

LOOKING AT TODAY'S REALITIES:

There's a new reality evident in any business' outlook on its meetings. That reality has been catapulted into the business mainstream by a number of previously-discrete considerations that have combined to establish new opportunities for business to retake the meetings field.

You can help to take back the meetings/training discipline from the advertisers; the freebie magazines in the commercialized meetings- industry; and the sychophantic associations that have misled their own members for decades in order to get free publicity from the freebies. The associations are playing catch-up now.

Five critical findings affect your, and your company's, executives, including the VP/Sales, CLO, Advertising Director, Training Director, department heads, and even line managers--everyone whose personal job performance results depend in large part on the performance of others.

However, none of those five alone established or created the current climate for change--their recent coincidence did.

Here, correlated, are those findings and our interpretations, developed and held after nearly 50 years in the meetings/training professions and trade(s). . .distinct from the overly-commercialized meetings-industry.

First finding:

Recent studies and literature indicate that 'expertise' in performance requires about 10,000 hours of 'deliberate practice' in nearly any field.

That '10,000 Hour Rule' was first established regarding athletic performance but has been found to be valid in virtually any performance skill--arts, athletics--and jobs?" Malcolm Gladwell, the author-source, was interviewed on TV in mid-'09 by Charlie Rose.

Don't take our word for it. Just search the term '10,000 Hour Rule' on "Advertising Age," specifically, and/or Google, generally.

Regardless of the extent to which the 10,000-hour-count applies to non-performed, intellectual endeavors, it's finally unarguable that there's a significant and substantial practice period related to any appreciable new skill. . .and it can probably be codified for any discipline.

In a current scramble to appear competent, a major meetings user-association is describing 'new levels' of meeting-planners' requirements (known since the '70s) as 'cutting edge'. . . but 'new' only to that meetings-industry, not to the related professions or trade(s). More below.

Why? That finding of 10,000 (or however many) hours needed to hone any skill destroys those meetings-industry magazines' (and their dominated meeting-industry associations') claims of leadership and expertise. Remember, we view the overly-commercialized 'industry' as being distinct from the related 'professions' and 'trade(s).'

Although already covered in some business publications, the '10,000 Hour Rule' has not been noted in the meetings-industry press. Self-protection? Most of the meetings-industry's 'magazine writers' have no experience in planning meetings and so can't understand the significance of deliberate practice as a qualifier or how and why their writings are inadequate in terms of Meetings Management.

All salesmen who demonstrate are performing. Most sales training occurs in meetings-rooms. No, they don't need 10M hours (five average years) with each color of widget, but with all widgets together, probably yes. Spoken text aside, once these salesmen have demonstrated widgets and ancillary products and services for multiple thousands of hours, they're probably on their way to becoming decent sales people.

Do additional thousands of hours produce sales-aces? Don't wonder: just take a survey of applied-hours among your best and mediocre salespeople. Build your training around your own findings and statistics!

Early sheltered-practice and good sales-script outlines build confidence and can make a real difference in early

sales results. That was demonstrated in the 1960s by Motorola's Mobile Radio experience, via their training as revamped to proved methods. How?

When brought inside as Training Manager, an ace-salesman hired an assistant who understood and used methodologies that approximated the military's later ISD (Instructional Systems Development) program. Training-know-how plus sales know-how. It worked like gangbusters! The chief's successor re-evaluated and re-adopted that initial program with minor changes. He also placed a consulting project with the departed once-assistant.

Skills take time to learn but can often be learned in less time if taught by authorities/experts. Facts remain facts and should drive all of your programs!

Second finding:

'Pay-for-Play' can cause even paid-circulation magazines to trade free PR space for paid ads (see "Advertising Age"; search that term). Once-upon-a-time, PR space was earned by merit! Now PR space can be meretricious.

The disinformation and misinformation in the feebies were astounding. Reading their superficial and often misleading articles of that time will prove the charge. Why should you believe in any magazine when your reading could be a shell game? That lamentable practice by a few is injuring the credibility of the entire publishing industry.

The fact of 'P-f-P' now in publishing indicates that such advertising dominance could have existed as charged in the '70s against the meetings freebie press--the only meetings press. The name itself derived decades ago from the phono-records scandal. So much for the Professor's "The market can regulate itself."

Third finding:

Studies of car phone-related accidents found double the accident rate among hand-held talkers at accident time, vs non-talking drivers. So hand-held units were banned in California, in favor of speaker-phones; but the higher accident rate persisted.

State's conclusion: the fact of concentration on the conversation--not the fact of the hand-held unit itself--was the culprit. New laws? No surprise.

In its own published study, "Car & Driver" magazine studied the problem. In every driver test, concentration on the conversation or texting resulted in slower reaction times for the driving component. Also, no surprise.

Big surprise: the same problem exists with cellphone-walkers! When people are checking their text pads, they're not watching where they're walking. . .and some have had serious accidents at about double the expected norm. Why should we require accidents before believing studies?

The US military's research had discovered decades ago that we cannot maintain vigilance in two sensory channels simultaneously. Yet, business still swears by multi-tasking practice, although serial single-tasking obtains better results. Choose between fads and facts!

Neither was notice taken of the limits-findings by the meetings-industry. Cell phone laws are only the latest and most specific application of that principle by lax governmental agencies.

This and other ignored research was noted in Cavalier's "FirstTake" article (1985), as mentioned below. Where in the meetings-industry are the new practices or methodologies that would honor all such previous research?

Fourth finding:

After three-plus decades, a major association of meetings-industry suppliers has designed a code of 'acceptable practices.' Which suggests that unacceptable practices (a few, below) were already common. Those unacceptable practices were also published in 1970s' related business publications--simply ignored by the meetings-industry. Deficiency is finally being admitted.

A recent survey of 157 members by the American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) found a lamentable ethics situation among publishers. Over two-third of those editors who responded indicated a need for better practices and guidelines. Remember, you've been believing their printed text--and buying accordingly?

Fault and failed meetings are simply denied by the meetings-industry.

Currently, the meetings-industry's largest corporate-user association has 'discovered' new levels of 'cutting edge' skill and requirements for meeting planners who wish to improve their capabilities--to 1970 standards, previously ignored. Of course there are other deficiencies:

Few working Meeting Managers write pop articles. Those persons who do write rarely challenge objectionable practices by the industry's many suppliers. By choice? Might 'publish-or perish' cause misconceptions or compromise among related professionals who themselves don't have the requisite hours of Meetings Management experience?

Never-acknowledged-in-print, but objectionable, practices include delays in room-set-ups; limited bilingual house-crew chiefs who usually supervise multiple-room set-ups simultaneously--but are not always available when needed; sales of 'unused' public space to third parties after dissuading the given organization from protecting that space in written contract. 'Observably unused' and 'essential purpose' are different concepts.

Will export of defective methods via associations' foreign convention locations provide enough static so that the associations can avoid acknowledging their years of inadequacy, as reflected in their past meeting-planner-certification programs?

Biggest deficiency: Coverage of photogenic-events and convention exhibits is no substitute for know-how in Meetings Management. Advertising aside, most industry magazines promote stage shows as guaranteed photo-ops.

That reflects their 'inintentional' misunderstanding of one of my client's published remarks: Joseph L. Koach, then-Convention Manager of the Linen Supply Association of America (newly 'Fabric Rental') wrote about a touch of show-biz for between-speaker relief. . .but the magazines turned it into an opportunity for show-biz extravaganzas! Good for ads and advertisers--not so good for your message and budget. There's a built-in conflict-of-interest among freebies magazines in all fields!

Koach's article--smudgy photocopy of the original carbon plus a re-key--is found on this website, as indicated below). He wrote of Meeting Management (distinct from meeting planner) in 1960.

Discrepancies between associations' and advertisers' bald claims and truly authoritative response to 'expert' requirements have resulted in numerous business meeting failures--or 'disappointments,' in politically-correct terminology. The meetings-industry didn't officially notice meeting failures in the past: therefore, very common failures 'didn't exist.' The web ended that censorship and deception.

Fifth finding:

A guru of classic training technique, Malcolm Knowles, had long ago stated: "Entertainment provides present-moment satisfaction; training requires present-moment dis-satisfaction in order to promote learning."

Comment: Applause is not a measure of learning. Applause for the show-biz values indicates present-moment satisfaction--an entertainment value that can contribute negatives--as does any spectacle with maxi-media (anything beyond need).

How do those five findings fit together?

Communication, not entertainment! In large meetings, think about group-communication, not technological splendor!

It's now okay (Thanks, web) to talk about and work with non-expensive, non-salable needs. But do-it-yourself is unpopular with the advertising-dominated crowd: they can't sell you your own message.

In the pre-web days, when unfavorable information could be blacked-out, there was rarely a mention of educationally-required elements or failed meetings in the industry press. Now, meetings failure can be admitted, discussed and blogged, and remedied by attention to the message.

But is that message being prepared by authorities on that topic?

For any program, program preparation by non-authorities is wasteful of everyone's work and time. . .prone to failure through inadequacy and to the waste of opportunity, same inadequacy. Moreover, because few of the freebie magazines' 'writers' have ever planned a meeting or earned their '10,000 Hour' trade expertise, they

discuss “It looks good,” not “It achieved stated objectives by or as measured by. . .”

When management fails to deliver messages that are clear, reasonable, and do-able; and when needed practice and tools are not provided, don’t blame your employees for not learning. That’s management’s fault! Experts/authorities know what they need in order to communicate their own know-how. Give them what they need--don’t require them to use what the ads and freebies tell you that the authorities need.

Pretty baubles, razzle-dazzle, and geometric seating patterns were never a substitute for proper delivery, understanding, and practice--all are related to the key message when it’s properly presented.

‘The message is the message’ was published in our 1970s column and 1973 book; and repeated in our 1983 book: that comment, in ‘83, plus, “And don’t you forget it!”

All advertisers would have been--and will be--better served by attention to their specific successes and examined failures. That creates confidence in the ad claims for readers and prospects as well as enhanced reader confidence in the editorial integrity of the magazines, by which the advertisers themselves benefit.

Many aspects of meeting planning were delivered in the early 1970s: Books by most authors discussed particular elements of meeting room needs but offered no overall system for use. Meetings are not a collection of independent tips and activities.

In addition to our expert columns and 1973’s “Achieving Objectives in Meetings” book, Richard Cavalier was acknowledged as an authority at that time (this website: ‘Recognition’ and ‘BW’ [“Business Week”] buttons.) The information was out there--simply ignored.

The 1970s? Old? In our ‘latest-thing’ business climate--yes. But irrelevant: the human brain hasn’t changed much in 10,000 years, according to scientists. Research-based educational principles are still valid. New brain research has identified real estate wherein each action registers, but scientists still can’t tell us how and why consciousness occurs.

In the meetings field, most ‘latest-thing’ hits have been limited-term fads; and the majority are gone. Even the once-ubiquitous Programmed Learning has been restricted to sequential tasks, not conceptual learning.

Programmed Learning can aid sequential tasks but can’t help with conceptual learning. When learning to ride a bike, did you learn first how to balance, and then how to steer, and then how to peddle? Or all together?

The training and long-ignored educational principles (embraced by most corporate trainers and us during that ‘70s decade and since) are still valid and efficient. ‘Most,’ above because many good salesmen are brought inside to teach other but don’t know how. They’re fodder for the big guns in the advertising-dominated meetings-industry.

Competent Trainers are simply not supportive of the meetings-industry’s sacred-cow slogans or the meetings-associations’ misdirected purposes. It don’t ‘gotta be’ face-to-face for hotel/airline benefit; for your own benefit, only maybe. The message determines.

Remember that, decades ago, American Express identified central business meetings as using up two-thirds of any corporations annual travel budget. Comment: That monster feeds on its own size, requiring more and more-expensive adjunct equipment while it demands larger and more-expensive hotels and public meeting rooms.

Also decades ago, “Sales & Marketing Management” magazine (which printed our column) demonstrated that regional meetings are always more less costly (more cost-effective) than either one central or multiple-local meetings.

For a list of important (previously published but ignored) 1060s-’70s contra-industry findings, see ‘FirstTake’ A/V magazine (‘85), under “Recognition/Industry’ buttons (approx page 13 of 48, scrolled).

Same location, ‘BW’ button holds our consumerist articles for two “Business Week” special-ad-issues, which

the travel industry declined to support (not signed: magazine-independence offended, not this writer).

Same location: Citations for third party research, under 'Granddaddy' button. AOM & Early mag columns' button.

For thumbnail summaries of yr2000 challenges from "Training" magazine to the meetings industry's sacred cows, slogans, and attitudes, check this same website: 'Titles' button; then 'Final Thoughts' segment, at the asterisk below the "ISD" book.

Those challenges appeared over several years, early in the yr2000s, while "Training" was still an independent publication. 'Training' is now owned by a publisher of meetings-industry freebies. . .and, for some reason, no longer prints such challenges to its new sisters. Once, that was sufficient for blackouts on truth and meetings failures--now, there's a new climate: "Looking at Today's Realities" segment at the top of this section.

The meetings industry's various associations have been trying to create 'instant expert' meeting planners via certification courses; most courses lasted a few dozen hours. Viewed against the '10,000 (or other count) Hour Rule,' such certificates are, in fact, Certificates of Inadequacy. Yet, these groups will announce 'new levels' of requirements and skills without acknowledging past inadequacies.

Moreover, the same associations that have for decades failed the related professions and trade are now trumpeting their belated 'discovery' of advanced levels of performance capability. When they claim 'cutting edge' learning for old knowledge, they're misleading their own members. Their shortcomings are demonstrated in the "FirstTake" and "Training" articles mentioned above. Why was association Missing In Action when best-methods needed to be established, way back in the 1970s?

Some associations and magazines recommended that their meeting planner members get involved in buying insurance for their 'events.' Why should neophytes be buying insurance? A company officer is already in charge. How great for preying insurance salespeople, ads, and ad-sales!

On a cover, "Inc." magazine stated that "Fun is now a core value." Who sez? Whose private agenda was "Inc." pursuing?

Accommodating 'events' is becoming an all-encompassing term--serving the purveyors. 'Events' rather than 'meetings' surely casts a wider advertiser net: balloons and clowns are conceivably valid at some 'events.' But at how many meetings, if any? That (intentional?) diffusion and confusion of legitimate trade purposes for meetings needs does not aid any competent meetings professional.

Misinformation and disinformation in the business press is the signature of editors who defer to the viewpoints of private-agendas and meetings-industry freebies when determining which stories to include in their issues. Education is the sole remedy. . .and who better than the ASBPE can address their own findings via sponsored education programs?

Meanwhile: Upshot and remedies for you to use, whether you're a VP/Sales or just a helpful colleague:

Disregard the 'buy-something' blandishments of the meetings-industry freebie magazines and concentrate on the educational, training, and emotional elements and needs of your individual meeting messages. That's free.

Those needs vary from issue to issue and meeting to meeting. Answers don't come in a box: management must apply identified learning principles and clear thought. Maxi-media (in excess of need) can split attention spans. So begin with human beings, not budget-blasters.

Then expect your organization's staff meeting planner to handle the still- significant logistical requirement for hotels and airlines--if you need a central meeting.

But demand that those staff ‘certificated meeting-planner experts’ refuse to compromise with hotels regarding the legitimate lectern and staging needs of that message--if you really need hotels and airlines. See the “American Express” reference, above.

If the hotel won’t bend before and in written contract, you’ve been warned! Go elsewhere, because many independent facilities and most chains have an ‘in writing only’ policy and approach to disagreements.

Next, look through the 1970s-world’s professional journals and how-to books in the meetings trade, including those of Richard Cavalier. Find out for yourself what help has been available for decades. . .without blasting your budget. Don’t be led astray by the opinionated books by no-experience “writers” in the meetings-industry.

Books that collect articles by multiple authorities can present good and usable information, but provide no system to combine the materials offered. That demands your own cut-and-paste operation into a possibly-faulty Meetings Management technique.

We all know that The Other Guy conducts lousy meetings. Don’t let yourself be The Other Guy for The Other Guy!

Finally, if your organization sells anything to the meetings trade, consider the greater conviction value that can be gained in advertising via respected trade journals and paid-circulation magazines.

When you are ready to switch your advertising to those publications whose editors and texts you think you trust, check: Pay-for-Play could have infected even your favorite paid-subscription publications. So first, ask to see a copy of their Codes of Ethics. Then decide. . .and reward deserving publications with your business. That combination of actions will reflect your own know-how. It’s free! And good ad-buyer technique.

Now, how much more attention can you pay to your message?”

Final notes:

Versions of the segment above were sent e-mail in Fall, ’09 to dozens of e-list business meeting editors, to selected ad agencies, and also to key meetings-equipment manufacturers and other purveyors who advertise.

If they get the message, you should be seeing responsive articles by Spring, ’10. If not, ask why not. Editors should ultimately get your message: that responsible publications deserve support once they understand and honor educational- and fact-based meetings structure and needs.

Before you feel absolutely-in-control, understand that there’s been no professional journal in the Training or Meetings Management fields. . .partly because corporate managements have felt that ‘anybody can do it’--and so have been unwilling to pay for such a publication. Think of all the problems already purchased with those savings! And be sure that your firm’s ad agency understands where you’re coming from. . . .

Finally, before you feel absolutely-in-charge, keep in mind that the reason that there’s no professional journal for meetings or training is partly the fault of business. Corporate managements have preferred to believe that ‘It’s easy’ and have been reluctant to pay for a professional approach if they can get “free” information. That seem to be the web’s problem now, too. What will you do to change things?