

In Practice

Great Works

Homer, Shakespeare, Machiavelli—icons of great literature, sure. But management gurus?

Yes, according to Chester Wolford, professor of business and English at Pennsylvania State University. MBA students in his leadership seminar study the leadership styles of Achilles, Aeneas, and other epic heroes, and read such great works as Homer's *Iliad*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and Aristotle's *Ethics*.

Wolford describes the course as "an antidote to the hundreds of trendy sociological survey results regarding leadership" that flood the offices of middle managers.

"For more than 1,000 years, people who wanted to be leaders studied great leaders. But nowadays, with the rise of number-crunching that creates [these] sociological data, the focus on the lives of great people seems to have been lost," says Wolford.

Wolford says his aim is to help MBA students understand that leaders must deal with ever-shifting circumstances and sidestep the ever-present threat of disaster. He notes that a vice-president of a large corporation once told him that "everything he'd ever read on leadership, he found first between the covers of *The Odyssey*."

Electrifying a Job Search

New-age job-finder Robert Shapiro works as director of sales and marketing for Artistic Office Products in Port Morris, New York. The company found Shapiro's resume in Job Bank, USA, a commercial data base containing the resumes of thousands of job-seekers.



Geoffrey Moss

Peg Donovan also knows firsthand about the power of electronic job searches. Without Donovan's knowledge, a friend submitted Donovan's resume to Nike, the sports equipment manufacturer based in Beaverton, Oregon. Nike deposited Donovan's resume in its internal resume data base. Donovan was surprised when Nike wrote acknowledging her letter. Later, she was delighted when the company interviewed and then hired her.

Syndicated careers columnist Joyce Lain Kennedy tells the stories of Shapiro and Donovan to illustrate a new angle in the way people and jobs intersect. Shapiro benefited from a resume data-base service. Donovan's good fortune was linked to an internal automated applicant-tracking system.

Kennedy, co-author of *Electronic Job Search Revolution* and *Electronic Resume Revolution* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994), calls both of these tools "job computers." She says job computers are but one visible sign of technology-driven changes that are

If you want to polish your leadership skills, consider Achilles as a mentor.

Writing Scannable Resumes

Jack Wright, the "Resume Guy" of Livermore, California, and author of *Resumes for People Who Hate to Write Resumes*, offers the following tips for preparing resumes that both people and computers can read easily:

- Use type no smaller than 10 points and no larger than 14 points.
- Do not use italicized type, and do not underline words.
- Type styles that work well for resumes that will be scanned as well as read include Helvetica, Futura, Optima, Times Roman, New Century Schoolbook, Courier, Univers, and Bookman.
- Submit only high-resolution documents. Documents produced on a laser printer work best. Many photocopies and faxes are not clean enough for scanning.

revolutionizing the job-search and recruitment industry. Paper-based searches have not exited, but electronic search and recruitment strategies definitely have entered the picture, she says.

So far, electronic tools alter only the screening, not the selection process. "People still choose people to fill specific job openings," Kennedy notes. But now, computers help the choosers winnow their choices.

A few studies indicate that more and more midsized and large companies tap into commercial applicant data bases or maintain internal data bases, Kennedy says. Many large companies also use resume-scanning software to handle the onslaught of resumes that arrives each time an opening is advertised.

Her advice? Don't throw away your carefully proofed and professionally printed stack of resumes. But think about enhancing your options with a resume designed for electronic recruitment tools.

Computers don't read resumes the way people do, Kennedy explains. In fact, computers don't "read" resumes at all. Instead, software scans resumes for keywords—words and phrases employers have chosen to summarize the characteristics that they seek in candidates for particular jobs.

Kennedy says the key for electronic job-seekers is to write resumes that present their qualifications as powerful keywords, usually nouns. Examples of keywords for human resource specialists might include "employee benefits," "401K," and "service award." Trainers might think about using "computer-based training," "interactive video," and "group facilitator."

Skip qualifying adverbs or glorifying adjectives, Kennedy says, and remember that verbs—which rev up traditional resumes—won't catch a computer's eye, so to speak.

To design a successful electronic resume, focus on plain-vanilla facts, she concludes. Sell your finer points,



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such as your resourcefulness, in the in-person interview after you've made the cut.

Portrait of a Cyberworker

As knowledge workers link to global computer networks in ever-increasing numbers, they create a new breed of professional—the cyberworker.

So posits John Makulowich, a writer and Internet trainer in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

According to Makulowich, "the cyberworker will be the electronically literate equivalent of Peter F. Drucker's...manager, 'one who is responsible for the application and performance of knowledge.'"

In a chapter in *The Internet Unleashed* (Sams Publishing, 1994), Makulowich outlines the roles a cyberworker might play for his or her company using the Internet. A cyberworker would

- ▶ prepare a plan for connecting the company to the Internet, taking into account likely future demands and requirements
- ▶ research ways that competitors, suppliers, and customers use the Internet
- ▶ gather information and resources from the "Net," such as texts, manuals, training materials, and sources of Internet instruction
- ▶ prepare a mission statement and develop a strategy for using the Internet, and identify co-workers who are likely to benefit from access to the Internet
- ▶ ensure that all workers receive training in tools and resources available on the Internet
- ▶ identify ways the company could contribute to the Internet community, such as through sharing internal resources or through contributions by individual employees
- ▶ identify new opportunities and markets on the Internet
- ▶ coach others in applying knowledge gleaned from the Internet to create business knowledge
- ▶ link the company's strategic use of the Internet to quality management and worker empowerment
- ▶ convey to co-workers the rules of "netiquette" and acceptable behavior on the Internet.

When a Co-Worker Dies

The death of a co-worker rends the fabric of the workplace, but few organizations consider how to help employees when a co-worker dies.

They should, say Lowell Pugh and Joanne Howard, licensed funeral directors and consultants based in Golden City, Missouri. Unresolved grief can trigger problems in workers' professional as well as personal lives. In the aftermath of a death, companies might see absenteeism rise and productivity fall.

Some co-workers mourn not only the loss of a workmate, but also the loss of a close friend. Even colleagues who had a strictly business relationship with their late workmate might need help to cope with the loss.

Employers should have a plan in place to help their staffs cope should tragedy strike, say Pugh and Howard. They advise employers to seek help from a facilitator with experience in grief counseling.

An empathetic staff member might qualify to serve as a grief counselor, with special training. But most organizations will need to locate an outside facilitator, such as a professional counselor, a clergy person, or a trained therapist.

The employer should ask the grief counselor to do the following:

- ▶ Establish guidelines for ways the company would respond after a death—for example, by notifying employees, sending condolences to the employee's family, and allowing people time off to attend memorial services.
- ▶ Compile a list of resources to make available to co-workers who need them.
- ▶ Develop the outline of a program that will give staff members an opportunity to remember and grieve for their colleague. A program might be a formal memorial service, a discussion group, or a series of gatherings encompassing both.
- ▶ Some workers might need follow-up sessions after the initial gathering. Arrange for the grief-support specialist to be available to employees who do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings in a group.

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In Practice

Optimism Knocks

By Louise Aznavour, a psychologist, Maureen Stafford, a social worker, and Michel Perreault, a psychologist. Reach Aznavour at 3445 Drummond, Suite 403, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 1X9.

Johnny Mercer had it right: Accentuate the positive. Eliminate the negative. Latch on to the affirmative. Research indicates that optimists have an edge over angst-ridden peers, in life and on the job.

Various studies suggest a powerful link between optimism and both physical and psychological well-being. For instance, optimistic heart patients recover faster after coronary bypass surgery, and optimistic salespeople sell more.

The good news: Optimism is an all-around useful trait. The best news: You can learn to be optimistic.

To determine if you are an optimist, consider your "attributional style," an approach devised by psychologist Martin Seligman and explained in his book *Learned Optimism*.

According to Seligman, pessimistic people describe problems as permanent and pervasive; optimistic people explain problems as temporary glitches.

Suppose a worker is rebuffed by his or her boss. A pessimistic person would attribute the slight to a permanent schism in the relationship. ("She doesn't care about my needs.") An optimistic worker would cite a specific reason for the rejection. ("She's preoccupied with next week's sales meeting and doesn't have time to talk to me right now.")

How can you "latch onto the affirmative"? Here are some ideas drawn from a program for staff at Douglas Hospital, a 700-bed psychiatric hospital in Montreal. The series of seven seminars, which attracted a cross-section of staff and professionals, was aimed at cultivating optimism as a way to manage stress.

Think and talk more positively. Changing the way one talks to oneself and others is the first step to changing one's outlook. The dictum "garbage in, garbage out" applies to human minds as well as computer

disks. Seminar participants explored the ways they talk to themselves and others by ranking a list of "50 Excuses for a Closed Mind," developed by J. Goodman, director of the Humor Project in Saratoga Springs, New York. (The excuse "You are right, but..." earned the most votes from participants for the excuse heard most often.)

Rest well. Leave your worries behind when you enter the land of Nod. Participants learned to store negative thoughts in an imaginary jar or outside their bedroom door when they retire for the evening.

Awaken refreshed. Don't blast out of bed. Participants practiced a wake-up routine: Stretch, yawn, hum, and slowly rise. They used the lazy movements of an awakening cat as a role model.

Manage your worries. Participants used a blend of Western and Eastern techniques, such as visualization, relaxation methods, and Tai-Chi (an ancient Chinese discipline of meditation) to manage the energy they spent on worrying.

Flex your emotional muscles. Participants practiced ways to manage their anger. One approach drew upon aikido, a Japanese art of self-defense that uses the principle of nonresistance to fend off an opponent.

Laugh. "You grow up the day you have the first laugh—at yourself," said one participant. Participants collected and shared cartoons and funny stories, and in general practiced taking themselves lightly. They learned to take minibreaks during the day to talk only about positive events.

Cultivating a positive outlook is an essential step toward meeting life as a creative challenge rather than a chore.

"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.