

From *Cults in Our Midst*

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Chapter Eight: Intruding into the Workplace*

There are many advancement programs, workshops, seminars, and training sessions currently utilized by companies and corporations in the United States and elsewhere that are legitimate in their intentions and often effective in their outcomes. Some of these programs have incorporated new ideas and new ways of thinking, which is why, on occasion, they are referred to as New Age training programs. This in itself does not make them harmful or of evil intent. Yet, a small but significant portion of these programs are not what they appear to be. In some cases, they are fronts for cults or other organizations using thought-reform processes that can cause considerable psychological harm and turmoil and even precipitate psychoses in some employees without delivering any increased skill, productivity, profit, or other purported benefit.

Several years ago, the executive vice president of the American Society for Training and Development estimated that \$150 million was being spent annually by U.S. businesses on suspicious

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training programs. This may not seem like a lot of money compared to the billions of dollars spent overall in this country on motivational training, but when we consider the loss of time and money on programs that produce no positive job-related effect and merely seek to sell more and more seminars, when we realize the distress caused to employees who are unprepared for the emotional and psychological duress of some of the sessions, when we realize the intrusion into personal beliefs perpetrated by those programs that misrepresent themselves, then we see a trend of impact on everyday life that cannot be ignored.

Certain programs introduced into industrial and office settings have been causing particular criticism and alarm. Sold under the guise of management and communication courses, these programs are frequently purported in advertisements and word-of-mouth sales to be able to motivate and even transform employees. The details of what motivation and being transformed involve are usually left vague but cryptically promising.

There are three primary reasons for discussing such programs in this book. The first is to reiterate the ever-present need to evaluate the premises beneath various offerings that are made to us daily. We must always ask ourselves, Who is this person offering me some new cure-all--some religious, political, social, psychological, health-related, or other life pathway that he wants me to purchase and follow?

The second is to bring attention to the fact that certain training programs use the same types of intense influence techniques that are identified with cults. Also, many of these programs are actually recruiting venues for certain cults. Some cults have put on three-piece suits and come directly into the workplace, disguised as self-improvement management courses.

The third reason is that the philosophy of life espoused in many of these programs falls within the realm of religious issues and personal belief systems, an important matter for many people. Underneath some New Age offerings there sometimes lies a philosophical and spiritual cosmology, a theory on the nature and principles of the universe. New Age cosmology generally views reality as one unitary organic whole with no independent parts, and this cosmology constitutes a belief system or religion that, at root, differs from, say, Christianity or Judaism.

A 1992 Gallup Poll reveals that more and more Americans--now 58 percent--consider religion to be "very important" in their lives. According to the Gallup organization's 1992-93 report, "Religion in America," 89 percent of Americans single out a religious preference, with 82 percent reporting that they are Christian, and 2 percent, Jewish. Two-tenths of 1 percent are Muslim, while one-tenth of 1 percent hold Hindu beliefs.

In legal cases brought before U.S. courts by employees who were made to attend training programs of various kinds, the

employees noticed that there were "religious" differences between their own beliefs, which are constitutionally protected, and the cosmology or philosophy put forth by these training programs. These citizens were the first to alert the public to this encroachment on our freedom in the workplace.

A Clarification about the New Age

Since I refer on occasion to "New Age" programs or groups, I feel that a clarification of my use of the term is necessary to avoid misunderstandings. This is not a book critiquing New Age philosophy. But I do call attention to what I think of as the dark side of New Age thinking, to show how some so-called New Age techniques and ideas are in some instances being used to exploit people and to induce people to join cults. Countless theories, activities, practices, and events are included in the broadest definitions of New Age ideas. For example, discussions of New Age thinking can range from interests in acupuncture, crystals, tarot cards, channeling, meditation, alternative health care, special diets, wavy music, whole foods restaurants, and a variety of self-actualization books and programs to specific theological critiques of the reasoning underlying certain New Age beliefs--such as the central theme that "all is one"--and to thoughtful philosophical critiques of what such thinking is bringing into the educational, medical, and religious arenas.

Many persons today dabble in such New Age ventures as going

to holistic health practitioners, engaging in supposed native practices, attending inspirational lectures, going on wilderness treks or vision quests, and collecting crystals. Many aspects of the New Age can be entertaining, beneficial, and informative, as long as people don't get caught up with someone using these ventures to entrap them into a thought-reform group or a cult or to psychologically coerce them into turning over their lives to a leader who will exploit them personally or financially.

How does this relate to the business world?

Many people of goodwill, with a desire to improve the lot of humankind, have explored and continue to explore how our thinking influences how we conceptualize the world. There has been an effort, under the New Age umbrella, to introduce the notion that the thought models we use--now widely called paradigms--should be examined to see if advances can come from our taking new vantage points from which to look at both our daily life and our world of work. Unfortunately, much of the writing and discussion about New Age ideas is put into esoteric, hard-to-follow language, which has made it possible for con artists and cult leaders to latch onto the phrases and concepts for their own purposes.

I often think of Ludwig Wittgenstein's statement from his well-known *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly." Many manipulators and cult leaders

have taken New Age ideas and phrases to imply that they have secret knowledge, something new and wonderful to offer. They use such terminology as:

"Achieving ultimate reality"

"Death is the final stage of growth."

"Your beliefs are what stand in your way."

"Transformation through psychotechnologies."

"Myths must be eliminated before new consciousness is achieved."

Exploiters prosper by exploiting ignorance, fear, and guilt to manipulate us. In that vein, they have appropriated some of the notions of New Age thinking and used them as leverage in their self-serving ventures. The very notion of "new paradigms," for example, sounds scientific and esoteric, even mysterious. New Age language can be baffling while also implying that the speaker has specific knowledge: the answers, the lore of the ancients, or the one path to transformation, specifically, in the case of this chapter, transformed and improved cooperation and productivity the workplace.

A Clash in the Workplace

How many reading this book recall attending a large group awareness training, either on your own or at the behest of

employers or friends, where you repeatedly heard the trainer or so-called facilitator shout at attendees that what was getting in their way was their "beliefs"? Without being told what was occurring, all of you there were being taught a new belief system about the universe.

People do have the right to try to persuade others to think as they do. But participants should know ahead of time when a program teaches a new belief system, and they should be able to choose whether or not to participate. The majority of complaints about this kind of training have centered around the fact that employees weren't informed either about the intensity of the psychological attacks that would be made upon them as individuals or about any underlying belief system or philosophy being taught. And the biggest concern always remained that the training "had no real application to my job!"

The criticisms come from many parts of the country and from employees in a variety of work situations. The most frequent criticisms are that certain programs make concerted attacks on employees' moral and ethical values and spiritual beliefs. Claims have been made that these training programs not only seek to convert employees to accept specific spiritual philosophies but also to recruit them to a cult. Among the recruitment programs are those that lack any markedly visible spiritual content but that are used to get into business, educational, and industrial

settings, at the company's or the government's expense, where large numbers of people can be reached. Once their foot is in the door, cultic groups will attempt to get as many employees as possible who take the first course to join the cult. Cult leaders and trainers assess individual participants in their seminars as potential recruits, already partially indoctrinated.

Cultic programs that tend to be purely commercial ventures generally aim at selling more and more courses. Again, persons met through the program are regarded as potential buyers and as links to a whole company or agency. Shortly, after taking one course, individuals are contacted by agents of the training program to purchase additional courses and to get their companies to send more employees to the introductory seminar.

All of these programs raise several general areas of concern:

- The programs are religious and philosophical in nature and thus don't belong in the workplace.
- They use thought-reform techniques and methods of psychological coercion and can cause psychological breakdowns.
- They produce social friction in the place of business.

I have mentioned that those folks for whom religion or a personal belief system is an issue are deeply offended by having

what is essentially another religious belief foisted upon them under the guise of job betterment. Also a plethora of allegations has been raised, some in civil suits, pointing out that individuals have suffered mental breakdowns and psychological harm as a result of participating in certain training programs.

In addition, negative social consequences in the workplace have arisen as outgrowths of these programs. In certain workplaces, you find an in-group and a group of outsiders. The insiders are those who have attended the program and, through compliance and adherence, have taken on the jargon taught in the seminars. They act in unison with others who have bought into the content of the program and go with the flow.

Moreover, there are inherent inequalities in any job situation. The power and influence that owners, supervisors, and superiors hold by their very roles is greater than that of workers of lower rank. Roles bestow power, and power determines the direction of the flow of influence. Few will quibble with the view that those at the top of the hierarchy have the power to see that their directives are carried out. In other words, if your boss sends you to a seminar, you go.

Thus, the workplace has become an arena where several social and psychological phenomena are converging. That is, the New Age movement, business's desire to compete in the world marketplace, and our nation's propensity to believe in self-improvement are

intermingling. This situation is further complicated by the intrusion of certain cults and thought-reform groups that take advantage of this milieu.

Violation of Civil Rights

As a result of the prevalence of programs that are not what they appear to be on the surface, a number of complaints have been filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) by employees who describe how the course content violated their rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Such programs were addressed by the EEOC in its 1988 policy statement, issued to employers as a warning. The statement reads in part:

Employers are increasingly making use of training programs designed to improve employee motivation, cooperation, or productivity through the use of various so-called "new age" techniques. For example, a large utility company requires its employees to attend seminars based on the teachings of a mystic, George Gurdjieff.... Another corporation provides its employees with workshops in stress management using so-called "faith healers" who read the "auras" of employees and contact the body's "fields of energy" to improve the health of its employees.... The programs utilize a wide variety of techniques: meditation, guided visualization, self-hypnosis, therapeutic touch, biofeedback, yoga, walking on fire, and

inducing altered states of consciousness....

Although the courts and the Commission have not addressed the particular conflicts raised by the "new age" training programs, this issue can be resolved under the traditional Title VII [Civil Rights Act of 1964] theory of religious accommodation.

Thus, the EEOC clearly regarded these matters as religious accommodation issues between employers and employees. To be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Several training programs around the country use techniques called ropes courses, in which participants (often employees sent by their company) climb high onto a platform, up a tree, or onto a promontory. There, they are strapped into a safety harness and given a hand strap to hold as they zip down and across a chasm or open space. Persons with fears of high places reportedly suffer great anxiety but feel compelled to participate in front of the other employees and managers at the program.

One of the most spectacular rope lines is said to be at the Wilson Learning Corporation in New Mexico. Employees attending the course launch themselves off a cliff, hanging onto a pulley that races down a zip line stretching to the other side of the Pecos River. While the person is zipping to the bottom, other attendees jump up and down, yelling "Hug, hug, hug," and welcome

the person. Most of these programs encourage much hugging and "sharing" of personal histories during certain sessions.

Some of the other procedures used in certain of the large group awareness trainings (LGATs) and their offshoots contain processes that humiliate people (they resemble fraternity hazing events). The only rationale that I can conjure up for these is to imagine that someone thought that humiliating people will get them over their shyness, which is not true. Nor can I see a work-related correlation or anything that may be remotely helpful to employees in exercises that, for example, have an obese woman don a bikini and go out on the street singing and trying to get a band of men to follow her, as one woman reported, or that have people cross-dress and act out caricatured opposite-sex roles, as others have reported.

In the nineties, we're even seeing a renewed interest in firewalking. As one colleague recently observed that "firewalking is sweeping the oil fields in Canada." Employees are sent to these programs (most of them imported from the United States) and are told they will be able to traverse pits of hot coals without being burnt as long as they think properly. They are told that after firewalking, no job will look difficult.

Such programs seem designed more to get participants emotionally pumped up, suspending their judgment and following the orders of the "trainers," than to impart anything connected

with job performance, communication skills, and profit margins. Many programs are described as simply providing "unforgettable experiences." And no one asks what you really learned and thought about the event or whether it had any useful application back at the office or factory. Yet the promoters claim these exercises produce "openness and confidence."

Having observed a number of LGATs and having interviewed many persons who attended variants of these programs as part of their work assignment, I am astonished at the gross childishness and unkindness of humiliating anyone under the guise of education, experiential learning, or the claim that participation in such travesties enhances work performance. Nor do all participants find sessions of "sharing" personal details helpful. Because of the popularity of training programs and seminars, countless employees go off to these courses thinking they are going to learn management techniques or specific job-related skills. Instead, they find themselves in high-confrontation, psychologically intense programs that are supposedly going to transform them—not just train them but literally make them over into a new breed.

Many employees realize that certain managers and bosses either are desperate to improve production or are captivated by the promises made by the sellers of the programs. These managers and employers don't want to hear that the programs are less than

welcome. Often, frank evaluations are produced only with the aid of an outside agency and a promise of anonymity to informants, as was done by the California Public Utility Commission when it investigated the Pacific Bell Krone program, which is described later in the chapter.

In some cases, there is not a training program per se but simply outright pressure to join the background organization. For example, a \$30,000 settlement with ILWHA American Corporation was reached in December 1989 after charges by a former employee of True Nature Health Food Store, a subsidiary of ILWHA, that he was pressured to join the Reverend Moon's Unification Church. The Illinois Department of Human Rights had found substantial evidence of a civil rights violation by True Nature, ILWHA, and the Unification Church. Several former employees of True Nature reported that they were told that unless they agreed to join the Unification Church of America within two years of beginning employment at True Nature, they would lose their jobs. They said that during their employment they were sent on religious retreats and to Church-connected stores in other states.

Besides filing complaints with the EEOC, many employees have filed civil suits objecting to the content of programs or related pressures at the workplace. Some lost their jobs by objecting. Others suffered psychological decompensation as a consequence of what occurred in the training programs. Still others have

complied and gone along with the programs, even saying they enjoyed them.

What Goes On in an LGAT?

On federal court orders, I have attended six large group awareness training sessions (sponsored by several of the known LGAT organizations) and have interviewed dozens of person who have attended these and such other programs as Silva Mind Control, Actualizations, Direct Centering, as well as the myriad programs now available, some started by former employees and even, on occasion, past attendees of the larger well-known LGATs. I have studied the training manuals and videos used to train trainers and have interviewed a number of trainers.

I have also served as an expert witness for various persons who sued corporations selling the training. These persons, or their survivors, alleged in civil suits that they had been harmed by a particular program. Therefore, the lawyers in these cases asked the court to order the corporations to permit me and another expert to attend the relevant programs as observers, sitting in the back of the large hotel ballrooms or other facilities where the training takes place. Because most of these programs are made up of highly scripted, standardized procedures, seeing one unfold gives a good picture of the processes and the attitudes of the trainers, as well as some experience of the

group process that occurs when 250 to 300 people are being psychologically and emotionally aroused into, on occasion, sobbing masses on the floor.

The other expert and I needed to view and study the training the plaintiff in the case had attended and form an opinion as to whether any connection existed between the conduct and content of the training and the alleged damages. The alleged damages ranged from death by drowning and suicide to both brief and prolonged stays in mental hospitals. I have kept track of the individuals involved in the nearly sixty legal cases in which I was a consultant. Some of them have gotten their lives going again, although with the fearful recall of what it was like to completely lose mental and emotional control. A few are still hospitalized as long as ten years after their breakdowns during or immediately after the training.

LGAT programs tend to last at least four days and usually five. They are described as seminars and sound very much like special college courses. The highly confrontational and psychological aspects generally are not mentioned beforehand. Nor is it mentioned that a whole new theory of how the world works will be inculcated in attendees.

The program trainers and leaders typically get agreement from participants that they will not tell anyone about the processes that occur. To do so "will spoil it for your friends,

family, coworkers when they take the course. Tell them what you got out of it," trainers advise. This means be vague about the actual content and provide glowing endorsements telling others that the training turned your life around, but do not tell them how emotional, dramatic, confrontational, and unnerving the sessions can be for some people. Because of this promise, consumers who buy and attend these seminars do so without the real information about how psychologically, socially, and sometimes physically stressing the event can be.

The following outline description is a composite of what goes on in the course of many LGAT sessions. Based on my attendance at several LGATs, consultations with former attendees and trainers, and my research, it also reflects my professional interpretations.

Day One

Day one is usually devoted to demonstrating the leader's absolute authority. The leader, often called a facilitator or trainer, immediately takes control of the setting with a demeanor that suggests that he is a powerful, in-charge person and no one is to challenge what he says. "This program works," the trainer proclaims. "It's all up to you to obey and get the maximum benefits." He remains totally in charge, acts knowledgeable, and is practiced in verbal skills so that he never loses an

encounter. Anyone who challenges the trainer will be humiliated and verbally mashed.

New customers are unaware that most LGATs allow or even encourage those who have taken the training before to reattend. These people serve as a clique or modeling section. They clap, speak the same jargon as the leader, make endorsing statements, and are models for the new customers to pattern themselves after. Because the returners "talk the talk and walk the walk," they get good responses from the trainer when they make comments. New customers begin to pattern their language and demeanor after the behavior of these others who, they notice, receive praise for using certain language or revealing personal material. The leader trains the group to clap after every sharing, no matter how inane, off target, or incoherent it is. For many, this is heady stuff to have a couple of hundred people clap when they speak a bit to the group. At the same time, new customers also see how the trainer berates and decimates opponents.

Day Two

Day two focuses on instilling the new philosophy the LGAT is teaching. The well-known LGATs claim that you have caused everything that ever happened to you, from choosing your parents to breaking your leg to getting yourself jilted to having been molested by your stepfather as a child. Trainers use the terms

accountable and responsible, but not with their ordinary meaning. They mean that you will, if you "get it," start to pattern your choices in the way the organization advocates. They create guilt and fear that you have caused all the bad things that have happened in your life. "Your life is not working!" the trainer or leader yells, while he implies his is. If you just "get it," you'll be able to "make your life work." What they teach about how to get your life to work is a type of magical thinking that supposedly allows you to create whatever you want. You are told that you can create parking spaces, money to buy the next courses, and so on. Since creativity is in, you create just by thinking.

Day Three

Day three is usually devoted to exercises, often trance-inducing guided imagery, in which attendees are urged to recall all the disappointments of life since early childhood. Exercises about mother and father, the promises you've broken and the promises to you that others have broken--all the sad memories of your life up to now are brought forth. By the end of the third day, participants have really been opened up psychologically.

Day Four

Day four is one in which much group sharing occurs, and the

leader begins to change from the stern, domineering taskmaster into a seductive, charming, loving daddy or mommy who wants you to buy the next courses. Legal cases have revealed that trainers' promotions and even their very jobs hinge on how many of those in the first course they lure into purchasing the next courses.

Day Five

Day five is one of lightness; there is dancing after restroom and lunch breaks. Much effort is put into getting you to sign up for the next and more expensive course. All participants are told to come back for a post-training meeting with the company staff, where again a great effort will be made to sell subsequent courses. At the end of the day, a surprise is staged, with friends and family unexpectedly appearing to congratulate "the graduate."

The Impact

What can be upsetting to certain people in such LGAT sessions is that, in these four or five intense, exhausting days (and sometimes this process is sped up into even fewer days), they become flooded with more emotion and conflict than they can handle all at once. Up until this time, they've handled their lives in their own way, but at these training sessions, they've had to look at their entire past in a brief, enforced way. This

is quite different from psychotherapy, for instance, where the therapist and the patient progress more slowly in order to allow the person to deal with whatever she or he wants or needs to at a manageable pace.

If they had known ahead of time about the intensity and psychological depth of some of these exercises, many former participants have told me that they never would have bought or gone to the training. They had no true idea of the intensity of the situation, the effects of group pressure, or the personal fatigue that comes from LGAT sessions, and they simply expected an ordinary educational experience. Even though printed statements are now given out to participants by several LGATs and training programs, it is my opinion that these statements don't meet the criteria of truly giving the consumer full information about the intensity that will be experienced nor about the potential surfacing of extremely personal past material. In California, for example, where residents have seventy-two hours to decide not to make purchases elicited by high pressure sales personnel, people have more protection from door-to-door magazine salespersons than we do from being taken in and pressured by cults and recruiters for LGATs.

I have included LGATs in this book because they represent forms of coordinated programs of intense persuasion and group pressure. I am not discussing here the many excellent skill-

training, educational, and motivational programs that are used in business and industry for practical results. But apart from those programs, there are many training schemes that employ thought-reform processes that can harm employees and engender lawsuits for employers. They are a modern-day, corporate version of social and psychological influence techniques that make people deployable without their knowledge or consent--precisely my objection to cults.

Development of a New Age Training Program: Case Example

One personal development program quite popular with educated professionals was Insight seminars. Some defectors from the organization have charged that Insight was used to recruit members to the background organization, the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness (MSIA). The founder of Insight and head of MSIA is John-Roger Hinkins (although he rarely uses his last name), and his story is an interesting one.

Hinkins graduated with a degree in psychology from the University of Utah in 1958. Subsequent to a postoperative coma in 1963, apparently he awoke to say he felt there were two people within him: a "new" Roger and the "old" John. For a while, J-R, as he called himself, sold his spiritual insights for three-dollar love offerings. Then, he studied Eckankar, a New Age spiritual system, and declared himself the "holder" of the

Mystical Traveler Consciousness fighting the Red Monk (the devil). He is said to have considered himself in line with Jesus, Moses, Noah, and the like. Blending the old and the new, J-R created MSIA and gained quite a following. By the early 1970s, he was teaching seminars four nights a week.

Later in the same decade, some of his devotees convinced him to adapt the Lifespring training to MSIA's needs. (Lifespring has been one of the more popular LGATs since the early to mid 1970s, along with est and Actualizations.) Working with a person who had been key in the development of Lifespring, J-R inaugurated his Insight training seminar with 120 MSIA ministers, who spread it first to MSIA's own church cells, then to public seminars. J-R is reported to have called Insight both his "ministry" and his "money machine."

The seminars were a cross between a motivational course and an intense group encounter session. They eventually became an orgy of self-exploration, full-body hugs, and love letters to oneself. Guilt was purged, fantasy was indulged, and love was in the air. One exercise, the "Cocktail Party," has been described as a mass primal scream session in which people shout blunt, honest expressions at one another for about two hours nonstop, while assistants hand out vomit bags and exhort participants to keep going. The session evolves into a "rebirthing" process, with peaceful guided imagery and calming music. Then, participants act

out their most anxiety-producing fantasy in front of each other. This is followed by "cradling," meant to let participants know that their new "family" loves them unconditionally, despite their revelations of deep personal vulnerabilities. Lights dim and certain individuals are hoisted in the air and gently rocked to heavenly music, with everyone else beaming angelically into their eyes.

Afterward, participants have attested to feeling "awesome" and experiencing an emotional high that lasted for days. Some say they had to use special "grounding" procedures just to carry on with normal life after this "transcending" experience. At some point, a "Gift of Giving" session was added to the five-day Insight seminar, during which it has been reported that some people were so euphoric they made out checks for \$10,000 to the group. Numerous Insight graduates were said to have been recruited to MSIA, although the link between Insight and MSIA was not generally known to seminar attendees.

In 1983, allegations of sexual abuse surfaced from two top aides. Some staffers said J-R used his spiritual authority to seduce them. According to reports, J-R discouraged marriage and ordered his personal staff to abstain from sex; but former devotees said that they were forced to engage in sex with J-R to maintain a "smooth relationship with the Traveler." Hinkins denied these allegations and no legal or law enforcement actions

resulted. Because of these charges and other negative publicity, however, many devotees and Insight trainees became disillusioned and quit. Some described the period afterward as a "spiritual shattering," and in some cases, it took years for former followers to patch up their psyches. Meanwhile, some staffers have remained loyal, continuing the Insight seminars.

A recent annual brochure from the Insight Consulting Group (ICG) claims that over fifty thousand people have participated with Insight, and boasts worldwide expansion, noting seminar locations in twelve U.S. cities and in London, Sydney, Toronto, and Vancouver. The partial list of clients includes Abbott Labs, Beth Israel Hospital, Campbell Soup, Lockheed, McDonnell Douglas, NBC, Pillsbury, Rockwell, the Social Security Administration, UCLA Graduate School of Management, and the United States Navy, and "a host of small and medium-sized companies." And as recently as 1990 J-R's book, Life 101, was on the New York Times best-seller list.

Problems with Being "Transformed" at Work

The following cases illustrate some of what happened when employers sent employees to certain programs. In some of these cases, the employees sought redress because they felt they had been coerced by their employers to attend and/or harmed by the program.

Aside from employees' complaints that they were being put through programs tantamount to a forced religious conversion, employees also objected to specific techniques being used: meditation, neurolinguistic programming, biofeedback, self-hypnosis, bizarre relaxation techniques, mind control, body touching, yoga, trance inductions, visualization, and, in some cases, intense confrontational sessions akin to the "attack" therapy methods that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Using intense psychological techniques, some of these programs "induce ordinary people to suspend their judgment, surrender themselves to their instructors, and even adopt new fundamental beliefs." Trainers using confrontational techniques create a sense of powerlessness in the seminar attendees. Once this sense is achieved, it becomes a lot easier to erase old patterns of thinking and behavior.

From a tire factory in Albany, Georgia, to a car dealership in Tacoma, Washington, workers began to put up resistance to the imposition of religious values and intense influence techniques used in the workplace training programs.

Management Courses and Worker Responses

Sterling Management, a consulting firm in Glendale, California, offers programs to dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, osteopaths, veterinarians, and other medical professionals to

teach them how to expand their practices and increase their income. Sterling claims to be a secular organization, but one lawsuit filed by three dentists alleged that a \$17,000 seminar turned out to be a weeklong "Scientology workshop" aimed at recruiting them into the church. One of the dentists alone said he spent \$65,000 in less than six months on the Sterling course and further Scientology counseling.

A promotional brochure asserts that in a single quarter, 109 Sterling Management clients "went Clear at Orange County Org" (group jargon that indicates they went through Scientology courses). And a review of a dozen brochures, mailings, and flyers put out by Sterling shows a clear link to Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, but none makes mention of the Church of Scientology. Sterling representatives assert that the training is nonreligious. A lawyer for Sterling has stated that they have secularized the teachings of the church.

In October 1993, the Nassau County (New York) Commission on Human Rights made a determination that promises to protect large numbers of employees against potential religious discrimination in the workplace arising out of such seminars. The commission found "probable cause" in the case of two employees of a physical therapy firm who were discharged by their employer for refusing to take training courses given by Sterling Management Systems. The attorney for the complainants regarded the commission's

ruling as a "ground-breaking precedent ... greatly advancing the protection of employees' rights throughout the country to resist religious indoctrination and solicitation of membership in another church."

Here are three additional examples of companies affected by this issue.

Applied Materials. In September 1992, Applied Materials, a California computer chip manufacturer, settled out of court for an estimated \$600,000 with three former employees who alleged that they were driven out of the company after they complained about courses given on the job by Applied Scholastics, a management consulting group basing its work on Hubbard's writings. In 1989, Applied Scholastics listed General Motors, Hewlett-Packard, and the United States Army as some of its clients.

Applied Materials admitted it had "lacked sensitivity with regard to the controversial nature of L. Ron Hubbard." A legal affairs writer commented that the case "is a typical one in a growing number of EEOC complaints and lawsuits throughout the nation over a host of management training programs linked to a host of religious sects."

Cocolat. In 1991, an investment firm owned by Joel Feshbach, an

acknowledged Scientologist, purchased Cocolat, a West Coast candy company that was having some financial troubles. Then, in early 1993, thirteen management and administrative employees told local newspapers that they had quit their jobs at Cocolat because their employer was using management techniques based on the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard. The company reportedly fired an additional six managers after they had resisted the company's management philosophy. Feshbach denies ever having pushed Scientology onto Cocolat employees, but once again claims of religious harassment were filed by employees with the EEOC.

Former Cocolat employees said that references to Hubbard and his terminology began to pervade the company training and in-house communications. They said outside consultants brought in Hubbard's philosophy, complete with workbooks, saying they were going to make the employees' lives better. One former store manager said, "It was like Scientology came in disguised as a management course. All the red lights went off for me. I felt like I was being brainwashed or something." In April 1993, the popular chocolate maker announced a reorganization and the closing of its entire San Francisco Bay Area retail chain.

Stryker Systems. According to a 1990 lawsuit filed against this California software company, employees claim they were ordered to read and complete written exercises in Introduction to

Scientology Ethics and Personal Integrity. The plaintiffs, who were allegedly fired for refusing to adopt the Scientology practice of "writing up their overts and withholds" (meaning confessing bad thoughts and actions), won an undisclosed settlement. The company acknowledged no wrongdoing.

Krone Training at Pacific Bell

One of the most notorious New Age employee programs espousing "Leadership Development" was instituted at Pacific Bell after its divestiture from AT&T. Pacific Bell brought in a program directed by consultant Charles Krone that was based on the philosophy of G.I. Gurdjieff, causing Jacob Needleman, a San Francisco State University philosophy professor, to comment: "I'm a bit amazed to see [Gurdjieff] being used [in business] because it is one of the most uncompromising spiritual teachings I know of."

The program attempted to change employees' thought patterns by changing the words they use--for example, a "goal" was to be called an "end-state vision." Employee complaints, exposure in the local newspapers, and a study instituted by the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) put an end to the program. Outside evaluators who went in at PUC's request reported they found some positive features, but "unfortunately these benefits are heavily outweighed by strongly negative influences." The influences listed included fear, intimidation and mistrust,

decreased productivity, wasted time, a split in the culture, introduction of obscure language and phrases, and a loss of morale.

Pacific Bell had spent \$50.6 million on the program in two years, and would have spent an additional \$135.6 million and sent all 67,000 Pacific Bell employees through the program. The PUC disallowed recovery from ratepayers of half the expenditures actually made.

PSI World

Another out-of-court settlement was reached in a case that involved PSI World, a consulting group based in San Rafael, California. The plaintiff claimed impairment after having his emotions manipulated in a five-day PSI World training program, which caused him to later lose control of his car, crash, and get hurt. He said he was physically and mentally exhausted after what he described as emotional ten-hour sessions in which participants were asked to act out mostly negative situations. He also went without sleep two nights in order to complete the homework assignments. "There was no clock and no one was allowed to wear watches," he said. "We were going long periods of time without eating and without breaks."

While PSI World admitted no guilt, and its lawyer said there was no merit to the claims, PSI World was reported to have paid a

six-figure settlement to have the case dismissed.

Lifespring

"Jane" took two Lifespring trainings in the late 1980s.

Lifespring's philosophy maintains that people are to "take a stand" to be responsible for whatever happens to them. By the end of the Level-I training, Jane had begun to accept this idea. During the Level-II program, Jane was required to reveal a brutal knife-point rape that happened three years earlier, when she was sixteen. Jane had never before discussed the rape except in a few counseling sessions immediately afterward. Neither her culture nor her family had treated the rape as a dishonor, since she had done nothing wrong. She felt her family had supported her right to continue to regard herself as a virgin. For three years, she functioned well, both psychologically and at school.

During the training, Jane was urged to release emotions associated with the rape. She forced herself to express anger and to describe the experience publicly. In a subsequent exercise, she was urged to express the emotion she felt toward her father who had died shortly after her birth. In response to this exercise, Jane began assaulting herself and chewing on a styrofoam bat used in the training. Nevertheless, she was allowed to continue the program.

Later, the trainer instructed Jane to role-play a \$10,000-a-

night prostitute. She believed the assignment had special meaning because of what she'd been led to reveal about the rape. She was further upset, perceiving herself as having been singled out for special humiliation. Although she had no history of psychiatric illness prior to the Lifespring training, afterward Jane underwent a period of growing depression that culminated in multiple suicide attempts. She was hospitalized for three years and remains on medication. Jane sued Lifespring and the case settled for a large amount.

Psychological Casualties

As we have seen, coercive psychological influence may be operating in the workplace at the time the employee is assigned to attend certain training programs and/or it may occur in the actual training program. Consequently, the psychological ramifications of some programs have led to employees' filing legal suits. Some of these suits were described in the previous section, and three additional cases are described here.

Psychological Breakdown

"Gerald," a forty-year-old man, applied for a job as a store manager. The owner told Gerald he would hire him only if Gerald purchased and attended a specific large group awareness training. The owner, who had become a devotee of the group, abides by the

group's policy of not revealing what the training is about. Thus, he failed to describe to Gerald its philosophy, the extremely emotional and confrontational quality of the program, or how psychologically upsetting the procedures can be for some attendees.

Because taking the course was a prerequisite to employment, Gerald assumed it would be a skill-training, job-related program, and purchased the training at a price he could ill afford. Once the five-day program began, he realized he was in an emotionally intense, highly confrontational, encounter-group situation. It appeared to him puzzlingly unrelated to managing a small store. The content was an amalgam of New Age philosophy, guided imagery, personal confessions, and confrontational attacks by the trainers. Gerald had never seen people break down emotionally to the extent he saw in these sessions. His anxiety mounted by the hour, much of it growing out of the conflicts he was feeling between his religious beliefs and the New Age philosophy he was hearing in the training. Adding to this stress was his fear that he would not get hired unless he completed the program. He felt himself coming apart psychologically and asked to be excused, but the leaders of the program insisted he remain. By the fourth day, he was in a mental hospital in the midst of a brief reactive psychosis. Gerald had no prior history of mental illness and nothing related in his family history.

Psychological Deterioration

"Joyce" was a top marketing executive in her firm. Joyce's supervisor told her she would get ahead only if she attended the New Age training program that he urged her to take. She thought it was a skills-training, job-related program but instead came upon the same stresses as experienced by Gerald. Joyce found the psychological and social coercion so intense that she has no remembrance of just when she deteriorated, but she was admitted to a psychiatric ward with almost continuous panic attacks. As time passed, she developed numerous and incapacitating phobias and became house-bound and unemployed or underemployed for more than three years. She had no prior history of mental disorder, nor was there any in her family.

Intense Psychological Stress

A dozen female technical employees of the same minority ethnic background were sent to a seminar after being told that success there would determine who would be promoted in the corporation. The course was run by a Caucasian male who had been a security guard before becoming a seminar trainer. None of the women could link the seminar with on-the-job demands either during or after the training. However, each suffered greatly during the program because of the humiliation and degradation heaped upon each of

them by the trainer. The trainer ran the program in the manner of an attack therapy group. He had no appreciation of their ethnic values and, in fact, seemed particularly insensitive to their ethnicity. Additionally, he apparently had no awareness or concern about the impact of the intense psychological techniques he was using. He was described as a rude, confrontational, and menacing figure. He called the women to the front of the room and had them stand on a table while he criticized their bodies and their clothing and taunted them for their conformity and cultural ways.

The psychological coercion was intense, the humiliation great, and the fallout was that each of the attendees suffered marked psychological stress, most resigning from their jobs within a relatively short time after the seminar. One woman suffered an enduring major depression, requiring medication and psychotherapy, and took her case to legal hearings and settlement.

Buyer Beware: Thought-Reform Processes at Work

Because of my involvement in psychological and medical research over the past fifty years, I have been working in a variety of hospitals, clinics, and universities. For more than fifteen years, I have served on the Kaiser Permanente Medical Institutional Review Board, evaluating and reviewing informed-

consent procedures for all research that involves humans that is performed under the auspices of the Kaiser Permanente system. I have sat on the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine Committee to survey the effects of mustard gas and lewisite, after a government testing program was revealed in which sixty thousand WWII military personnel were exposed to those gases without their consent. Data from this testing was not made public until 1991. So I have been sensitized to fighting for and sustaining the laws that protect human rights in biomedical and behavioral research.

The combination of these review responsibilities and my professional work with cult survivors has given me an avid appreciation for the need to protect and uphold the practice of informed consent. I am dedicated to individuals' having informed consent over their lives, their choices, and their beliefs, and I believe that employees have the right to know what they are being made to attend. This perhaps has made me particularly aware of how deceptive many training programs are.

Thus I call attention here, as I did earlier in reference to cult recruitment, to the uninformed state in which many employees and other individuals are sent or go on their own to various training programs and work-related or self-improvement seminars. They learn what the program is about only after it becomes difficult to leave it. The primary barrier to leaving, of course,

is that they might lose their job by offending the boss who sent them to the program and who perhaps seems enamored of it. Yet in the examples just given, we can sense the devastation that can be wrought when employees are made to attend training programs that are not the excellent ones that exist for skills training and job-related behavior but instead are meant to "transform" (and in some cases, recruit) for less than noble purposes.

Religious issues aside, the pronounced psychological nature of many of the exercises within many of these programs is of concern. We cannot deny the fact that they grew out of the highly confrontational group therapy techniques introduced by the encounter, sensitivity, and large group awareness training movements. And in many ways, these psychological techniques are little different from the influence processes used in today's cults to achieve attitudinal change. This is apparent in the psychological and attitudinal effects produced, and in the appearance of a certain number of psychological casualties during and after participation in some of these training programs.

A further result is that the majority of participants experience varying degrees of alienation and instability because they are urged to give up old norms, goals, and ideals. They also suffer a type of culture shock as they try to reconcile pre-training values with what they learn in the training and with the realities of their post-training existence. Importantly, a

certain number of participants will be seriously harmed as these stresses precipitate a handful of psychological conditions, such as brief psychotic episodes, posttraumatic stress disorder, a variety of dissociative disorders, relaxation-induced anxiety, and other miscellaneous reactions including phobias, cognitive difficulties, and stress-related illnesses.

In light of such consequences, the fact that most of these programs do not provide the skills training they advertise is the least of their problems. Unfortunately, the decision to buy a training scheme is often made on an emotional rather than a rational basis by an executive who is still high on his own introductory experience of the training.

While some people decry the number of legal suits filed yearly in the United States, it appears that it has been the recent legal cases filed by employees and the EEOC rulings that have given employees the hope that they have some leverage over the types of training programs they can be sent to. The hue and cry has not been over employees' finding themselves at authentic skills-training programs, but over their finding themselves at programs that impinged on their religious or personal beliefs and that did not train them for their jobs but that attacked and decimated their personality and very self.

In short, lack of informed consent, use of hidden agendas, and use of various forms of coercion characterize the criticisms

of both cults and certain modern-day training programs among those who have experienced them. Buyer, beware.