

Training the Whole

Person

If your training goals include preparing people to move themselves from novice to expert levels of performance, then holistic methods may be for you.

By RALPH STRAUCH

Inadequate assumptions about how people learn too often cripple employee training programs. Inefficiency and low productivity are the undesirable results.

Many training theorists assume that the best way to understand how people perform a complex activity is by breaking that activity down into logically distinct pieces. And the best way to train that activity, then, is by starting with the pieces, later combining them into larger pieces and eventually into the required activity as a whole. To teach someone to drive, for example, you would first teach them about steering, breaking, and the other pieces of driving before putting those pieces together into the larger act of driving.

A correspondingly holistic approach to training makes the object of attention the complete activity rather than an isolated piece. The core assumption underlying this approach—that competent performance requires the involvement of the whole person in the whole task—is not even an issue for consideration when you see the problem as one of teaching the activity as a set of isolated pieces.

Holistic training has been used successfully in tennis instruction and movement training, examples that may seem far removed from most business training situations. Nevertheless, they can be

used to isolate and clarify principles with far broader application.

Inner tennis

Tennis instruction usually proceeds from the conventional piecemeal perspective described above. The instructor focuses on teaching the student isolated components of good tennis playing such as the grip, the stance and the swing. The student's play is evaluated in terms of how well he or she performs each of these pieces, and corrections are made accordingly. Thus, for example, if the student has a bad stance, the instructor will call attention to that fact so the student can correct it.

Holistic training in tennis is exemplified by the approach developed by Timothy Gallwey (author of *Inner Tennis* and, with Robert Kriegel, co-author of *Inner Skiing*). A typical lesson might run along the lines described below. (This lesson parallels one I watched Gallwey give as a demonstration. The student was a non-athletic woman in her mid-30s who never had played tennis before.)

The lesson starts with the student on one side of the net holding a racket, and the instructor on the other. The instructor begins by tossing balls across the net. The student's job is simply to notice what's happening and to say "toss" and the instructor lets go of the ball and "bounce" when the ball bounces in the student's court. After the student has done this successfully several times, the instructor begins a toss but doesn't complete it. The student says "toss ... bounce" anyway, anticipating continuation of the past pat-

tern. The lesson is clear. There is a difference between being aware of what's actually happening and only partially paying attention, relying on the continuation of past patterns. The student soon learns this lesson and is able to stay fully aware of when the ball is tossed and when it bounces, even though the instructor varies his timing considerably.

The instructor continues to toss balls, but the student's task changes. She must now say "bounce" when the ball bounces and "hit" when she would hit the ball, but without making any attempt to actually hit it. At first, she says "hit" too early or too late, but soon she is saying "hit" just as the ball passes her body. Next the instructor asks her to begin swinging the racket while she continues to say "hit," without being concerned about whether or not she actually hits the ball. Soon, she is hitting the ball every time and returning it to the center of the far court.

In the demonstration I watched, nothing was said about stance, grip and the other "pieces" of good tennis playing. However, by the time the student was returning the ball regularly across the net (about 20 minutes), her stance, grip and swing were all very good.

Conventional vs. Holistic

What's going on here? How does it differ from conventional tennis instruction? Let's go back to first principles and ask what training is all about. Both forms have the same underlying purpose: teaching the trainee to perform an activity that she previously **could** not perform. The activity is too complex for the student to grasp

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all at once, so the training must approach it through a series of steps. The difference between the two modes of training lies in the way each selects those steps. Conventional training divides the activity into pieces (stance, grip, swing) that are not complete in themselves and tries to teach each piece in isolation. The holistic approach, on the other hand, always works with a complete pattern of activity, starting simply and gradually growing in complexity toward the activity being trained.

The two modes of instruction are aimed at different aspects of the student's being. Conventional instruction is directed at the controlling, intellectualizing part of the mind; the holistic approach directs itself more toward the part of the person which does the activity and experiences the doing. Gallwey refers to these two aspects of the person as "Self 1" and Self 2," and I use the terms "ego" and "body knowledge."

These different aspects exist in each of us and perceive of and deal with the world in very different ways. Self 1, the ego, divides the world into pieces, intellectualizes about the relationship between those pieces and attempts to interact with the world by controlling the various pieces separately. Self 2, our body knowledge, sees things as integrated wholes and interacts with the environment in complete patterns of activity. The ego sees the individual trees, while body knowledge deals with the forest.

We tend to be more aware of the ego, and to identify ourselves with it. We are less in touch with our body knowledge, seldom noticing the constant role it plays in our lives. We consciously experience it only fleetingly, perhaps letting go of the ego in lovemaking or for short periods in some other activity when everything seems to flow. Both aspects of self are important, and we couldn't get along with either one alone.

We need to be able to look at the pieces of things, and to intellectually understand relationships among them. Yet instruction which proceeds exclusively from that point of view is defective. People don't do pieces of activity in isolation. People only do things as part of a total pattern of activity. When we act, that action must be an integrated pattern of activity, and body knowledge seems much better suited to monitor and direct such a pattern than does the ego.

Conventional instruction can teach the pieces, but may fail to integrate those pieces into an overall pattern. With the holistic approach the student works with

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patterns of activity that take her closer to the activity being trained, so these problems do not arise. Starting simply, she learns to differentiate the task environment and to cope successfully with that increasingly differentiated environment. If she ultimately learns to do the whole thing right, the pieces will take care of themselves. Learning the whole activity will teach you the pieces, but learning all the pieces individually may not teach you the overall activity.

This is why the tennis student described above learned a good grip and stance without explicit instruction. Good stance and good grip are not arbitrarily prescribed as "right" by some higher authority. Rather, they are natural consequences of good tennis playing, the best way of doing those parts of the larger activity. That may be lost when tennis is taught as a collection of isolated pieces, but when it is learned as a holistic activity engaging the whole player the pieces fall into place as naturally as a ball tossed in the air falls to earth.

Business applications

Teaching tennis may seem far removed from the training concerns of most businesses, but the principles involved are universal and apply to all forms of instruction. In Los Angeles, Gallwey has developed training programs for such diverse groups as telephone operators, technicians, salesmen, and managers.

The telephone operator's job is fairly simple; the training program was designed to overcome the boredom frequently felt by operators who were not being challenged. Gallwey made the job more interesting by giving the operators more to do. The human voice is incredibly rich in information, most of which we ignore when we listen to people. Gallwey taught the operators to hear that information and to notice whether the caller was old or young, calm or agitated, self-assured or self-conscious. As operators began to do this, each call became a new and challenging experience. Boredom faded, and productivity improved. The customers

benefited as well from the increased personal attention they received from operators receptive to them as human beings rather than as disembodied voices on the phone.

Gallwey's other programs followed the same basic pattern, leading the learner towards coping with an increasingly complex environment in ways that made the problems easier to deal with. Technicians were taught to be aware of when they were in a learning mode as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of more conventional training programs. Salesmen learned to become more aware of their customer's ongoing reactions to their sales presentations, increasing rapport between salesman and customer and lessening the chances of throwing away a sale that could have been closed. Managers learned to become more sensitive to the people they managed, in turn increasing the sensitivity and productivity of those under them.

The Feldenkrais method

Another important source of ideas relating to holistic training is the work of Israeli physicist Moshe Feldenkrais, who over the past 40 years has developed a revolutionary system of psychophysical education. Feldenkrais believes that all human actions involve (or should involve) the entire brain/body system, and depend on an internal mental model or *self-image*. Poor performance results from an incomplete or incorrect self-image, which leads us to take actions in ways which are inefficient or counterproductive.

You can demonstrate this for yourself. Turn **your head** slowly to the right to look over your shoulder, and see how far it goes. If your self-image sees "head moving" as something that takes place only in the head and neck, then you may unconsciously hold your back rigid as you turn, severely restricting your range of motion. On the other hand, if you allow your entire back and spine to move freely you will be able to turn much farther with greater ease.

Feldenkrais teaches people to improve by using repeated small movement patterns and directed attention to enhance their self-image and know (and drop) those aspects of their actions that are ineffective or counterproductive. In the case of the head rotation discussed above, for example, repeated small rotations of the head and neck might be used to involve the spine. This allows the back to move more freely and the head to turn further and more easily than before. Im-

mediate gains in flexibility, ease and range of motion are not uncommon, and chronic pain may suddenly vanish.

Improvement is not due to the movement itself, but to the increased self-awareness that comes from paying attention to how you move. In fact, if you didn't get a noticeable change, then you probably didn't attend to what you were doing. For further evidence that the change is due to increased self-awareness rather than simply to the movement, try the following. Turn your head right and left once or twice and notice the difference. It is common to find it easier to go to the right. Repeat the above movements to the left in your imagination, without actually moving. As you do so, notice the same kinds of changes and spreading awareness that you were aware of when you actually moved to the right. Then stop, actually move your head to the left and right, and see how it feels. Many people will now find the difference between the two sides greatly diminished, even though no actual movement to the left was made.

Most people (though not everyone) will notice the effects of even this little bit of movement and directed attention. Feldenkrais *Awareness Through Movement* lessons (of which this was a very short and simple sample) usually take 45 minutes to an hour done under the guidance of a trained teacher, and the effects are proportionately greater. Over the years Feldenkrais has developed thousands of these lessons, working with all parts of the body. They have proved to be of benefit to a wide variety of people, ranging from cerebral palsy, stroke, and chronic pain sufferers to athletes and performing artists, and including many ordinary people interested in extending and enhancing their own capabilities.

There are two sets of issues to be considered when thinking about the applicability of this work in business settings. The first concern the utility of the method as it is normally taught, i.e., in the form of lessons such as those described above. The second concern the potential for tailoring the work to specific business applications, as Gallwey has. I'll briefly look at each in turn.

Feldenkrais instruction works as a tool for enhancing employee well-being. Employees who learn to be more aware of themselves and their bodies will feel better and work better. Stress levels should drop, and employees should develop the ability to keep them low. Health problems like lower back pain

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should diminish, with a resulting decrease in absenteeism.

However, beyond these obvious, direct benefits lie subtler benefits that may be even more important. *Awareness Through Movement* lessons are a complex process in which learning takes place at many levels simultaneously. The student learns to move more easily by directing attention to the process of movement. The movement in turn serves as a tool to teach broader self-awareness, leading to the direct benefits cited above. But self-awareness is not separate and distinct from other forms of awareness; it is one aspect of an overall sense which we apply to the world around us as well as to ourselves.

The student can solve problems requiring a broad viewpoint more easily than someone with narrower perceptions, and to avoid the kinds of oversights and mistakes that frequently result from too narrow a focus. He can learn more easily, because he can process as a whole material that someone with a narrower field of view might only be able to see as a collection of isolated pieces.

At yet another level, he is learning a new way to learn: exploring, noticing and coming to trust his own internal sense of "rightness" rather than that of some external authority. Or perhaps he is just rediscovering the mode of learning we were all born knowing, which served us so well during the period of massive learning in the first few years of our lives. In any case, that mode of learning does not apply only to self-awareness and body use. It can generalize, and make all learning easier whatever the subject matter.

The methods of Gallwey and Feldenkrais teach new ways of learning that are independent of the particular material being learned. Both encourage greater attention to the process of performing an activity than to the end goal. Yet almost paradoxically as the process is performed more efficiently, the goal is achieved more easily—even as it receives less conscious attention. Learning in these ways goes beyond the par-

ticular activity being trained, affecting other areas of the student's life as well.

At master levels of competence, decision-making approaches a completely holistic response. Expert race drivers sometimes speak of being "one with the car." The wider application of holistic training would produce more quickly and directly higher levels of competence—and reduce the time and effort ineffectively spent training novice performance.

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