SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

## "HRD PERSON, DEVELOP THYSELF"

Guest Commentary
BY NEAL E. CHALOFSKY

Psychiatrists and psychologists are notorious for helping others work through their deepest problems while not coming to terms with their own neuroses. Lazy, obese, chain-smoking physicians warn their patients about the dangers of heart attack. And human resource development persons — practitioners, managers, consultants and academicians — encourage and work with organizations to develop their employees while they themselves remain ignorant of basic theories underlying the field, don't keep up with the state of the art (the *real* state of the art; new approaches to evaluation, how adults learn, new learning strategies — not just the fads), and don't increase and broaden their competence in basic and emerging roles within the HRD field.

The American Society for Training and Development decided to try to conduct an institute with Robert Blake and Jane Mouton on basic behavioral science theory. Definitely not a "how-to" workshop. Definitely an experience with two experts in our field to help HRD persons build a theoretical base. ASTD didn't get enough participants to warrant conducting the workshop.

The ASTD Region Two conference offered a concurrent session on career/professional development of HRD persons. Three people signed up.

True, our first priority is to get our jobs done. True, many of us in
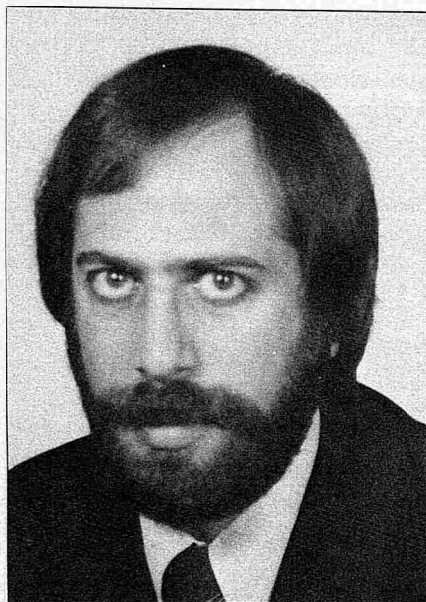
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the field are in HRD positions only temporarily or are in jobs where training is only one of several collateral duties, and we all shouldn't have to be able to perform every role and activity called for in the various role models. Therefore, not every HRD person needs professional development. FALSE!

Everyone can grow professionally and personally. We should all have a basic understanding of the theoretical foundations of our field, of the different training activity areas, of new learning strategies, and of the issues and controversies that abound in an emerging profession such as ours.

At the very least we should be setting an example for others in our organizations. How many HRD

managers have an organized professional development program for their own staffs? How many HRD managers see their own staff's development as a top priority? How many HRD persons have their own professional/career development plans? We spend so much time developing executive-development programs, management retreats, technical and skills training, and employee-development systems that we neglect our own development.

Now, before I turn off too many readers, let me say that there are some positive trends in the field. In the past we have not enjoyed an overabundance of resources for the professional development of HRD persons. But we have now been able to identify approximately 70 colleges and universities that have HRD/training and development degree programs, and more than 70 who want to start one. There is an increase in the number of nonacademic workshops, seminars and institutes in HRD skills and knowledges. There are more books being written in our field and more guidance on how to obtain resources from other fields.

Another positive trend is that we now know more about what HRD persons are and should be doing and what competencies and body of knowledge they need to do it. We can now provide more specific assistance on how to develop oneself professionally.

Finally, there seems to be a

"If we don't develop a proactive attitude toward professional development, we're going to find ourselves facing future shock. . . ."

trend of more people entering our field with a strong, specific educational base and an attitude toward the necessity for continued professional development. As an adjunct professor in an HRD graduate program, I've been startled by the number of students who are switching from other fields and want to get a sound theoretical foundation before they enter HRD.

Create Your Own Opportunities

I would like to change the subject and address myself to those of you who have the desire to develop professionally but don't have the financial support from your organizations. This is reality. I do believe most HRD persons want to develop professionally and would if they had the encouragement, support and commitment from their organizations. My suggestion is for you to create your own developmental opportunities. There are several ways to do this. The easiest is to build self-development activities into your job. Volunteer for assignments in order to learn more about something, rather than because you're already an expert in it. Look for ways to visit other offices, organizations and institutions to learn what they do and how they do it. Seek out experts in other fields and work with them. In short, view your work as a way to constantly develop more competence rather than a way to demonstrate competence.
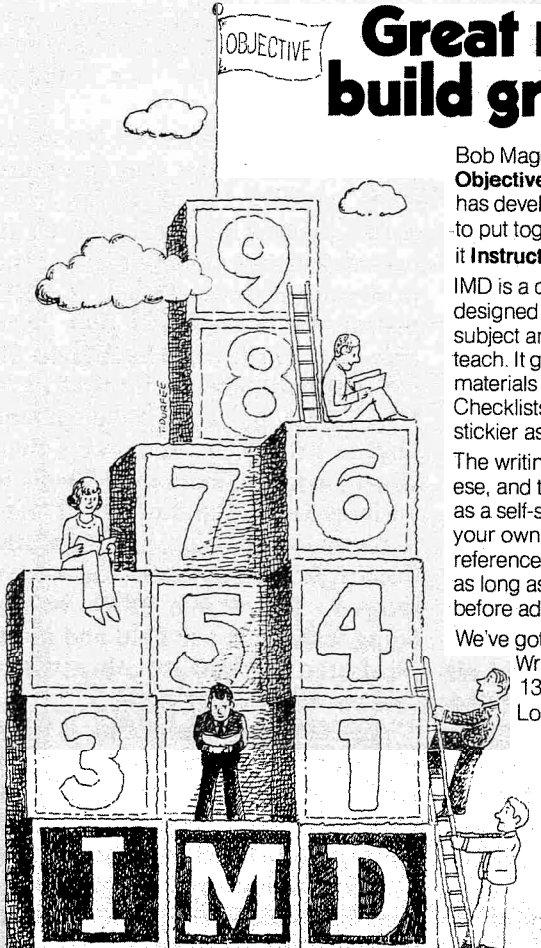
If you can, develop self-directed learning projects. Actually plan and implement activities to learn something by doing research and writing a report or giving an oral presentation. Obtain instruments measuring your knowledge, behavior, attitudes or values; complete them; see if there are areas you would like to change; and develop an action plan for changing them. Get on task forces and committees. Volunteer for assignments in other areas of the organization. One good learning project is to organize learning activities for you and your colleagues. Two that I've organized are sessions for previewing and discussing new films at lunch time — we called it the Brown Bag Film Festival — and going outside during the summer at lunch time to discuss new theories and issues — the Shadetree Seminar Series. We got to know our new associate director by inviting him to a shadetree seminar to talk with, not to, us about his plans for how we were going to operate now that we were reorganized.

Finally, volunteer to work for ASTD, and/or other professional associations. Not for visibility or prestige or political power but for professional development. ASTD gives you the chance to chair a committee and improve your problem-solving or group facilitation skills. Develop training programs for chapters. Design instructional strategies or evaluation forms for use with presentations at conferences. Get a chance to interact with experts in our field who are on national committees.

I think the bottom line on professional development is that our profession is going the way of every other profession, it's going to get harder and harder to keep up with changes in the state of the art and practice. If we don't develop a proactive attitude toward professional development, we're going to find ourselves facing future shock — and the future is NOW. — *Neal E. Chalofsky*

Neal Chalofsky is an independent consultant in human resource and organization development and is also project leader for the *Standards for Training Effectiveness Study*, a research and development project of the Productivity Research and Evaluation Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (formerly the U.S. Civil Service Commission).