

APPLICATION OF IMAGINAL EDUCATION IN TRAINING, INC

Written by Shirley Mueller, Executive Director, Training, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA,
Marie Sharp, Executive Director, Training, Inc., Washington, D.C.,
Anita Gibson, Supervisor of Training, Training, Inc., Indianapolis, IN

Applying Imaginal Education to adult education, Training, Inc. is a clerical skills program designed to empower the long-term unemployed to make the transition to a successful career.

The majority of participants in Training, Inc. are single heads of households who find themselves in dead end situations, with few or no marketable skills and little work history, insufficient education and a lack of sense of worth, of being a valuable member of society and particularly the business community. Training, Inc. offers participants up-to-date curriculum and office equipment, a real office setting in a downtown office building and a track record of an 85% placement rate.

A collaborative effort by business, government and local area networks ensures relevancy to the needs of the employers and the potential employees. Trainees learn in a setting modeled after a working office rather than the traditional classroom. Office systems, workflow, patterns of work and employee interaction are experience through the workplace oriented environment.

The difference this makes is best illustrated in the response of our graduates. Gloria was 35 when she came to Training, Inc. and her four children were 18, 16, 14 and 12 years old. She had been on welfare for 17 years and had no intention of finding a job because, as she states it, being on the assistance meant she knew where the food, housing, and medical care was coming from to care for her children. However, her caseworker had strongly suggested that she get training that help her get a job that would move in a different direction. She quit the other jobs when she decided that she was not getting anywhere, no one really cared about her, or employment did not seem to be a viable alternative for care for her children. Toward the end of the training, her caseworker asked her why she stayed through Training, Inc. She replied, "Training Inc. is different! They are serious about skill development, they care about you as a person, and they want you to get a job!"

Methods used by Training, Inc. are unique in the field of business training. The difference can be traced to an innovative theory called "Imaginal Education", which addresses both skills and self-image, resulting in holistic training. Kenneth Bolding, in his book, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*, says that people have a picture of the world and their place in it, and this picture provides the context for the daily decisions about life, work and relationships.

Training, Inc. uses a spiral curriculum based on wisdom from the twelve-step program and two philosophers of learning – Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner. We train the whole person with an integrated curriculum that teaches basic, business, and life management skills simultaneously not sequentially. The hands-on, learning-by-doing approach wakes up minds which have been dulled by boredom or a failure syndrome and provides work-based, basic skills relevant to a real job. Self –paced incremental

success builds an "Aha! Now I understand" excitement, Real achievements quickly overcome past failures.

Participation is beckoned, deep motivation is tapped, life contexts are expanded, imagination is stimulated and critical thinking is enhanced.

EXPANDING THE CONTEXT

Most of the trainees that enroll in the Training, Inc. program our like Donna, "My life was going nowhere; and I had no hope of ever succeeding at anything." Donna was ready for a change. Training, Inc. helped her think in new ways about her potential. Because at the core of everyone's psyche is the will to believe that "My life is significant", Donna was able to make a dramatic shift in her dominant life references (context) assisted by an unfolding series of positive experience in the training program.

In the general orientation session on day one each trainee is asked to tell about her "uniqueness". Denials abound, but slowly and surely a new realization begins to dawn as one after another around the room venture company comments like: "My name is a combination of two grandfathers names" ... "I am the oldest of nine children, the grandmother of 23 and can make something out of nothing." ... "I have a lot of international friends and have had an outer body experience." ... "I am artistic, model clothes and have a son six months old." In addition this groups is welcomed by a member of the Training, Inc. Advisory Board, linking them to the larger needs and opportunities of the business community.

Within the first few weeks of the program, everyone is involved in a "professional image" workshop. Wardrobe consultants, hairstylists and make-up artists explain and demonstrate the principles and power of a new appearance. Wow! This is fun. Look at me. The self-image expands

Simultaneous with self-affirmation is the hands-on learn by doing clerical skills building. Mastering the keyboard, conquering the computer, befriending the calculator, and upgrading English and math wakes up dulled minds depressed by past failures. Self-paced progressive achievement expands their self-image as growing competencies are objectively measured and celebrated.

One of the most empowering experiences for the trainees is the Grad Panel. Three to five previous program participants tell about their personal journey of doubts, fears, family crisis, success in getting a job, promotions, new achievements, and future dreams. The message is clear: "I did it and so can you! The future is open!"

Expanding the trainees' context beyond achievement to "I am an asset" is most powerfully accomplished in the Lester Hill business simulation and the two-week "internship" in a real office environment. Lester Hill is a simulated wholesale supply company. It quickly becomes more than a game, however, as trainees apply for their preferred position in the company and "don their hat" as payroll clerk, warehouse manager, or a member of the administrative apartment department. The entire training center is transformed into a realistic functioning corporation in which everyone has a role to perform. The experience of teamwork is magnificent. Everyone realizes the

importance of his or her part in the process and takes pride in helping to make the entire company run smoothly. Suddenly the job, whatever it is, make sense and each person is an asset.

Following Lester Hill, trainees are placed in real life situations at the invitation of local businesses that agree to assist in the training journey. Real work assignments are given. Real supervisors and real office coworkers are encountered. Some of the trainees are later hired by the company on a permanent basis. But the primary benefit of the experience is to convey the message that "making it in the working place" is by being an asset on the company team.

Perhaps the most gratifying benchmark in the journey of transformation is when a trainee declares his or her intention to give something back to the community. Sometimes this takes the form of going on for additional education or recommending Training Inc. to friends and relatives or volunteering in a charitable organization.

"Because of all the things I've achieved during the last 18 weeks, my plans for the future have changed from what they were before training. My training at Training Inc. convinced me that I want to continue my education while I'm working, so I can eventually have the skills to become a bookkeeper. My main goal is to be able to leave my children something when I'm gone, something they can be proud of and so they won't have to struggle so hard all their lives."

I would like to thank everyone involved in the Training Inc. program – iNET, IMPACT, Ivy Tech, and all the businesses that support the program. Without your desire to give people like myself a chance for a better way of life, we will be stuck on public assistance programs and jobs that would not let us use our minds to grow and be productive individuals."

STIMULATING THE IMAGINATION

An expanded context alone does not insure behavioral change. "Walking the talk" is an essential dynamic in effective learning. There's something about "doing it" that jumpstarts good intentions.

Training, Inc. has created a multimodal system of exercises that allow the trainee to actualize a new self-understanding: on-time problem-solving; simulation for accurate accounting; practice interviews; telephone courtesy (TI receptionist for a day); and resume writing

During resume writing each trainee is asked to list their life experiences and newly acquired clerical skills. The action of "writing it down" is a struggle; but it yields a clearer understanding of what the trainee has to offer a prospective employer. With this clarity comes a great self-confidence.

Setting a pattern of being "on-time" is a real challenge for many trainees. Tardy prone trainees meet with the supervisor for a time management problem solving session. Short-term goals are created. As these goals are realized, a group celebration is held.

New goals are set. Another celebration salutes new accomplishments. By now the trainee is more and more able to get punctuality priority it is due.

In the accounting section of the curriculum there is a helpful business simulation. The trainee must perform with solid accuracy. Learning math and use of the calculator is often a perplexing abstraction until it is applied to a simulated job experience. This is the jumpstart that sparks the imagination with visions of going on for more education and even being a lab assistant to help others in the group breakthrough the learning barriers.

It has been said that "Action removes the doubt that theory cannot solve." Imaginal education removes the doubt by providing hands-on experiential successes that reinforce budding visual and auditory images.

DEEP MOTIVATION IS TAPPED

Within. Find values within. Discover courage and convictions within; abundant mindset within; a source of trust within. Partner with the whole picture of life, within and without. The Training Inc. curriculum and the Imaginal Education process build self-confidence and self-esteem by touching the deeps of individual lives, putting inner space in relation to external career choices.

Self-confidence gets a boost through daily achievements in basic and technical skills. Learning to use the computer, write a business letter, and use a calculator in invoice preparation creates a base of skills development toward mastery. Selfhood rises through specific skills achievements.

Training, Inc.'s location in the heart of downtown employers immerses trainees in the setting of the desired job. Trainees go to the employer's world every day. Images shift by dressing professionally for daily trips to the downtown business district for training. The inner life of images, attitudes, thoughts and perspectives are touched and tapped.

Self-esteem is developed when specific challenges such as punctuality, attendance, and professional wardrobe are overcome. Time management and wardrobe are supported through time and wardrobe workshops, supervisory group meetings, free professional outfits from a clothing bank, sign in/out timesheets, workplace values seminars with employer presenters, counseling support, and goals workshops.

Kathy and Brian are both graduates of Training, Inc.. Cathy graduated first. At graduation Kathy had a federal government job and was five months pregnant. Two other young children were at home. She lived with her husband's parents. Her husband was in prison for drug charges. Her marriage was shaky. Kathy debated the potential success of the marriage, but kept focused on her training, caring for her two young boys, visiting Brian, and finding a job as soon as possible. Kathy's dream was for Brian to become a trainee at Training Inc. after his release from incarceration. She received support, encouragement, training, and a chance to think deeply about her life and that of her family.

Kathy's dream became Brian dream. Within a year, Brian started training and 24 weeks later, graduated. He took a job with the public school system and is still there. Two jobs in the family meant that they could rent an apartment to be on their own. The baby born four months after Kathy graduated was named Victoria for their many personal and family victories. Touch the hopes and dreams of life and support that with skill development and placement in a full-time job to undergird those dreams. Imaginal Education provides tools to tap the wells of our inner lives.

Arlene had no GED or high school diploma. She was on public assistance, wanted a job, but believed that no one would hire her. Her selfhood was fragile from stepfather's abuse. Arlene came to Training, Inc., eyes cast down, quiet and shy. Her first success was in business math and then in accounting. She remembered liking math as a child. It took many weeks before she chose to do her Toastmaster's speech of her business communications writing.

During job search Arlene believed no one would hire her because she had failed her GED test. Yet her math skills were strong and she discovered her love for accounting. She elected to do twice the accounting simulated packets as was required. Arlene was chosen to manage the accounting simulation department. After graduation, a teller position opened at a bank. She remembered her decision to take the "'t" off can't. She put affirmation statements on her notebook. She practiced interviewing, went on the actual interview, and landed the teller position pending successfully completing the bank teller training classes. She did those two weeks successfully. She could barely grasp her success as really there; but it was.

Arlene began working a major downtown branch. She had four promotions from teller to senior teller. She had a goal, tapped her own perspective from within, and pulled from that inner resolve to not only become employed, but to stay employed and move up the career ladder. Imaginal Education provides the process for image shifts by pulling from foundations in life in order to release human potential. Touching the deeps taps energy and resolve.

CRITICAL THINKING IS ENHANCED

Choices. Face them daily. Make choices. Create choices. Values in choices. Framework around choices. The Training Inc. curriculum with an Imaginal Education process encourages critical thinking around choices. It works with the individual learner as part of a larger group: the workforce, the community, society, the family, in life skills, basic skills, technical skills, and job search skills. Imaginal Education builds images of who we are, how we think and learn, and how we create options for choice.

Job search is filled with choices and is an essential part of the Training Inc. program. The employer has job openings with specific job descriptions. The job seeker develops a resume, prepares applications, practices interviewing skills, professionalizes a wardrobe, reinforces a proactive style, and clarifies the career direction. Job search is standing in the eye of the needle. It is a center of choice.

Life skills are brought to the scene: time management, professional dress, body language, interpersonal communications. Basic skills are revealed through a polished resume and application, an articulate interview and specific employment tests.

Technical skills are demonstrated in employer tests, revealed in interview questions, and expressed in resumes and applications. Skills for decision-making come through the process of career goal setting, networking for job leads, setting appointments, and sorting through the job search process of creating options and evaluating or Job choice. The job seeker is guided in connecting information with inner resolve, intent, and basic values. Training, Inc. staff assist in the process of connecting the life journey and process of choosing pathways with the specific job search activities.

Phyllis said no work experience outside the home. Her children were teenagers and older. She was managing a health situation that was not going to go away. Phyllis wrestled with her life experiences in relation to job search. Her story was that she had no job experience. "Who would hire her?" Yet she had successfully completed Training Inc. coursework, had managed the two weeks Lester Hill Company simulation, and was ready for a job outside the home.

Phyllis examined her skills. She had managed the Baylor family purchases, paid bills and rent on time, set doctor and dental appointments, got children through school, and was involved in church activities and the school parent's organization. Phyllis listed skills learned in these family activities: write checks, set appointments, manage time, interpersonal communications, etc.. These transferable skills made up her resume of "Manager of the Baylor Household". Phyllis began seeing herself as a responsible, dependable person who knew how to plan and problem solve successfully in family settings and at Training, Inc. She built her story and sold herself to a major bank, resulting in her being hired as a lock box clerk in a night job, her preference in order to be available when her children went to school and when they returned with homework and dinner needs.

Phyllis looked at the reality of her situation, analyzed her skills, and thought through her situation. She is still employed after four years in the same bank but in a daytime job as loan officer. In recent cutbacks Phyllis did not receive a pink slip. She has created a win-win situation for herself, her family, and the bank by being proactive with her goals, redefining her skills, and looking at real options.

Bill, a single parent of a young son, was a graduation speaker. His speech reveals image shifts and choices made:

"Good afternoon fellow graduates, trainers and distinguished guests. I am truly honored to giving this opportunity to speak at this graduation ceremony. I am an eager to learn dependable and mature individual who has had the opportunity to take advantage of the Training Inc. experience. Before coming to Training, Inc. I wasn't so eager, dependable or mature, at least not to myself. In fact I considered myself to be a lazy, unreliable and childish individual was working a dead-end job, making just enough to party on weekends.

But after the birth of my son, I knew it was time to make a change. Determined to be great provider, I quickly applied for better jobs that I felt I was qualified for; but for some reason, unknown to me at that time, I wasn't being hired. After talking with the Director of Livelihood program, a program designed to help low income individuals, I learned of Training, Inc., an intensive 24 week career building program.

Sounds interesting, doesn't it? That's exactly what I thought. A professional career building program for free! I was sold and immediately called Training Inc. to schedule an appointment.

Prior to my scheduling an appointment, I attempted to learn as much as I could about Training Inc., which left me very puzzled. I learned it was a clerical program! Can you believe it? Clerical! The first thing I thought was that this is for females only and not for me.

Because Ms. Sharp was so nice on the phone, I decided to keep my appointment. Why did I do that? Because this nice lady immediately played on my weaknesses: my love for math, and my inability to turn down a challenge. The first words that she greeted me were, "Are you sure this is something you want to do? Most men find it difficult to do clerical work such as typing." What! This lovely lady with the motherly smile is challenging me. She didn't mean to, but it was too late. It registered, and would you believe it, right after that she started talking about the accounting field and how Training Inc. teaches basic accounting and computer skills, and how many of the former graduates went on to build their lives with an excellent foundation with companies like Riggs Bank, Arthur Anderson, and others.

No more needed to be said. I decided to be a trainee and not just any trainee, but the best trainee Training, Inc. has ever had. Which puts me here today. I may not have been the best trainee they ever had; but I now have the skills and ability to be the great provider I so wanted to be.

I now know Word Perfect 5.1 and Lotus 123. I can handle basic accounting functions such as accounts payable, accounts receivable, cashier, billing and payroll. I have skills in business math, human relations, business communications, filing, handling a six line/18 extension phone system, writing and public speaking. Oh and let's not forget copying and faxing.

I am capable of doing everything from processing sales tax exempt information into a database to data entry for maintenance on competition database and hard copy file. My speed is now 175 keys depressed per minute on the ten-key calculator. I now type 40 words per minute.

As I look at myself in the mirror, I think of all the things I've accomplished in this short period of time and smile. Thanks to the help of my fellow trainees and the excellent instructors, I can teach my son through my example that no goal is impossible to reach, if you only try."

PARTICIPATION PAYS OFF

While at Training, Inc. Gloria found within herself the power to succeed. Reflecting on the achievements during training, she realized she had gifts that can lead to a brighter future for herself and her family. In one of her talks to current participants, she shared how her fear of the future and her ability to handle what it brought, have kept her locked in dependency. Just prior to her graduation, still acting out of this fear, yet wanting to be the first to gain employment, she took the first job she saw. After two

weeks as a data entry clerk at a local bank, she realized that although she excelled in data entry, she was already feeling the need for a greater challenge, and her people skills needed expression. Her strong typing skills led her to a position with the Board of Education. She learned another word processing program and through studying the manual in the evenings at home, soon increased her knowledge to the level that she was helping others expand their capabilities with the program.

One year later a secretary position opened in the community college. She applied, was hired, and soon found herself representing her department on committees for the improvement of education of youth and adults. Taking advantage of the low cost college courses, Gloria began working toward a degree in education

This year she became a secretary at the Department of Federal Programs, earning more than some of her instructors. Now she dares to dream of opening her own program for the education of those who, like herself, need a change to live their possibility to become independent. "Giving back to her community what has been shared with her is her way of demonstrating the interdependence of our lives," Gloria comments.

Four years after her experience at Training Inc. Gloria plans her future out of the principles by which she lives rather than the fear of what might be. She expressed appreciation for the inner strength she has developed as she embraced the balance of 100% support and 100% demand for excellence given by the staff. Like other graduates, Gloria points to the quality-of-life difference Training, Inc. has made.

As a training program for those that might otherwise be left behind in our society, Training, Inc. is committed to human development and the location of a meaningful employment. Through a focus on the total person, we strive to provide an atmosphere where each one can grow toward total employability. Staff and participants work together to achieve proficiency in clerical skills, develop pride in workmanship, and strive for continual improvement. Our logo carries the message that we "train for the future", and in living out that imperative, our curriculum design assists the participant to deal with change as a gift and a challenge.

May 28, 1993

Dear Training, Inc.,

This is just a short note to let you know how much Training, Inc. has changed my life. I heard about the training from a friend at church. At that time my life was going nowhere; and I had no hope of ever succeeding at anything. Food stamps and welfare had become the only way to feed my two teenage boys and myself. Without much income, life had become very difficult and I thought I could do nothing worthwhile.

Training Inc. changed all of that. They taught me to type, file, do accounting, and how to work on a computer. But the most important things they taught were how to dress professionally get along with others, and how to have confidence. I got a job after graduating in November 1986, and I'm still working for the same company. There have been promotions and raises; but most of all I still carry with me the confidence in myself that Training, Inc. gave me. In April, 1990, I went back to school and in September, 1993, I received two associate degrees. Without the help of Training, Inc. to get me started, I would still be sitting in my living room feeling sorry for myself. Instead I am enjoying life. Thank you Training,