills ignore the latest theories about workplace learning.

"Any expert we speak to emphasizes the importance of relating remedial training to the requirements of the job," but most companies do

### Boosting Skills

Between 25 percent and 40 percent of hourly employees have some basic-skills deficiencies, finds a survey of Michigan employers.

The survey is discussed in the report *Classrooms in the Workplace: Workplace Literacy Programs in Small- and Medium-Sized Firms*, by Kevin Hollenbeck.

The report, from the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, emphasizes that "a significant share of employers" either increases hiring standards or reorganizes work in response to basic-skills deficiencies. Perhaps as few as 5 percent of small firms use workplace-literacy programs, although 20 percent of respondents without programs expressed an interest in starting basic-skills efforts.

On average, workplace-skills programs cost the respondents roughly \$14,000 annually. Most see modest improvements in employees' skill levels and company performance, but realize large gains in employee morale and workers' self-confidence.

For information, contact the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 300 South Westnedge Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49007; 616/385-0461.

not seek customized remedial programs, says Eric Rolfe Greenberg, director of management studies for AMA.

Cost may deter some companies from seeking basic-skills training tailored to their needs, Greenberg says. "Customized training does cost more."

The report observes that estimating the costs of remedial training programs is difficult because companies account for costs in different ways and train different numbers of people. Among responding firms, the average remedial program trained 81 people in 1993 and the average program cost was \$20,024. The average cost per trainee was about \$244.

The survey did not query firms about whether their basic-skills training programs produce the desired

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results. Nonetheless, Greenberg says, "I know of no one involved with remedial training who is less than enthusiastic about the results. All involved think it is money well-spent."

The survey sample represented AMA's corporate membership of 7,000 U.S. organizations, which together employ a quarter of the U.S. workforce. For more information, contact AMA at 212/903-8052.

### Aspire Higher

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**H**ow do you chart a path to the top ranks of the training and development profession? According to consultant Jack Bowsher, a retired director of education for IBM, you should set your sights on the post of CTO—chief training officer.

For several years, Bowsher has served as lead instructor in an action-learning workshop for senior-level training and development executives. The workshops are sponsored jointly by the American Society for Training and Development and Arthur Andersen.

Despite an ongoing trend toward downsizing in general, and "de-layering" of management in particular, the ranks of CTOs are growing, Bowsher contends.

Why? Because, as Bowsher explains, as senior-level executives delve deeply into reengineering, quality improvement, and strategic planning, they grasp the link between workforce learning and performance on the one hand, and company performance and profitability on the other. In turn, senior executives seek to vest responsibility for training and performance with CTOs.

A CTO brings a unique mix of skills and perspective to an enterprise. CTOs help craft organizational strategies and translate them into performance goals. They ensure that their firms achieve those goals

### Trainers at The Top of the Earnings Heap

*By Rebecca Thomas, a free-lance writer based in Alexandria, Virginia.*

How does your salary compare with the earnings of other human resource professionals? Recent survey data from nearly 600 companies show that compensation—along with titles and human resource functions—runs the gamut.

By and large, the median income for corporate human resource directors is \$65,000, but leaders in the industry can earn well over \$250,000 a year.

The composite profile for a corpo-

rate HR director with the highest annual income includes an MBA or a doctorate, 15 or more years of experience, and management of 10 or more professional-level employees. The best-paid HR people tend to work for manufacturers in the following industries: aerospace; fabricated metal; food, beverage, or tobacco; and stone, clay, glass, or concrete.

You'll also find top earners in merchandising firms or utilities with 10,000 or more employees and assets or annual sales of \$250 million or more.

Abbott, Langer & Associates conducted the survey.

through comprehensive performance-management systems. They draw on both traditional training methods and a range of new technologies, such as computer-based training and electronic performance support.

CTOs also ensure that key elements of their organizations' infrastructures—for example, reward and incentive systems—support their performance goals.

Is that good news for trainers? Only if they prepare themselves to take advantage of the opportunities that are emerging, cautions Bowsher. And he's worried that the supply of rising training professionals qualified to fill such posts is too small to fill the growing demand.

Ideally, CTOs possess traditional HRD skills and the ability to create and manage change, both in the

training function and in the major areas of their overall businesses. Unfortunately, Bowsher says, few training managers have mastered the strategic and technological know-how demanded of a CTO.

"Most directors of training simply do not have a proven record of enhancing the performance of the workforce," Bowsher says. "They

have been focused on the old paradigm of training: developing a catalog of courses, filling class seats, and getting high marks on the 'happiness sheets.'"

As a result, says Bowsher, CTO positions are being filled with top-notch executives drawn from other fields, such as personnel management, marketing, finance, and operations. These "outsiders" must spend several years on the job mastering the fundamentals of training.

He urges training and development professionals who aspire to the executive suite to prepare themselves by developing their leadership and strategic-thinking skills, as well as their expertise in change management, training technologies, and performance management.

Bowsher will lead another four-day CTO workshop in St. Charles Illinois, beginning October 30, 1995. For information, contact Kristey Husband, ASTD project assistant, 703/683-9218.

THE MEDIAN INCOME FOR HR DIRECTORS IS \$65,000, BUT LEADERS EARN OVER \$250,000 A YEAR

*"In Practice" is edited and written by Erica Gordon Sorohan. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.*