

Training: Its Benefits and Limitations

With the current importance placed on corporate learning initiatives, "training" and "education" are often used as interchangeable terms. And as technology-based learning becomes more widely used, these terms become more and more synonymous.

While there are many similarities between training and education, there are also many differences. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the role of training, its benefits, and limitations. To do so we'll draw upon our expertise in the area of interpersonal skills training, as well as the work of psychologist Sidney Jourard.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Sidney Jourard has made an interesting distinction between education and training:

"True education, as opposed to training (which is essential), is by definition subversive. Education liberates individuality; it frees and strengthens autonomy. Training constricts: it reduces variance; it diminishes freedom and lessens autonomy."¹

It is important to realize that training does indeed constrict, reduce variance, diminish freedom and limit autonomy. Participants in training workshops often sense this more than the consultant does. Many times trainees will verbalize their discomfort at having to respond in such a limited way. The effective trainer will not merely reflect what they have said, but will try to get inside the trainee's frame of reference and sense how lacking in spontaneity it is for that person to give patterned responses. Many trainees sense that there is something wrong with it at least as a final outcome.

Paradoxically, though training and education can be seen as producing opposite results, *training can serve the goals of education in two ways.*

First of all, *training is directed toward behavioral outcomes.* Unfortunately, much of what is called education is only a sterile exercise of the disembodied mind. Often it does not touch the emotions or influence action. Effective training, however, concentrates on behaviors. (And because changing behaviors often stimulates feelings, training can elicit a greater emotional response than the typical classroom educational experience.) Though training is segmental—dealing with only one small aspect of a person's life—it often engages the whole person. The mind, emotions and will are all involved.

Secondly, *training (reducing variance) may be a needed step in a person's education (liberation).* Sidney Jourard points out how this occurs in the training of therapists

(and we believe the same is true of most communication skills training):

"I think that when one is training, one should be given a rigid way of being so that you have a model to wean yourself to, so that you can wean yourself from the ways of being you learned from mother, father, Sunday school, your neighborhood, and so on."²

Once a person is liberated from unthinking repetition of behaviors that are often dysfunctional and has learned a new set of responses (that hopefully are more functional in more situations) he has enlarged his options from one to two. Now that he is liberated from strict reliance on one set of patterns that have been used automatically from childhood, it will be easier for him to experiment with still other options.

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TRAINING OTHERS IN INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

At Ridge, our workshops rely on training. But we believe training would generally serve the purposes of education (liberation). When people object to the rigidity of the types of responses they are taught to make, we cannot simply hear and reflect what they are saying. We must agree that vital communication is more spontaneous than the way it is taught in the early stages of training.

We have found that the best way to help people achieve spontaneity is to teach them to discipline themselves to behave in the limited and rigid manner taught in the training program until they are weaned from past patterns. Our goal, however, is to free people to be spontaneous with each other. The guidelines we offer are often broken by people who are truly effective communicators.

Coleridge said, "make any truth too definite and you make it too small." That is what training does. It makes truth definite. It says "do this, not that." That definite-ness is helpful at first. But the truth is larger than training indicates and the truly effective practitioner needs to transcend his training.

Ideally, the trainer, even as he or she teaches rigid patterns of behavior, points to a time when these narrow responses can be used with greater flexibility and even abandoned on some occasions. Unfortunately, many trainers do not see the larger picture and train people to use their knowledge or skills in limited ways. Forever.

Whether classroom-based or not, most training programs are too short to achieve their desired objectives—liberating a person from the restrictions of his or her training. Jourard says that rigid adherence to your training will not necessarily be effective in interpersonal communication. It is helpful to learn patterned responses in training.

"But that is only half training. The other half is provided through supervision. Once a master is persuaded that the pupils have mastered the basic discipline, then he must afford encouragement and challenge to his student...First he must guide the pupil in the ways of basic discipline. But then, he mustn't

be satisfied until he sees his pupil is ready, responsibly, to surpass his training in any responsible way that seems relevant in that moment to accomplish some therapeutic objective...You know people are always looking for an absolute rule that will relieve them of the responsibility of evaluating each situation on its own unique merits, and then risking an action. Well, I think training should teach you rules, but then your trainer should encourage you or prod you to go beyond the rules in response to the call of the immediate therapeutic situation. This is where masters of the Zen way can teach something. A Zen master presumably is an expert at getting someone to master some technique and then tricking him, bulldozing him, so he will forget technique and respond unselfconsciously and spontaneously. The response is most likely then to be relevant and appropriate, with head and heart in congruence."³

In our own experience teaching communication skills, there simply isn't enough time to do both halves of the training. And the trend is toward ever-shorter classroom-based learning experiences. Even when a program affords enough time to learn the basic disciplines of communication, the trainer's attitude, design and didactic will either encourage or discourage the transcendence of patterned responses. Ironically, when a teacher insists that students never break the rules of communication being taught, he is often less effective in teaching those rules. Students sense in an inarticulate way that there is more to it than these rules. As a result, trainee resistance hardens.

In Ridge training, people are encouraged to make specific kinds of responses, not because there is one set of right answers. We do work hard on the specific responses, but we know there is an even

better way of communication beyond the techniques we teach.

Even as we teach patterned responses we are aware that communication is an exchange of meaning between real people. Though the heights of communication lie far beyond the mechanical responses of a technically competent communicator, becoming technically competent is an important way station to a larger goal. When training can serve as a springboard, it has served its purpose well.

ABOUT RIDGE

Ridge Associates helps leading companies realize the full value of customer and employee relationships through skillful communication. For more information, call 800-691-7720 or visit www.ridge.com.

NOTES

1. Sidney Jourard, *Disclosing Man to Himself*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968. p. 127.
2. Op. cit., p.72.
3. Op. cit., pp. 72–74. Jourard was writing for and about therapists.