

Book Review

Performance-Based Instruction: Linking Training to Business Results

Dale Brethower and Karolyn Smalley

Performance-Based Instruction: Linking Training to Business Results

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998

Reviewed by Charles Bishop

This recent addition to the field of performance-based education is a readable how-to manual designed for human resource managers, faculty and students interested in organizational development and "rugged individualists," an artificial category given the general focus of the book but one obviously designed to pick up any stray buyers that might respond to this appellation. The authors, Dale Brethower and Karolyn Smalley--the former a professor of psychology at Western Michigan University and the latter a management consultant and former human resource development administrator--argue that applying the principles of performance-based instruction will improve productivity in both the workplace and the classroom.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One outlines a "practical approach to training issues" by essentially detailing in workbook fashion how to answer behavioral objectives guru Robert Mager's three questions: 1) Where am I going; 2) How shall I get there; and 3) How will I know when I've arrived? The importance of teamwork, guided observation and guided practice, the demonstration of mastery and the often discussed implications of the Hawthorne Effect are included in this section. Part Two suggests how organizations can become performance-based through the application of principles outlined in the work of Marcia Heiman and J. Slomianko in their book *Learning to Learn: Critical Thinking Skills for the Quality Workforce (1994)*, the title of which is copyrighted as an educational process and used repeatedly as a mantra during Brethower's and Smalley's discussion. What is "learning to learn"? As briefly defined by the authors, ". . .the full process is *asking, answering, and checking answers to questions*" (p. 161). Of course, the method also weaves into the process a learner-centered classroom focus, a teacher model emphasizing facilitation and guidance rather than "sage on the stage," and measurable instructional outcomes--themes that have been popular in schools of education and among behavioral psychologists since the 1960s (and much before that in the work of psychologists John Watson, B.F. Skinner and Fred Keller). While there is no footnote to document the assertion, the authors claim that application of the "learning to learn" system has encouraged student retention, increased graduation rates among high-risk students at Boston College, and at Roxbury Community College, between 70-80 percent of the students taking the "learning to learn" course graduated as compared to 40 percent of the students who received traditional subject matter tutoring. Why higher educational institutions have not lined up in train loads to adopt such a system given these impressive results is not explained by the authors.

As a workbook for staff development or human resource professionals involved in training new employees, *Performance-Based Instruction* and its accompanying diskette of checklist and tables will probably be helpful with its learning by doing/mastery of skill emphasis. As a handbook on instructional development for academicians, it has less to offer since so much has already been written on the topic of performance-based education, a literature that is barely mentioned either in the text or the bibliography. As for the "rugged individualists," they will certainly be turning to more meatier fare.

About the Author

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