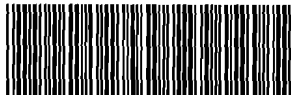


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of the outplacement firm Lee Hecht Harrison Inc. "I haven't known a whole lot of training people who are drawn to either [business] analysis or numbers," she says. Her advice: Find an executive in another department who is good at this kind of thinking and sign him up as a mentor.

You've Got to Get Out More

Simple curiosity and willingness to learn about your company's business and how it works can be a tremendous asset. Learn enough, and you gain a reputation within the organization as someone who can solve problems, rather than someone who delivers classes *purported* to solve problems.

As relationship manager for the learning and education department at Coopers & Lybrand, the New York-based accounting firm, Freida Aboyoun vouches for the importance of working outside the training box. If you want to understand your company's strategy and its business processes, she says, "you absolutely have to get out of the training department. And the way you do that is by working with the managers and the people who are actually doing the work."

If all you aspire to do is to teach canned training programs in generic subjects, you can sometimes get away with knowing little or nothing about the inner workings of the company and the specific concerns of employees in various jobs. But if, say, you want to be part of a cross-functional team that builds a prototype electronic performance support system (EPSS) for your company, as Aboyoun recently did for Coopers & Lybrand, you won't be invited if you never stick your head out of the training department.

Gloria Regalbuto: The Builder

Gloria Regalbuto builds corporate universities for a living. She is a start-up specialist. For years, her career pattern has gone like this: She is hired by a company that wants to launch a new training department or an in-house "university." She stays a few years to see that it's up and running. Then she is enticed away by another company, usually in a different industry, that wants her to do the same thing.

Since February 1997 she has been engaged in her ninth start-up as director of human resources development for Bath and Body Works, headquartered in New Albany, OH, a Columbus suburb. She is charged with launching the Heartland Academy, as the company's training function is now known, in nearby Reynoldsburg, OH. Her prior job was as president (and builder) of Seafirst University in

Seattle, the training arm of Seafirst Bank.

How does she do it? By the numbers.

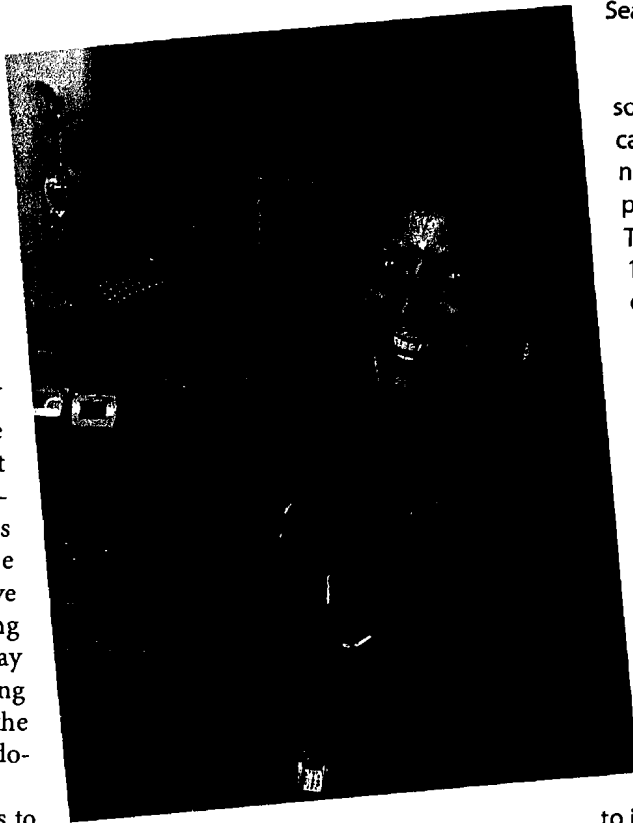
Regalbuto holds a Ph.D. in interpersonal communications and is a card-carrying member of the training fraternity; she served in 1991 as national president of the American Society for Training and Development, and in 1996 she received ASTD's highest honor, the Gordon Bliss Award. But what really helps keep her feet beneath her and her training operations out of trouble, she says, is not so much classic training expertise as knowing how to read a balance statement, talk with accountants, and justify her existence in terms of ROI.

The second of her nine start-ups, in the early 1980s, was at an Anchor Hocking Corp. division in Lancaster, OH. She linked her training efforts directly to the tabletop-glassware manufacturer's statistical quality control system, using the SQC metrics both to identify training needs and to evaluate

the impact of training programs on quality measurements. The data this generated also showed that her training was cost-effective.

One day, out of the blue, the divisional manager she had carefully cultivated was replaced. The new manager didn't talk to her for two weeks. She sent him a memo saying she assumed his silence indicated that he planned to cut her department. In the memo, she included her ROI figures along with some testimonials from other managers in the company. The new division head finally met with her and told her that, while he wasn't entirely persuaded by her data, he agreed she had a story to tell. He arranged for her to make her pitch to corporate headquarters. When Regalbuto emerged from that headquarters presentation, she had not only saved her department but was named head of training and development for the entire company.

"It's the one time I had a chance to save a department from demise,



Photograph by Andy Snow

and I had it because I had the return-on-investment data," she says.

Fluency in the language of finance is a tremendous asset to a training manager, says Regalbuto. When Beth Pritchard, the CEO of Bath and Body Works, sent her the memo every training manager is supposed to dread—the one asking her to justify her existence—Regalbuto was happy to receive it. Some CEOs don't know that they *ought* to ask such questions, she says, and she was pleased that hers did. At an ensuing meeting with Mike Stromberg, the general merchandising manager, Regalbuto came equipped with the kinds of ROI figures she collects as a matter of course. But those were just for openers. She breezed through them quickly. Then she started to talk *numbers*.

She pointed out that whenever the company launches a new product, the costs of design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing and merchandising are all factored into the price of the product. However, she said, the company forgets to factor in the training costs associated with the product launch. Counting lost opportunity time for the salespeople who get the training, those costs probably add up to about \$200,000 per product. That cost comes directly off the profit margin. Wouldn't it make more sense, she asked, to get training involved in product development early in the process, instead of as an afterthought?

Not exactly the defensive sort of conversation one associates with the phrase "justifying your existence." Nor does it sound like a stump speech on the glories of employee development that one might expect to hear from the dean of a corporate university. But Regalbuto's idea of a university has little to do with ivory towers.

Indeed, in several companies her notion of the role and function of a corporate university has varied drastically from executive preconceptions. Often the execs who hire her picture an idyllic college campus, complete with a cool logo, a pleasant location and artful decor. Mostly, they expect to see classes full of students.

Regalbuto doesn't fight them on the classes, but she does give them more than they planned for. She begins quickly by compiling a generic curriculum of off-the-shelf courses that "can't do any harm." Programs in time management, supervisory skills and customer service may spend money the company could better invest in other training projects, she figures, but such courses won't undermine anybody's performance. "I buy time with the flash and the dance and the marketing," she freely admits.

Time for what? Some hard-core performance analysis, job and task analysis, work flow analysis and needs assessments. Regalbuto's "universities" in fact are staffed mainly by people who function as performance consultants. Their real role is to seek out and provide solutions to the company's most pressing human-performance needs.

Having built nine of them, Regalbuto's approach to jump-starting a university is now routine. She appoints a manager of training design, a manager of delivery, and a manager of administration. She then assigns the rest of the training staff to act as performance consultants, "embedding" them in the heart and guts of the corporation by giving each one a set of departments to adopt as clients. Then she goes in search of the company's cost accountants. "Cost accountants," she says, "know everything about pricing of products and cost of manufacture and lost costs and scrap and rework. They are the best clue to big organizational needs."

So it comes back to numbers, as always: How does the company make money, and what can you do to help? "If you're not tied to that, or you're not even aware of it, then you are a hunk of overhead," Regalbuto says.

And when you get that memo asking you to justify your existence, you will have nothing to be happy about.

—B.F.

Technology Is a Piece—Not the Pie

Any heads-up trainer understands that technology-delivered training is going to be important in the coming years. On the other hand, none of those with whom we spoke advocated the wholesale replacement of classrooms with computers that some pundits predict. Most took the position that technology is a key piece of the training puzzle, a great way to deliver certain kinds of training to employees under certain circumstances.

For some, it can be a very big piece. Starr Ramieh, associate director for training and consulting services for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) in Arlington, VA, has a busy summer ahead of her. Over the next few months, her department will be rolling out a distance-learning satellite network *and* an EPSS. Add that to her group's ongoing development of computer-based training, and Ramieh has all three training-technology bases covered.

But while Ramieh is excited about the technology, she is equally engaged with her department's evolution toward a "performance consulting" role. Her team, called the Client Representative Group, assesses requests for training from other departments and makes recommendations about interventions. After laying the groundwork for the past few years, the group is finally gaining acceptance throughout the organization, she says.

Not Just Another Buzzword

The evolution of trainers into performance consultants is a real phenomenon, not just another trend that will flash and fade, according to the people with whom we spoke. Like Ramieh, most are attempting to redefine their training departments as units that investigate human performance problems and recommend any number of different solutions—not just "the place you go for classes."

Hand in hand with the emphasis on performance and business results goes a growing impatience with the idea of teaching skills and knowledge