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## Speedy needs assessment

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out that these are not just fuzzy, general guidelines but laws that can be expressed with mathematical precision.

Then display the mathematical expressions of the three laws:

- The Law of Plurality:  $N_p > 1$ .
- The Law of Decadactyly:  $N_T \approx 10^* N_p$ .
- The Law of Inevitability:  $A \approx K$ ,  $P_{ST} \approx 1$ .

After giving participants a moment to scan the three laws, explain them thus:

The Law of Plurality holds that on every team, the number of people,  $N_p$ , is always greater than one. There are no teams with only one person. There may be two, five, 10 or 15 (what a team!)—but always there are more than one. (At this point, participants will not be too impressed; forge through their disappointment at

something so obvious.)

The Law of Decadactyly holds that however many people there are on a team, the number of toes,  $N_T$ , is approximately equal to 10 times the number of people,  $N_p$ . This is not a perfect tenfold correspondence, because some unfortunate team members may not have a full set, or the occasional polydactyls will have more than they are due, strictly speaking. But, on average, there are roughly 10 toes per person on every team. Six people, 60 toes. Fifteen people, 150 toes. (Participants are now re-engaged, amused to see that the unfamiliar word "decadactyly" simply refers to our 10-toedness and appreciative of your precision in recognizing exceptions to the rule of 10. They are also quizzical, and may even ask what this has to do with any-

thing. Answer that question by explaining the third law.)

The Law of Inevitability states that as a team's activity level,  $A$ , increases, and the length of time,  $K$ , that it is together grows larger, the probability,  $P_{ST}$ , of stepping on toes approaches one. That is, with so many toes moving around and seeking space in close quarters, it becomes practically inevitable that over the course of time, people on a team will step on each other's toes.

Then announce that this session is about the care and repair of toes. Your program will be off to a good start. —Russ Forrester

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between the substantial demands that we put on you and the demands of your personal life, and if there's some way to accommodate that by recognizing that you have a pet, we'll do it."



## Speedy Needs Assessment

How do you perform a needs assessment under today's compressed business deadlines? It's a question often asked these days by trainers (and was the subject of a March feature in TRAINING: "How to Do A Needs Assessment When You Think

You Don't Have Time").

Sometimes asking a series of questions in an analytical format provides enough information to replace a lengthy, full-blown needs analysis, says Jack Asgar, chairman of Practical Management Inc. of Las Vegas. Asgar's suggested list of questions, in sequence, are:

1. What are the operating problems? (Never ask, "What is the training need?")

2. Are the operating problems caused or contributed to by human behavior? If yes, describe the present behavior and the desired performance.

3. Could the employees perform correctly if they had to? Have they performed the task correctly lately? (A yes to either question suggests that training is not the solution.)

4. Is the desired performance now being demanded by the employees' manager? If yes, explain how. If no, what assurance do you have that the new behavior will be reinforced on the job after training has been completed?

5. What evidence shows that present performance is a problem? What would be some observable signs that the problem has been solved? (End results such

## Noted

"Web-based training is a lot like teenage sex: Everyone says they're doing it, very few actually are, and those who are aren't enjoying it all that much."

—Klaus Andersen, vice president of education for Oracle Systems Corp., speaking at TechLearn Live!, a conference sponsored by the Masie Center of Saratoga Springs, NY, and broadcast live from Seattle via satellite and the Internet.

as increased sales, etc., are not acceptable. The observation must involve the use of skills.)

6. What other issues might be contributing to this operating problem?

7. Based on this analysis, is training needed? If yes, what skills should be learned?

8. If training is needed, will managers commit themselves to active involvement in the training process before, during and after the training?

"In our experience, these questions often lead either to no training or to different training from that originally discussed," Asgar says. More important, he adds, they may identify fundamental problems in the environment that impair employees' ability to learn or use new skills.



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