

TRAINING, INC. – A Model of Transformative Career Education for Adults

As remembered by Carol Walters, April 2025

A Seed is Planted

In the summer of 1974, I embarked on a life-changing journey to the Majuro Human Development Project in the Marshall Islands as part of a team of ICA consultants. For five days, we collaborated with local Marshallese citizens and ICA staff, engaging in comprehensive planning to strengthen the community capacity for development. My focus was the development of a Business Training initiative to equip individuals with practical commercial skills. At its core, we integrated the principles of Imaginal Education—ensuring learning went beyond technical knowledge to foster confidence and self-realization.

It was on that island in the vast Pacific Ocean that the seed was planted in my heart—to pursue a career in Transformative Adult Education. Our teams spent warm days exchanging ideas, refining approaches, and ending each evening in thoughtful debriefings on the beach, sipping chilled coconut water under painted sunsets. When the consult concluded, both Marshallese volunteers and ICA staff were energized, ready to bring the training program to life.

Following the Majuro consult, I returned to my family now in Chicago, resuming our work with the Fifth City Human Development Project. That fall, an opportunity arose at the Central YMCA Community College in Chicago—a chance to design and lead an innovative short-term clerical skills training program in Oak Brook, Illinois. Recognizing the alignment with the work we had just completed, I leapt at the opportunity. Supported by a collaboration between the business community, government, and education sectors—with the additional backing of DuPage County CETA grant funding—I worked with a team of ICA colleagues determined to reshape career training for adults.

Our guiding philosophy was clear: the transformation of human potential required more than skill-building; it needed to reveal each individual's confidence and strengths. Through Imaginal Education, we empowered students to see themselves as capable contributors—members of a thriving professional world that welcomed their talents. The results spoke for themselves: program graduates not only secured jobs quickly but excelled, receiving promotions and accolades for their work.

Hands-on Experience in an Office Setting

Each morning, a small team of ICA colleagues packed into a car, brimming with ideas and enthusiasm as we designed the new program in Oak Brook. Brainstorming filled our drives to and from work—"What if..." scenarios flowed freely:

- *What if our trainees saw themselves as valued members of the business community from day one?*
- *What if they recognized their own strengths and talents—embracing the future with confidence?*

- *What if their journey became more than just a job, but an opportunity for personal transformation?*
- *What if every classroom had a teacher who truly cared—ensuring every student felt seen, learned, and grew each day?*

And that's exactly what happened.

Training, Inc. shattered expectations, enrolling and graduating record numbers of students. Job placements soared as graduates transitioned seamlessly into professional roles, earning recognition and promotions.

From the outset, we committed to an active learning environment where students applied their skills immediately. Simulation-based training was a pillar of our approach, immersing students in practical, real-world scenarios. Even the program's name, *Training, Inc.*, reinforced this vision—it operated as a simulated corporation similar to an actual incorporated entity.

We knew our students learned best by doing. The office setting became their training ground—a space where they could learn about the business office culture, interactive roles, practice skills, gain experience, and refine their abilities in a supportive environment. Every detail was intentional: modern equipment, state-of-the-art resources, and a sleek office space designed to foster success. When students stepped through our doors, they entered a world that said, *Welcome to Success!*

This philosophy extended to every aspect of the program—including the way students presented themselves. Dressing for success wasn't an obligation; it was an affirmation of newfound confidence. Each day, students and staff walked in ready to embrace their professional roles, stepping out with dignity, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.

The Growth of Training, Inc.

What began in Oak Brook as a tiny acorn in 1975 grew into a mighty oak—expanding across cities and continents. Over time, Training, Inc. and affiliated programs took root in major cities such as Chicago, Indianapolis, Boston, Newark, Pittsburgh, Washington D.C., New Orleans, Atlanta, Northern Virginia, Albuquerque, and internationally in India and Guatemala.

With every replication, ICA-trained staff trained new staff and the programs continued to instill the pillars of Imaginal Education—ensuring that human potential remained at the heart of career training. While the program evolved—adapting curriculum, adjusting timelines, and incorporating new training areas and features—the core principles remained unchanged:

- **Whole-Person Development** – Training was more than technical skill-building; it nurtured personal growth.
- **Work Simulation Environment** – Trainees gained confidence in a setting that mirrored their future workplace.
- **Learn-by-Doing Philosophy** – Practical hands-on application was prioritized alongside theoretical instruction.

- **Imaginal Education Foundation** – A highly participatory approach fostered engagement and self-realization.
- **Grounding in Real-Life Experience** – Simulations, firsthand stories, and industry volunteer involvement ensured relevance.
- **Human Potential as a Cornerstone** – Belief in individual transformation was central to every training model.
- **Team Approach** – Collaboration, mutual support, and shared learning enriched the experience.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships** – Engagement with education, business, public sector, and community leaders ensured relevance and sustainability.
- **Commitment to Success for Every Trainee** – The program aimed for 100% completion, placement, and retention.

There is an old proverb, “Mighty oaks from little acorns grow” that means something great can come from small beginnings. Today, Training, Inc. continues to innovate—pioneering new approaches in workforce development while staying true to its transformative roots. Programs such as YMCA Boston Training, Inc., Essex County College Newark Training, Inc, and Training Futures in Northern Virginia continue to integrate advanced technology, foster critical thinking, and provide immersive experiences tailored to modern career fields. The acorns continue to fall and grow in many other Workforce Development Programs when wholistic imaginal education methods are used.

Over five decades, one truth remains: when people recognize their own potential, they transcend limitations. Training, Inc. has done more than prepare individuals for employment—it has empowered them to step into their future with confidence, competence, and purpose.