



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Forrest R. Belcher

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM

Is training a profession?

The question still lacks a clear answer and so we're pleased that it is getting the serious study it deserves in ASTD.

What does the term "profession" mean? Several ASTD committees and interested groups are working to develop an answer for training and development practitioners. Most people recognize the general dimensions of what profession means in the training field: a definition of a common body of knowledge, a plan for the education of practitioners, a code of ethics and an articulated philosophy. Fewer have seen that true professionalism calls for an added dimension — one that includes the "outside world" of social issues and concern for society.

The Social Issues Committee of ASTD has been particularly concerned with this "added dimension" to the professionalization of training. In fact, its purpose as a committee is to focus attention on social problems or issues and the role of the trainer in their resolution. This issue of the *Journal* highlights some of the activities and concerns of the committee.

The work of this committee has been underscored by three assumptions: that the wonders of technology are not always beneficial, that there is a high level of interdependence of the variables that influence a person's life and behavior and that planned change can be accomplished by application of established and reliable methods.

Let's examine each of these three assumptions in more detail:

1. Science and technology have forged miracles, especially in the last three decades, that have radically altered our lives. The technology of power has dominated until recently. It is the type with an ancestry in the steam engines of Newcomen and Watt that transforms raw materials to finished products, generates vast reservoirs of energy, transports

materials and people with great speed and efficiency, moves mountains and so on. Another technology is concerned with information and control — the expansion of mankind's power through modern communications and information storage, retrieval and dissemination.

The major triumph of technology is the liberation of mankind from much of the sterile and harsh physical labor that made life short, savage and hopeless. But there is the price we pay for such gains: the pollution of our environment, the threat of wholesale destruction through nuclear war and the inability of people to deal mentally with accelerating technology. It is as Alvin Toffler says in his book, *Future Shock*, that in the years ahead many psychologically normal people face an abrupt collision with the future.

2. The economic, social, psychological and political variables of life are interdependent. Man's behavior is the product of his interaction with the environment and the nature of his genetic inheritance. This observation is being reinforced as we try to deal with the problems facing individuals and the society: it is impossible to deal with only a part of an individual's background and interests. It is difficult to say that for this portion of his day, we will deal only with the individual's economic being; for another, with social being, etc. Individuals are the sum of their parts and these parts can't be neatly compartmentalized. If we are to deal as trainers with the whole man, we have to consider the social elements that help make him what he is.
3. The body of knowledge that is common to the training and development profession is that of planned change — for individuals, institutions and society. Within ASTD there is substantial agreement that both individual and institutional

change can be planned through training and development. But less emphasis and attention have been given to the role of training and development in planned changes in society. ASTD members must take action to use their knowledge to help solve the pressing problems facing our society.

Many years ago Will Durant observed that man has transformed his environment far more than his environment transforms him. This

observation still holds. A contemporary economic philosopher, Barbara Ward, notes that "it is inconceivable that we should turn the whole human experiment over to forces of change which we can neither master nor fully understand."

So, although technology has created problems as well as great advances, and although the individual sometimes seems isolated and alienated, there is still a hope for positive change. The

Social Issues Committee is concerned with the role of the trainer in initiating such change.

This issue of the **Journal** is a beginning forum to start a dialogue within ASTD on the extent of our professional responsibilities and the contribution we can make toward positive action. The issues are not clearly defined, nor have solutions been outlined. The Social Issues Committee hopes that through this forum in the **Journal** new insights can be developed in both areas.

WHY WE'RE CONCERNED

During the meetings of the Social Issues Committee we've spent considerable time considering the question, "What is the social responsibility of ASTD?" As might be expected there were as many answers to that question as there were members of the Committee. While we could not reach a consensus on that complex question, we were in agreement that greater effort must be expended in increasing members' understanding of the issues facing our society and the supporting actions which lead to the solution of the problems.

One of the truisms of life is that we are prisoners of our experience. Most of us become so involved in the microcosm of our daily lives that we forget to consider the broader environment in which we exist. Perhaps the central problem for the training and development profession is to assist people in dealing with the problems associated with the rapid rate of change that characterizes our time. Several committee members have agreed that a primary emphasis must be upon the change of attitudes and values. If progress is to be made, we must tap all of the resources of the profession — the theories of change, efforts which attempt to deal with the problems of changing attitudes and values, and evaluation research which provides informa-

tion regarding effectiveness of change efforts. We hope to call your attention to these issues and ask you to join us in attempting to further the current state of the profession.

This issue of the **Journal** poses a number of questions for the ASTD membership:

What is the total picture of our society? What are the issues that will most influence our lives and professional practice? What are the implications for our personal, and institutional lives? What are the implications for ASTD Chapters and the larger organization?

As you read the following articles and consider the questions provided in the Opinionnaire on page 33, we hope that you will join with us by contributing your ideas and skills in determining a meaningful role for the training and development field.

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