

Critique of Paul Pierce- AT&T HPI Presentation

Paul Pierce started his presentation with energy and a Human Performance Quiz that knocked us all silly. The "Human Performance Technology Quiz", which I will presume he developed, demonstrated just how conditioned we are to read our own expectations into a quiz question with attributes that are not there. Said another way, the quiz tested our critical thinking skills and found us wanting, and amazed. Fun was had by all, and it established for us the confidence and authority this speaker brought to the table from 40 years of Human Performance Improvements growth and management from one of the biggest players in communications history: AT&T.

Paul was warm, friendly and full of what Aristotle called "The Three Offices of Truth: Ethics, Logic and Passion". (Golden, Berquist & Coleman, 1978) His presence revealed a man of character, intelligence, and goodwill, which are the three elements that make up the first office known as Ethics. His ability to demonstrate and refute claims while communicating his experiences with authority, gave faith to the second office of Logic. And his ability to arouse and allay the emotions of his audience and communicate the impact of HPI in the workplace was clearly rooted in his Passion for delivery of authentic and

meaningful services in his work at AT&T. I trusted his words, had my imagination aroused, my passions moved and my will changed!

Paul brought to the class many ideas, stories, and tools that invited us into his world that stimulated my curiosity of how business is conducted in a familiar institution, one where I got my first corporate and professional training. At that time, the company was called C&P Telephone Company in Baltimore, Maryland back in the late 1960's. Turns out that working at AT&T, and perhaps other large companies of this caliber, as an HPI manager, was not as I imagined it might be as written in my first paper, thanks to Mr. Pierce!

We got a glimpse into the way HPI maneuvers around issues of training, including other options in a request for "on the job" assistance. We discovered how a request for training could be researched to find the actual gap in performance for a work issue, and how other possibilities aside from training could save the company money, and be just the right solution. And one of the best lines ever was introduced as a way to overcome obstacles, win friends, and influence people: Just say "yes" to your clients needs and substitute the word "and" where you might normally impose a "but" in a communication request. I

remember this training technique offered to me back in the seventies and I am happy that it is still in use in the current HPI jargon at this company!

I really appreciated Paul's advice about being humble rather than boasting expertise that might offend the client. He suggested that we are likely to garner more support to explore solutions to a problem when we humbly allow the client to define the problem rather than insist on taking the lead. In my business, providing accounting and communications services to small start-up companies starting in the late eighties, I pretty much had to come off as an expert that would take over the accounting piece and deliver reliable, effective and efficient Financial Statements to convince the creative folks I worked with that I could do the job.

In the HPT field, small start-ups will not be my clients. Only mid to large organizations can afford training and development contract fees, so this information is key to my ability to provide services and to stay afloat. I just had my worst lesson and hopefully my last in an attempt to be an expert in a "one-to-many" institutional approach, coming from being my own authority. I lost a lot in the confusion. But I am a quick learn, and bridges will be mended in time, if I get this part down. There is a gap between the assertiveness required of a small

operator in a small pond, and the humility one may need as a small operator in a larger more confident pond. While small business (1 to 10 people) will tend to trust me when confident and self-assured, presenting as such to the mid to large size business may not come off as an advantage.

While HPT processes require one to adapt to corporate culture may seem like a disadvantage, Paul's workplace sounds like a functional family adapted to changes under his command. Having an experienced HPT manager has to be a great advantage in a culture of practice providing services. I am excited about the concepts learned in the handouts, especially the Whole System View of Organizations. This handout alone reminds me of a key point in my notes, that "process proceeds structure". "First determine the level at which the problem is occurring. The barrier is in the level above, always". I must focus on the culture, the leadership, yield to agreements, enjoy the stories they tell and then search for the best solutions. Who knows, at some point I might even be asked to tell a story or two. I better get started.

References

Golden, J. L., Berquist, G. F., & Coleman, W. E. (1978). *The rhetoric of western thought*. (3rd ed., Chapter 4, pp 68-69). Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.