

How to Make and Evaluate Video Models

BY WILLIAM R. DANIELS

For thousands of years, one of the primary methods for teaching skills has been apprenticeship. A skilled craftsman or "master performer" set the example; the master was a "role model" or a "behavior model." By watching and imitating the role model, one learned skills.

Some sociologists say that behavior modeling is the fundamental method which conditions humans to assume normative behavior in their own culture, such as children learning "appropriate" sex roles from parental and other adult models. It's quite probable that all human beings have been and are constantly "immersed" in behavior modeling. It is, for sure, one of the oldest learning methods in the training profession.

Television is a good tool for refining the behavior modeling method of training. Video technology allows us to capture or create precise demonstrations of master performances. The opportunity to edit the performance before display greatly refines the model. Replaying the per-

formance simplifies comprehension and reinforcement, and accommodates variable rates of learning. Television allows for simplified distribution of models and assures continuity in training with large and widely dispersed target populations. Finally, television keeps getting better and less expensive.

Video model-making is fun, as well as glamorous. It invites creativity, and it may even become addictive!

Video model-making, however, has its hazards.

- You believe a good video model will be sufficient to transfer targeted skills. It won't work if the rest of the training design doesn't allow for practice.

- The technical elements in your video model are below broadcast quality and standards. Such models can work, but in America, at least, video consumers are hooked on broadcast quality and disdainful of poor video images.

Without good broadcast quality, your trainees may discount the "master performer." (This can shatter the status of a familiar "hero" in your organization.) Anything that detracts from the credibility of your master performer will make trainees

reluctant to learn. This "custom approach" has a great deal of support, but you may want to check results as demonstrated in skills transfer back to the job. That's where it counts.

- Your video model shows the essential and "magical" behaviors of the master performer. Be careful! Make sure your master portrays a model worthy of imitation.

We don't yet understand all the powers of television. From my own experience in the classroom with video models, I'm convinced that if you prepare trainees with good perception training for viewing the video model, and if they see the video model twice, the image "programs" a literal imitation. Be careful what you show; make the model "pure."

- You make a video model with distractions. It can easily happen, but the art of video modeling is essentially the art of creating a clean focus on the target behaviors. The most obvious and unforgivable distractions include:

Familiar settings. Trainees expend energy trying to place where and when the video model was made.

Familiar people. Trainees expend

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MODEL EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Focus

- Are the key behaviors in the model the ones you want to teach?
- Are all key behaviors displayed?
- Are the key behaviors obvious (assuming prior perception training)?

Credibility

- Is the set appropriate for the skill demonstrated?
- Is the master performer's appearance acceptable?
 - 1) Dressed appropriately;
 - 2) Clean looking;
 - 3) Appropriately authoritative;
 - 4) Likable.
- RE: Discussion models—is the subject discussed recognized as typical (preferably not too interesting or detailed)?

Distraction Free

- Technical distractions:
 - Is the lighting and contrast sufficient?
 - Is the camera work invisible?
 - 1) Focused;
 - 2) Smooth in movement, if any;
 - 3) On the action—key behaviors.
 - Is the screen image at least as sharp as broadcast television?
 - Is the sound balanced?
 - Is the sound free of echoes and other distortions?
- Set distractions:
 - Is the set "anonymous?"
 - Is the set free of irrelevant oddities?
 - Is the set free of irrelevant time references—e.g., calendars?
- Dress distractions:
 - Is the apparel unnoticeable?
 - Are the styles conservative—likely to last a few years?
 - Is the apparel appropriate to the performance and the performers?
- Verbal distractions:
 - Is enunciation clear?
 - Is intonation appropriate?
 - Does the intonation have a relaxed variation?
 - Is the speech free of "fillers"—"ah," etc.?
 - Is the speech free of stumbling, self-correction, misstatements?
 - Is it free of buzzwords or offensive material?

energy recalling events when the person acted differently.

Familiar subject matter. Trainees expend energy evaluating discussion content, instead of watching the discussion methods—especially hazardous when modeling communication skills.

The rule is: Don't show anything nonessential to the demonstration of the target behavior. Don't let anything distract the eye or mind. I doubt the existence of a good "custom" model. The more recognizable the model, the more likely it will have crippling distractions. Any supposed gain in credibility will be

offset by loss of training focus.

In a good video model, the target behaviors always have a generic quality. Like other art, a good video model is universal; it is simultaneously precise and abstract.

To avoid the hazards of making video models, I recommend the following:

- Scripted models;
- Professional actors and actresses;
- Professional directors (preferably with a knowledge of video modeling objectives);
- Broadcast quality studio.

- Nonverbal distractions:
 - Is it free of fidgeting?
 - Does the expert have appropriate authority?
 - 1) *Relative height of eyes.* The higher the eyes, the more likely will be the interpretation of power and authority.
 - 2) *Asymmetry of posture.* The more asymmetrical the posture, the more likely will be the interpretation of power and authority.
 - 3) *Smile ratio.* The less smiling, the more likely will be the interpretation of power and authority.
 - Does the expert show appropriate concern or involvement?
 - 1) The more muscular activity and energy required to maintain the physical posture, the more likely the person will appear concerned.
 - 2) The more activity and animation in the facial musculature, the more likely the person will appear concerned.
 - Does the expert show appropriate approval?
 - 1) The nearer the body locates itself in relation to another object or person, the more likely will be the interpretation that the person approves of that object or person.
 - 2) Eye contact brings one nearer to an object or person; the interpretation of eye contact will be approval.
- Notes:
 - 1) *Affirmative Action.* Casting must reflect a consciousness of affirmative action—technically, this will create a distraction; but the failure to do it will be even more disruptive to your classroom.
 - 2) *Direction of entry.* An ancient tradition of the theatre brings the hero or protagonist into view or onto the stage from the audience's left—the antagonist enters from the audience's right.
 - 3) *Visual orientation.* It takes the nervous system at least five or six seconds to orient itself to a new scene—failure to allow the time may cause early actions to be missed; much more time will make the audience feel like it is waiting, and encourages critical analysis of the set.
- Content Distractions:
 - Do early lines and/or actions establish roles and relevant time references? Failure to do this creates a distractive confusion.
 - Are "terms" free of error? (e.g., titles, names of organizational divisions, job names)
 - Re: discussion models, where focus must be on interaction:
 - 1) Is the subject matter understandable, while at the same time being unfamiliar enough to avoid critical attention?
 - 2) Is the subject matter credible, while remaining simple enough to avoid close attention?
 - 3) Does the subject matter permit the interaction to happen in a credible way without intruding on the trainee's attention?
 - Are exclamations free of religious offense or obscenity?
 - Are words or phrases with possible sexual or racial interpretations avoided?

These practices will make it easier to control the variables necessary for pure, focused video models.

The costs, following these recommendations, can be high—roughly \$1,500 per finished minute of video model. The benefits, however, can easily be measured in cost effectiveness.

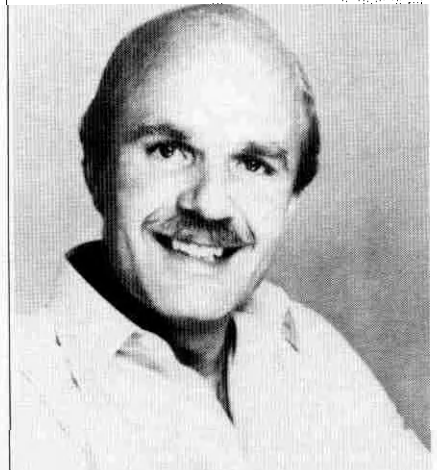
A pure, focused video model can transfer skills with startling speed. Using criteria-referenced objectives as the measuring method I've taught active listening with video models in one third the time it takes using unmediated, experience-based training.

Taking all direct and indirect costs of training into consideration, six minutes of video modeling usually pays for itself in the first half-day session with any 12 supervisors. Trainee time is the highest training cost, and video modeling is the way to use that time efficiently!

The "Model Evaluation Checklist" on these pages will be helpful in evaluating and perfecting video models.

William P. Daniels is president of American Consulting and Training, Inc., Mill Valley, Calif.

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