COMPUTERWORLD

The 100 Best Places to Work

June 1996

JUGGLING PRIORITIES

IS executives master the art of creating a thriving workplace

- Training
- Work Styles
- Diversity
- Survey Results

Michael Radcliff, CIO
Owens Corning

Balancing *the* Best

As a manager, I know something about juggling priorities. There's staff development, strategic planning, project management, new technology applications, budgeting and, oh yes, satisfying the customer. If you take your eyes off any one of these balls, they all can come crashing down.

We put Michael Radcliff, CIO of Owens Corning, on the cover of this issue because the juggling metaphor captures the essence of what it takes to be a Best Place to Work. He really does know how to juggle, and so does his entire IS group — all 150 of them. (The group photo below is testimony.)

In the pages of this year's Best Places to Work issue, we celebrate IS staffs from 100 companies, universities and government agencies. If you are electronically inclined, you can access each of these Best Places to Work through *Computerworld*'s home page at http://www.computerworld.com.

My hope is that you will use the Best Places to Work to benchmark your own organization and to improve your juggling skills.
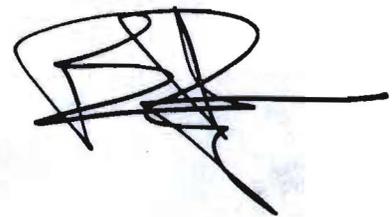
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Owens Corning global development team members, from left: Sharon Crowle, Kevin Gabel, Paul Fortner, David Johns, Tom Alfieri, Dave Lepow and Scott Highman. See articles on pages 31 and 42.

Counting *the* Intangibles

Some things can't be measured.
The Best companies go the extra mile to motivate their IS staffs.

BY AMY MALLOY

Here's a look at the offbeat ideas some of the Best Places to Work institute to motivate and assist their IS employees.

Balls in the air:
Owens Corning

Jugglers walk through the halls, practice in the lunchroom and coach each other at the water cooler. No, this is not tryouts for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. These are information systems employees at Owens Corning in Toledo, Ohio.

"Within IS, juggling is a great metaphor for what we are doing, which is getting everybody involved, mastering their competencies and learning by doing," says Michael Radcliff, Vice President and Chief Information Officer. Juggling is also an appropriate metaphor for managing multiple projects. So at an IS training workshop, Owens Corning's IS staff made a commitment that everyone in the department would learn how to juggle (with the help of an instructor).

The exercise has been a useful tool for understanding the job at hand. "You can't learn to juggle three balls at once. You have to learn to juggle one, learn to juggle two and then learn to juggle three," says Bob Heinaman, resource development leader. The same applies to IS projects — they need to be broken down into smaller components. If the entire project is tackled at once, it becomes difficult to manage.

Once an employee mastered juggling, he became an instructor. "We are not done until everybody can juggle. We all have a responsibility to ourselves for individual transformation, but we also have a collective responsibility to help everyone on the team make the transformation as well," Radcliff says.

The IS team extends beyond the Owens Corning headquarters, encompassing branches throughout the world. Many branches learned how to juggle during the IS training. "The juggling was part of the continuity from workshop to workshop. We focused information systems as a global team. We tried to create a common experience to help with team behavior, team identity and, ultimately, team success," Radcliff says.

Rising to new heights:
Cisco Systems

Would you climb 30 feet in the air relying only on your co-workers and a few ropes for support? Employees in the networking and telecommunications department at San Jose, Calif.-based Cisco Systems, Inc. did.

The staff spent an afternoon last October at Planet Granite, a local indoor rock-climbing facility. Allan Etterman, director of networking and telecommunications, and his staff paired off and took turns climbing the rock blindfolded while a partner called out directions. "It was team oriented, and the team had to support each other at different levels," Etterman explains.

The reason for the rock-climbing expedition? Cisco had hired 14 new IS employees in the networking and
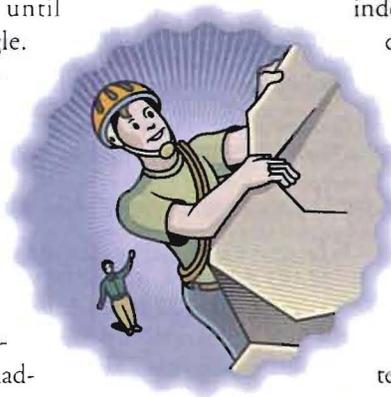
telecommunications department (including contractors) during the past year, and Etterman wanted to give them a chance to get to know one another in a social setting. By the end of the afternoon, employees were relay-racing up the rock. Time permitting, Etterman hopes to get his team together for more activities. "Everybody works so hard here that it is very difficult to get somebody to take 30 minutes off, let alone three hours or more," Etterman says.

Getting an education:
Barnett Banks

Since she was 10 weeks old, 5-year-old Kayla Petrey has spent her days at Barnett Banks in Jacksonville, Fla. — first in day care and now as a kindergartner

at Barnett's on-site elementary school. The bank also has a company-funded before- and after-school program for the children of its 5,000 employees.

"It is one of the driving forces that has kept me here," says Vicki Petrey, Kayla's mother and a security systems analyst at Barnet Technologies, Inc.

Petrey's daughter is one of about 150 students attending the elementary school, which includes kindergarten through third grade. A satellite of the Duval County school system, the school is financed by Barnett and the county school board. Barnett maintains the facility, and the school board provides the teachers and books.

Students at the school benefit from the expertise of parents like Petrey. She helped set up an E-mail system to establish communication between the school

and the bank. Other IS employees installed and set up PCs that their department donated to the school. Parents in the PTA, which Barnett created two years ago, contribute by donating software packages for these systems.

Working in IS, Petrey is usually on call for IS emergencies 24 hours a day, which allows her the freedom to visit her daughter during working hours.

"Any time she has any kind of school activity, I can attend. I'm within walking distance. It takes 30 minutes out of my day. If I had to take her to a regular public school, I would have to drive an hour," Petrey says.

Walk in my shoes:
Southwest Airlines

If you want to be someone else for a day, Southwest Airlines Co. will encourage you to try it. Once a year, the company sponsors a walk-a-mile day, during which employees in various departments within the company get to

experience firsthand what day-to-day activities keep their co-workers busy. Southwest's goal: to increase respect among fellow workers while promoting company awareness.

It's also a good way to find out what works and what doesn't and where changes need to be made.

A case in point: Early in his career at Southwest in Dallas, Ken Rundas, director of the solutions and systems department, encountered a walk-a-mile day employee from the ticket counter at a systems department meeting. The ticket-counter employee made some good suggestions for improving the end process at ticket stations, giving IS staff the end-user perspective.

"People are really anxious to hear other ideas, regardless of what level of the organization they come from," Rundas says.

Act the part:
Price Waterhouse

Consulting is a pretty serious business. That's why Price Waterhouse tries to inject some light-hearted fun into their training course for entry-level consultants by including some elaborate role-playing.

And what better way to do that than have instructors act and dress the parts of clients? Wearing funny hats and outlandish ties, the consultants create distinctive personalities, both agreeable and difficult. "It gives the young consultants an opportunity to get a feel for the kind of issues that come up during a client's engagement and how to deal with them," says Fran Engoron, a senior partner of intellectual capital at the New York-based Big Six company.

To prepare for the role-playing, consultants receive case studies outlining the client's issues. After some study and preparation, the consultants try role-playing. Then they discuss what they learned with the instructors.

"I think it is a good educational experience, and it's also fun for the consultants," Engoron says.

Training
for the
New Millennium

With constant and rapid change a staple of life, it takes a new attitude
toward learning to prepare IS staff for the future

BY DAVID WELDON

Ask Robert Heinaman how many information systems trainers he has on staff at Owens Corning and he doesn't hesitate for a second. "We don't have any," he says.

He's kidding, right? As the director of resources development at a company with 17,000 employees, serving 11 business units at 105 manufacturing sites in 30 countries, shouldn't Heinaman have internal IS trainers by the truckload?

Well, he does, actually, and then some. But they prefer to think of themselves as Owens Corning *employees.*

"We don't keep IS trainers on staff. We expect our people, as they grow, to turn around and reach others," Heinaman says.

Owens Corning isn't alone. Other companies are adopting this learn-to-help-ourselves attitude when it comes to training in the latest technologies and business processes. The reason is simple: rapid change.

Along with changes in attitudes and technologies, companies are changing how their training budgets are spent. On the decrease: full-time IS staff trainers and broad-based staff training. On the increase: short-term third-
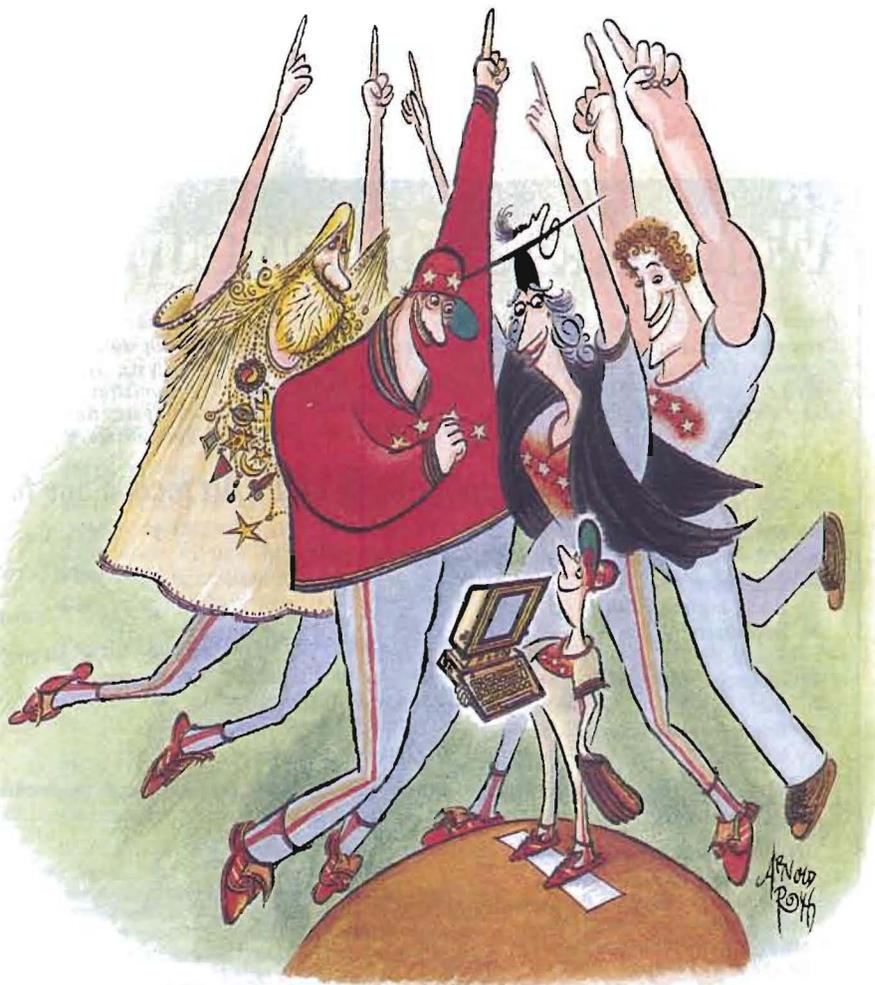
Good communication skills are vital. In this new environment, IS employees "have to become trainers, teachers, coaches and spiritual guides," says Owens Corning's Michael Radcliff.

party trainers, training on a project basis only and training new-technology "champions" picked as much for their business and communications skills as their technology prowess.

"The focus is on learning, rather than training. Learning occurs on a new assignment, and you learn more by doing," Heinaman says. "We look at our training role as providing information the employee needs to use on the job. Teaching how to use a process, rather than a tool, is key."

For IS professionals concerned about career development, the implications are many. On the technology side, companies will invest heavily in the training that employees need, but this will be based on the projects to which they are assigned.

Getting on those projects in the first place means mastering business and "soft" skills, which include facilitation training, conflict resolution and team building.

These project teams include business users, who may be just as uncomfortable working in this environment. It's a new role for both sides, and success depends on open communication.

Ultimately, "it's not the skills in technology that make IS professionals successful," says Michael Radcliff, vice president and chief information officer at Owens Corning. "It's the attitude, 'How do I give value to my business, to my customers?' "

Make way for change
It's critical that Owens Corning employees get this attitude right because the company is in transition. The mainframe systems are being scrapped, and the IS department is halfway through a 100-week move to a new client/server platform. On top of that, Owens Corning is re-engineering all business functions around SAP AG's enterprise client/server software.

Corning has had to completely re-create IS, and all employees had to be retrained in new processes and new technologies.

"It is a massive amount of training to absorb," Radcliff says. And the key to success ultimately will lie with the

ability of employees to help each other through the process. "We've had to learn a lot of new things quickly, to make a lot of mistakes quickly and to become competent in a short amount of time," Radcliff says.

Despite the new technologies that must be mastered, outside trainers are being brought in only for initial training. Their role is to "jump start" each process, Heinaman says. The outside trainers work with selected "champions," who can master both technology and business issues quickly. Once comfortable with a new technology, the champions take over the job of training others, who, in turn, help train others.

In this new environment, good communication skills are vital. IS employees "have to become trainers, teachers, coaches, spiritual guides," Radcliff says. And along the way, managers have to learn trust.

Balanced training
With trust comes responsibility. Employees and managers at Farmland Industries, Inc. in Kansas City, Mo., are learning this lesson firsthand, as they work in partnership to determine individual training.

And there's a lot of training going on at Farmland. The company is six months into a four-year project to completely re-engineer all business processes around SAP. Seven companies essentially are being merged into one. And 25 of the most experienced IS staff have been selected to learn the industry's hottest skill.

When they're through, says John Eller, director of IS planning, these employees can pretty much write their own career tickets. But they weren't picked just for their technology prowess.

"When we first started the SAP project, the Ernst & Young consultants were surprised to notice that the members already had the soft skills needed," Eller says.

These included a consistent record of getting work done on time, a quickness to learn and an ability to under-

stand the business issues.

It wasn't coincidence. Farmland already was involved in a large amount of joint-application development, and communications skills were becoming a large focus of IS training. "Facilitation is an important skill for IS people to have," Eller says. "The ability to work in a true team environment, to be expected to work and be measured in a team, is critical."

But Farmland expects IS employees to take some of the initiative, as well as managers.

"A big part of our performance methodology is career development planning," Eller says. The company provides a variety of training on internal technology, soft skills and productivity. Employees are expected to develop their skills in those areas, and managers are expected to ensure a well-balanced training diet.

Such a training diet is high on the

Upping the Ante

Training is getting a larger percentage of the IS budget

1996

4.9%

1994

3.8%
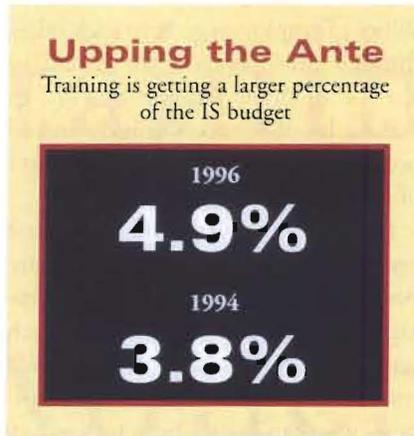
Source: 1996 report on User Needs and Requirements for IT Training by International Data Corp., Framingham, Mass.

priority list at The Home Depot, Inc., in Atlanta.

·Home Depot IS employees spend an average of 11 to 12 days in formal training each year. And the company has an IS training budget of $6,500 per person, more than three times the average for the 100 Best Places to Work. But project training is at the heart of the company's training efforts.

"Employees are barraged with training as they go from project to project," says chief information officer Ron Griffin. Technology training is built into each new project. Home Depot provides whatever technology skills might be needed.

Before any IS project gets under way, IS employees are assigned to work briefly in the business unit. This helps them understand the business issues at hand and get to know their new business partners.

"We have a very strong culture that we try to reinforce at every turn," Griffin says. This means providing training in relationship building, communication skills, leadership, the ability and willingness to speak up and flexibility.

Griffin says this approach to training is new ground for many companies and many employees. "This is a journey; it's not a destination. It's hard to quantify, other than how you see people working together," Griffin says.

The IS professionals who will be successful long-term will be those who can learn and assimilate things quickly, he says. And after mastering the soft skills, "you can adapt more easily to whatever does happen," Griffin says.

Learning to work well with others – quickly – is vital at Maytag Corp. in Newton, Iowa. Teamwork is this company's motto. And with the IS department in the midst of major hiring, new employees will find that training in team building is among the first items of business.

They'll need it. The company is centralizing several autonomous business units, IS included. "Many people will be assuming responsibilities they never had before," says Donald Scott, corporate IS staff specialist for business systems. They'll also have new business partners. This likely will mean an increase in internal IS training on core business strategies, Scott says. But the constant change in technologies will force the company increasingly to go outside for that training.

"The greatest need for training will be more and more emphasis on the team-building part," Scott says. "The IS department is full of techies who flourish in the technology but are very much individuals. We need to think more like a business. We need to communicate better with our business users to understand their needs."

In tune with business

Understanding the needs of business is the cornerstone of IS training at Mellon Bank Corp. in Pittsburgh. And fortunately, many IS professionals are finding this new work and training environment very much to their liking.

When Mellon Bank set out to completely replace its internal networks last year, the first step was for IS professionals to work closely with their business partners. Before tackling any new systems design, IS employees found themselves training for days in customer service or loan application processes.

The impact: "This line training has helped them understand the business issues," says Marty Lippert, vice president of information management. "It makes them more in tune to a total systems approach, rather than just an individual technology approach."

Easier said than done, however. "Implementing that type of training has been the most difficult part of it," Lippert says. "Getting the commitment of all groups takes time." And the project

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pace was intense. But IS team members emerged "charged," Lippert says. "You expect a team to come out of the experience exhausted, and they came out exhilarated."

And why not? The project came in ahead of schedule and under budget. IS team members were learning some pretty hot skills, not to mention the business. And they learned to be IS trainers in the process, now passing along those new skills to their peers.

This new meld of IS employee/trainer is critical for Mellon Bank, Lippert says. Because of a skills shortage in the Pittsburgh job market, Lippert must develop skills in-house, which means spending more on outside training, first to acquire new skills, then to quickly develop widescale expertise within the company.

Turning to Outsiders

IS training now tops the list of targeted outsourcing activities

	1996	1995
1. Training and end-user support	43%	40%
2. Disaster recovery	39%	37%
3. PC procurement and maintenance	38%	49%
4. Application development	37%	40%

Source: 1996 survey on Critical Issues of IS Management by Computer Sciences Corp., El Segundo, Calif.

"The way we're reacting is to take people who have had good track records and put them through intensive training. We get them certified, and then we bring them back internally to teach the others," Lippert says.

The key words here are "good track record." For some, it means a strong technical skills portfolio. For others, it means successful work on previous projects. For still others, it means showing initiative in seeking out their own skills development.

Mellon Bank expects IS employees to plot their own career growth. The IS department has a skills-inventory database of all 1,400 employees. Every job function in the department is clearly defined according to skills and education needed. And every logical career step from each position is outlined. To prepare for the next career step, the employee is expected to seek out training.

"It really paints a very definite career path for them – what courses, what education, what training they need. It puts the responsibility on them to know what it takes to succeed," Lippert says.

WELDON IS COMPUTERWORLD'S SENIOR EDITOR, CAREERS.