!NTELLIGENCE

/IN PRACTICE/

What is Effective Training?

Experts and practitioners discuss current training issues.

By Michael Laff

FOR SOME ORGANIZATIONS, training still means sending staff to a low-budget hotel where an overenthusiastic host races through slides in a PowerPoint presentation. After a day or two of such sessions, employees head back to work, satisfied that at least they gained a day away from the office.

Whether the organization gets any value from sending its staff off site is another story. Most training and development experts believe that if the employees somehow resist the urge to fall asleep, the value of instructor-led sessions is lost as soon as they return to the office.

"In our experience, management continues to cut corners," says Dennis Reina, co-founder of the Vermont-based Reina Trust Building Institute. "They throw a few dollars toward training and expect miracles to happen. Training in and of itself is not going to do the trick."

While there are varying opinions about what skills are best obtained in training modules, Reina says effective training begins before and continues well after the course concludes. And a thorough needs analysis is a must.

What's ironic, however, is that some businesses are spending a seemingly unlimited amount of dollars to recruit and hire a candidate, only to devote a paltry sum to her training. According to Deloitte & Touche, an organization will spend 50 times more to recruit an employee earning $100,000 annually than it will spend on that staffer's annual training.

Especially when training is devoted to intangible skills, team participation needs to be emphasized. Unfortunately, time constraints are preventing employees in fields such as healthcare or manufacturing from attending courses as a unit, and prevailing social mores of the workplace remain.

When training is offered to an individual, he is often greeted with sarcasm by co-workers or supervisors when trying to apply the learning. Steve Cady, associate professor at Bowling Green State University's Organization and Development Program, believes an organization's training is directly linked with the style of leadership. Too often, staff members say they attend a particular training session because a supervisor ordered them to do so.

This creates what Cady calls a management paradox whereby employee enthusiasm for a particular training session is low; the staff does not implement new skills; and the manager then faults human resources for not promoting the session well enough.

Organizations also want to be sure they obtain some value if they send employees off site. But, experts agree that annual retreats or the occasional team building exercise is typically ineffective without regular reinforcement.

"If employees go to a site and take turns climbing a wall, all they've learned is how to play together," says Linda Henman, a St. Louis-based HR consultant. "That's not team building. I want to see a change in behavior."

The absence of a training curriculum is not always dire. Few observers believe that employees leave an organization simply because training is not available. The mantra of an employee who "leaves a boss, not a job" still applies.

Sometimes the source of the problem is poor communication between management and staff. Today's man-

agers often have difficulty delegating tasks, providing feedback, and giving clear instructions.

For example, Long Fence Construction of Maryland was a dominant player in its field until competitors entered the market, which made the working environment tense.

When Jim Jenkins, a Maryland-based HR consultant began working with the company, he noticed the divide between what its sales force thought of management efforts and what the management team thought of itself. Managers had no formal training on how to give feedback or run a meeting. Meetings were devoted dress-down sessions of individual staff members. Eventually Jenkins helped the company utilize sales meetings to motivate and uplift members and keep criticisms of individuals private. Managers stuck to an agenda to maintain discipline and save time.

But for managers who beg off on training because time or money is tight, there is a solution. Oris Stuart, managing partner of the Philadelphia-based workplace consulting firm, Global Lead Interactive, says many organizations now utilize 10-minute Podcasts that include communications training for managers and staff. While driving their car, supervisors can review sample cases where a manager interacts with a staff member. The listener is asked to choose one of several ways to respond. Each module carries out all scenarios from the most effective to the least effective means of communication.

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/TRENDS/

Rest for the Weary Worker

Would you open your wallet for some shut-eye on the job? Some New Yorkers are paying as much as $14 for 20 minutes inside a sleep "pod" before their next big meeting.

Named after its founding company, the Metronaps pod looks like a cross between a La-Z-Boy lounger and a motorcycle helmet. It inclines forward for entry, and then reclines into a napping-friendly position. A swing-down visor cuts distractions by blocking light and sound.

Metronaps claims that its pods are the "future of workplace productivity." In fact, its founders said that the concept was born from the "realization that many employees spend significant portions of their day dozing at their desks."

So, instead of hiding from their bosses, groggy workers plop down in the pod. They simply set a digital timer to their desired nap length. When the time is up, a programmable controller wakes them with a combination of lights and vibration.

While the company's goal is "to be the premier provider of professional nap centers in the United States," it may be making a bigger splash abroad. Metronaps has only two U.S. sleep centers (both in New York), but it has opened one in the Vancouver International Airport, plans to open another in Australia this year, and also sells pods in the United Kingdom.

MORE/www.metronaps.com

/YOUR HEALTH/

Obesity Affects Workplace Productivity

OBESE WORKERS, which represent 29 percent of the United States workforce, cost employers about $123 billion annually in healthcare costs, according to a whitepaper by Leade Health, a health coaching organization in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This paper also focuses on the positive impact that health coaching has on combating employees' weight issues.

About 22 percent of obese adults—individuals who are 30 or more pounds overweight and have a body mass index above 27—between the ages of 45 and 74 have pre-diabetes and could benefit from lifestyle changes. According to "The Business Case for Weight/Obesity Management Using Health Coaching Interventions" whitepaper, medical costs for obese employees are 77 percent higher than those for healthy weight employees, and obesity-related disabilities cost employers up to $8,720 per claimant.

Obesity accounts for about 43 percent of all healthcare spending by U.S. businesses on coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, hypercholesterolemia, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis of the knee, and endometrial cancer combined.

Productivity loss associated with obesity is even higher than what has been reported for workers who use tobacco. Obese workers have the highest prevalence of work limitations, with 6.9 percent experiencing work restrictions versus 3 percent of normal-weight workers. Obese employees are also more than twice as likely to experience high-level absenteeism—seven or more absences due to illness over six months—compared to low-risk employees.

The U.S. Surgeon General's office reports that these disease risks may soon cause as much disease and death as cigarette smoking.

With a shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, work environments have become very sedentary. But this paper suggests that overweight patients in well-designed weight loss programs can achieve a weight loss of as much as 10 percent of baseline weight.

"Obesity is a growing epidemic in American society, but employers can turn the tide of rising healthcare costs with lifestyle intervention programs such as health coaching," explains Michael Mulvihill, president and CEO of Leade Health.

According to Leade Health, one-on-one health coaching programs, coupled with physical activity, healthy eating, and good nutrition, have reduced the incidence of diabetes by 58 percent in at-risk individuals over a three-year period. It was even more effective than the medication Metformin.

Conservative return-on-investment estimates show that for every dollar spent on intervention programs, between $4.56 and $4.73 can be saved through restored productivity and medical savings.

At Leade Health, nearly 10,000 people have participated in the firm's health coaching program for weight management. Of those, 89 percent have achieved weight loss or weight stabilization after one year.

—Paula Ketter

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/WORKING LIFE/

Family and the Office

By Marilyn Puder-York

WORKPLACES are full of trigger scenarios—events that stir up strong emotions and, often, prompt unwise actions in response. Trigger situations are particular to each of us, depending on personal vulnerabilities. A situation that gets your stomach acids churning may have little impact on your co-worker at the next desk. That's because a major determining factor is individual family dynamics. From those old relationships, we've developed coping strategies to reduce stress and feel more secure, and we are likely to call on these learned strategies when confronting people who are giving us a hard time today.

Of all the troublesome situations in the workplace, dealing with a difficult boss is probably the toughest to handle for the majority of employees. That's because this person has the power to give us a raise or show us to the door.

Bosses also tend to push our emotional buttons because they can provoke the experience of being parented. In particular, their behaviors may remind you of how your mother and father treated you—and how you reacted to them.

There are all kinds of combinations of the boss-parent equation, but each trigger different responses from you. Ask yourself:

● Did you grow up in a happy, stable home, with supportive, loving, and rational parents? If so, you may expect the current authority figure in your life to behave equally rationally. When he doesn't, you're puzzled. You assume you must have done something wrong.

● Did you grow up with a bullying, harshly critical parent who frightened you? If so, you probably coped by laying low and staying out of her way, and that's the strategy you'll adopt now with a bullying boss.

● Did you perceive mom or dad as rigid and dictatorial and were rebellious in response? In the office, your instinct may be to fire off an angry email to a boss who's not getting the picture.

While emotions are neither bad nor good, reacting to them may be. If you do, you are more than likely to behave in ways that are maladaptive to the event, which can worsen your situation or even damage your career. Sending spur-of-the-moment, hostile emails to your boss, for example, is almost always unwise. Similarly, keeping a low profile probably won't elicit the clarification you need. So, instead of going on gut reaction, try to rein in the emotions and detach a bit. Be aware of your vulnerabilities, and get them under control. Take a deep breath and give yourself time to figure out an appropriate plan of action. The goal is to "manage up." That means to address your boss successfully—in a problem-solving manner that diffuses defensiveness and conflict and motivates him to deal with a tricky issue or modify behavior. The following are useful strategies to get you started:

Figure out what kind of a person you're facing. There are three profiles of the difficult boss. The first is basically a good guy—decent, fair, rational—who could be acting out of character because he's under stress. Then there is the kind of boss who is good at managing up with his bosses, not too empathetic or concerned with his subordinates, but at the same time, not intentionally out to inflict harm. The other is the bad guy, a truly destructive narcissist who's been known to lie, blame others, or devalue co-workers to get ahead. With the first and second types, you probably can initiate a constructive conversation. With the third, your options are limited.

Be ego sensitive. You may be thoroughly justified in believing you have been mistreated. But astute managing up includes respecting your relative positions in the big scheme of things. Arrange to express your concerns at an opportune time. Maintain a conciliatory tone. Emphasize your commitment to being helpful and to getting the job done.

Educate the boss. In some situations, a stressed out, overburdened boss may not

even realize she's acting irrationally. She may need more information. Marshall your data: Discuss specific and practical remedies that can ease the problem. Arrange a timetable for receiving feedback. **Keep notes.** Trigger events with difficult bosses sometimes don't get solved overnight. Whenever you're trying to diffuse and improve a bad situation, it's smart to keep a private diary of any exchanges with your boss. You may need to refer to it in the future.

Marilyn Puder-York is an executive coach and the author of *The Office Survival Guide,* on which this article is based.

/FAST FACT/

Unhappiness is Costly

Disenchanted employees are a huge drain on an organization's balance sheet in terms of decreased productivity, increased turnover, and lower morale.

In the United States, disenchanted workers cost $350 billion annually, compared with 100 billion euros in France and 64 billion pounds in the United Kingdom.

SOURCE/ The Gallup Organization

/WORKING LIFE/

Top Interview Mistakes for Executive Candidates

AS MANY AS ONE-THIRD of executive-level candidates blow their chances of getting the job during the initial recruiter interview, according to Salveson Stetson Group, a full-service retained executive search firm.

"After working through an extensive prescreening process, it all comes apart when they step through our doors and interview with us," said John Salveson, the firm's co-founder and principal. "They are sometimes so focused on the interview with the client company that they overlook the need to make a positive impression on the recruiter."

Sadly, by the time a candidate is called for a personal interview with the executive search firm, the competition has already been narrowed dramatically. "More than 90 percent of roughly 150 initial candidates are eliminated before personal interviews are even conducted. So, candidates who get to a personal interview have already come a long way, sometimes only to be eliminated because of an interview 'don't,'" says Sally Stetson, co-founder and principal with Salveson Stetson Group.

The firm offers solutions to these top mistakes candidates make during interviews with executive recruiters:

Talking too much and listening too little. "Provide concise and specific answers to the recruiter's questions. If you go off on a five-minute tangent, the recruiter may better remember how long you talked, and not what you said," said Salveson.

Overselling. "You need to provide a delicate balance between representing your background in the best possible light and overselling yourself. It's important to make your case for why your experiences match the role—but if you overdo it you may appear desperate," said Stetson.

"Fishing" expeditions. "Don't interview with recruiters for jobs in which you have little interest in as a way to 'get your name in front of an executive search

firm,'" said Salveson. Instead, talk to the search consultant. If you both agree it is the wrong role, move on.

Lacking executive presence. "You may be the best qualified executive in your discipline, but if you can't effectively communicate that to me in the interview, then I can't move you forward in the process," says Stetson. "Successful candidates present themselves as polished, personable, and confident executives."

Springing surprises on recruiters. Be open about any barriers that exist to your accepting a position such as noncompete agreements, relocation issues, and compensation expectations.

"Search consultants and their clients hate surprises, so be an open book. These issues should be dealt with before you meet with an executive search consultant," advises Salveson.

Treating the recruiter interview as a barrier to the client company. "Treat your interview with the search consultant as a chance to better understand the job and company, assess whether the position is of serious interest to you, and determine if the role truly is a good fit," said Stetson.

Stretching experience levels. "If there are gaps between your experience and the requirements for the position, talk openly and honestly to the search consultant about it. Don't try to convince the recruiter you fit every single qualification if you really don't," said Salveson.

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Glass Ceiling Not Cracked for Executives

DESPITE SIGNIFICANT GAINS in the past 10 years, female executives around the world still face an uphill battle in workplace equality.

According to the results of a new Accenture study, 30 percent of women executives and 43 percent of male executives believe that women have the same opportunities as men do in the workplace. The study is based on a survey of 1,200 male and female executives in eight countries in North America, Europe, and Asia.

However, the study also found that overall the women were about as personally satisfied with their own career opportunities and positions as men were with theirs. For example, the same percentage of men and women respondents (58 percent) said they are fairly compensated or that their salary reflects their personal achievements. In addition, about the same number of women as men said they feel secure in their jobs.

For some women executives, the glass ceiling is believed to be more of a societal obstacle than an individual barrier. Female executives in the United States and the United Kingdom say they are very confident of their own business capabilities and are more likely to believe that the greatest barriers to their success come not from their own capabilities or even from their own companies' cultures, but from society at large. On the other end of the spectrum, women executives in Canada and the Philippines believe that societal issues are less of a barrier to achieving career success and that corporate cultures are more to blame for the glass ceiling.

Company culture poses the greatest barrier to advancement in Austria, whereas Swiss respondents believe their companies poses relatively few barriers to their advancement. In Germany and Australia, barriers to advancement are believed to be most prevalent in society.

"The study reminds us that while there has been progress in shattering the glass ceiling over the past 20 years, organizations—and societies—need to realize how important it is to capitalize and build upon the skills of women," said Kedrick D. Adkins, Accenture's chief diversity officer. "Creating a business culture that supports innovation, growth, and prosperity requires people with diverse talents, and organizations need to ensure that they value all styles of leadership and work. In other words, global inclusion is the key."

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