

Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

WORKSHOP USING EXPERIENTIAL MATERIALS IN INDUSTRY TRAINING

B. Irvin Summers, Southwest Missouri State University

ABSTRACT

The workshop is intended to provide information to those interested in utilizing experiential materials in managerial and supervisory training. The emphasis is on soliciting and conducting training on a for-fee consulting basis. The presenter elaborates his experience in these programs. The format is a short presentation followed by an open discussion between the presenter and those attending the workshop. Materials for Experiential training programs will be available for review and consideration.

OVERVIEW

The workshop is designed to provide information to those who are interested in using experiential training materials as training aides, or as the basis of a managerial development and training program in private enterprise. The presenter has been using experiential materials for the past seven years in experienced manager training, both in special courses within the university and in on site programs within manufacturing firms. The content of the workshop draws primarily from this experience. To the writer's knowledge, the use of experiential exercises in training experienced managers is not extensive, and many professors are interested in extending their development and training work into this area. The sub-topics for the workshop are selected because, (1) they have been concerns regularly mentioned by faculty interested in experiential training, or (2) they are pitfalls and hurdles experienced by the writer. 1. Soliciting clients. 2. Planning the training program with the client. 3. Pricing. 4. Duplicating, copyright releases, lead-time. 5. Materials available. 6. Frequency and length of sessions. 7. Assessing leaning. 8. Introducing and reviewing the sessions. 9. Mixing the management levels in the training group. 10. Is hall a loaf better than none? Or, training time is OK until something else takes priority.

If one has limited experience in working with experiential materials, or limited experience in training experienced managers, it is probably most desirable to obtain that experience on campus through special courses or programs before considering the presentation of programs at the client's location. The most effective solicitation seems to be follow-up with those that have attended on-campus programs and discussions with firms that are too small to employ a full-time training staff.

Once the training goals of the client are understood, select experiential materials that are directed toward the learning goals, and assemble them for presentation to the client.

1. Provide a letter or proposal that restates the training goal(s). List each exercise with a brief description of the activity of the exercise, detail the learning experience that is expected, state how the exercise is related to the leaning goal(s), suggest a schedule for the sessions if appropriate, and state the costs.
2. Briefly review some of the exercises with the client.
3. Agree on the date to call back for a decision.
4. Leave the material with the client to show to others and for their consideration.

Experiential training sessions do not fit neatly into the typical one hour training blocks; two hour sessions seem to be more satisfactory. The client is committing to having supervisory people away from their job during the work day,

or will be conducting the training outside of regular work hours; either of these choices present planning problems. One of the advantages of experiential materials is that each session is a complete learning experience. Sessions may be scheduled once a week, or once a month. Conducting sessions more frequently than once each week does seem to be too frequent; the participant seems to need a span of time to intermittently recall the experience of the session to gain the best learning experience from each session.

Allow a comfortable lead-time before the starting date of the program, copyright releases are probably needed, and reproduction and assembly of materials will take time.

Should you mix the management levels that are participating in the program? Any response to this question is probably tentative. However, if some of the training goals are to increase effective two-way communication in the organization, and increase the effectiveness with which various levels in the organization solve mutual problems, the answer seems to be yes. Experiential exercise do seem to be an excellent tool because of the participant interaction that is generated.

Practicing managers are busy, they do have priorities they perceive as having higher rank than training. Probably it is most practical to expect them to miss sessions, and if the sessions are conducted during working hours, expect them to be called away during sessions, in any case, determining the client's attitude toward attendance may provide some indication of the importance attached to the training. Also higher management's regular attendance does seem to support the program; take the time to ask the highest level managers in the program to attend every session and tell them their influence and participation is important to the program.

The simplest method of pricing is to compute the amount of presentation time required, plus the estimated preparation time, times the hourly rate charged. Determine the reproduction costs by checking several printing options. Publishers reply promptly to copyright release inquiries, the typical charge is 15 cents per page copied, times the number of times the page is reproduced. Mileage and travel charges should be computed; and the sum of all of the above is the fixed price.

Introduce the first session with a handout and an oral presentation of what experiential learning is and what is expected from the participants. Remember, they have probably had no experience with this type of training. Introduce each session with its purpose and an overview of the exercise. End each session with a summary of what you observed and what learning may have occurred; give the participants a few moments to reflect on their personal learning experience.