

This column is a continuation, in spirit, of the profile pieces Odin Westgaard started in the early 1980s in *Performance Improvement Quarterly* and more recently here in *Performance Improvement*. We think that these profiles give a glimpse into the minds—and hearts—of the people who have shaped the basics of our field. We hope that you find these profiles as interesting and rewarding to read as they are to write. Enjoy!

—Debra Haney & Sheryl Narahara, *Column Editors*

UNsung HEROES

Allow Me to Introduce Darryl Sink

by Debra Haney

The customer is the customer. Period. We better find ways to help the customer or someone else will. Our customer relationship permeates our work. Good work and satisfying the client are both necessary.” Dr. Darryl L. Sink, president and founder of Darryl L. Sink & Associates, Inc. (DSA), is in the business of human performance technology (HPT) and instructional systems design (ISD) consulting and training. For Darryl, the delivery of solutions, first at colleges and later to corporations and governmental agencies, is a business activity. Darryl thinks that having a business perspective widens the context of his consulting, supports more and better solutions for his clients, and grounds his actions in reality.

An orientation to the business side of consulting has

not prevented Darryl from continuing his strong track record in the practical research and application end of ISD and HPT. This track record, by the way, started with his dissertation research and has continued through 25 years of consulting work. He is a contributing author to the *Handbook of HPT*, both first and second editions, as well as numerous publications. Darryl has won two Outstanding Instructional Product of the Year awards from the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI). The first award, in 1986, was for a self-contained multimedia course on computer literacy for teachers in Alaska. Darryl remembers the work as being extremely interesting and fun, as well as professionally satisfying. The second award, in 1995, which he shared with Hewlett-Packard, was for a systems approach to

order processing. Both projects involved many different tasks and were large scale. Darryl also received ISPI’s Outstanding Service Award in 1997 for work he did as Vice President of Finance while he served on the Board of Directors from 1993 to 1995.

Darryl sketched out his view of the field: ISD → HPT → ISD → HPT. He started with instructional systems design, expanded to human performance technology, but stays with ISD as a cornerstone to his business. He views his career from the perspective of a “craftsman”—always focusing on practicality. Even in graduate school, every class he took he viewed from the perspective of looking for practical applications. His major at Indiana University (IU) was ISD, with a minor in media production and educational psychology.

Darryl's dissertation research was on the use of learning objectives by students to shape their own study processes and habits. He examined more than 100 published studies for the literature review. He remembers that it was interesting that only 50 or so of those studies showed a statistically significant difference. Learners in highly structured learning environments (this was the Skinnerian age), with different types of objectives, showed no significant differences in results. However, in unstructured environments, providing learning objectives had a significant effect on the results. As a part of his study, he developed and used a program that taught students how to study using objectives as a guide. He later marketed and sold copies of the objectives program.

This spark of entrepreneurship was evident in DSA's first project with Apple Computer. Darryl wrote the instruction manual for the first Apple printers. The client asked Darryl if he knew of a good company to produce the manuals. This was in the days of typesetting for print production. Darryl recalls that as he was driving home, it struck him that he could produce the manuals, based on his production experience at IU and in his community college job, and greatly increased the profit margin over the labor-intensive instructional design and writing. He became so excited that he almost drove off the road. It was the start of his full-service company.

After finishing his doctorate, Darryl spent a year in Texas, at Eastfield Community College. He was part of a team of three full-time instructional designers doing internally funded projects with the faculty. The projects ranged from straight instructional design (ID), to media production, to supporting faculty members' development as instructors.

He was able to take what he learned at Eastfield College to West Valley Community College in Saratoga, California. Setting up a program like the one at Eastfield College was not a straightforward process, as there was no existing program at West Valley for internally funded development projects. Darryl wrote a proposal for funding so faculty could have release time from teaching and other duties to work on ID projects. He had to sell the idea to the dean of instruction and the president of the college. It worked. As Darryl says, "I viewed the dean and the president as my clients and customers. I had to please them with the program."

As a college professor, senior administrator, and business consultant, Darryl has consciously worked with the political realities of any situation. This has meant selling himself, finding customer needs, and fulfilling them.

Darryl's advice to newcomers focuses on opportunities, customer orientation, and leveraging yourself. "Look for opportunities to learn the craft, rather than looking for an immediate opportunity for financial success. Look for opportunities to develop something you have never done before. This increases your skill set." At West Valley Community

College, he found opportunities to develop things he had not developed before, such as structured role plays, instructional games, and interactive video instruction. Darryl created his own opportunities to practice and expand his craft.

"Think in terms of marketing yourself and your skills in whatever environment you find yourself. Develop an orientation to customer service, whoever your customers are. Make your final products look great. Think in terms of leveraging what you know and do while learning new skills. Decide where your opportunities are, whether those are profit margins, new experiences, or something else."

Darryl thinks that the ID-HPT field is growing, and these services are needed more than ever, in both public education and corporate training. The population is growing, and adults require more training and retraining in the job market. Performance improvement will grow, because it supports business.

According to Darryl, three different skill sets are needed by professionals in our field. The first is ISD and human performance improvement (HPI). This skill set includes superior, not just good, written communication skills. A need to write will always exist. Even in a needs analysis, for example, you will need to summarize and articulate problems and opportunities concisely and convincingly. ID and HPI skills are necessary, but not sufficient.

The second skill set is interpersonal skills: working with people. Most people new to the field need to improve in this area. Two areas of likely failure are dealing with customers and coworkers. Darryl recalled a newly graduated (PhD) instructional designer he placed on a project. This person had excellent ID skills and came highly recommended. However, in his focus on product quality, he ignored warning signals that the client was not happy with the process and their personal interactions. At the end of the project, the client told Darryl that the product was great, but he would not work with that instructional designer again.

The third skill set is technical: computers and all other equipment needed for the job. This skill is always evolving, because the equipment is always changing. Technical skills need to be developed to a sufficient level that, with a minimum level of coaching and modeling on the job, the person will be able to perform. Having a doctorate is not a guarantee of this technical skill set. Also, having achieved a certain skill level does not guarantee your skill level in the future. All three skill sets need to be developed continually over the course of a career.

Early in his career, Darryl had the opportunity to start a program for faculty in West Valley Community College. The goal was to improve the courses and also have the faculty learn how to do ID, and most importantly, think like an instructional designer.

In 1977, Darryl designed a workshop that became a richly rewarding professional experience and led to lifelong friendships as well. "Workshop 77" was hosted at the West Valley Community College. Forty-five ID support staff from a variety of community colleges attended. Their roles were to support college faculty in instructional design, but many had no actual background in ID. The weeklong workshop gave them an intensive grounding in ID. Darryl, the West Valley College media and production staff, and the participants all worked hard and partied together. Thiago and Harold Stolovitch, whom Darryl knew from his IU days, presented the training. The workshop cemented Darryl's personal and professional relationship with both gentlemen.

Darryl was later involved in a large curriculum development project for vocational schools in Saudi Arabia, associated with the US Department of Labor and California State University at San Jose. He recalls that it was a unique cultural experience visiting the schools in Saudi Arabia. The project work was done in San Jose, California, but Darryl went to Saudi Arabia as part of the negotiation team and to visit the vocational schools and students who would be taking the courses.

Darryl had early, memorable mentors: Jerry Brown, who was his dissertation director (and who later, by the way, came to do contract work for Darryl at DSA) and James Okey, from the science education program at IU. Influential professors at IU include Dennis Pett, Ivor Davies, and Tom Schwen. Intellectually, Darryl was mentored by Bob Mager's work. Thiago and Harold Stolovitch greatly influenced him in terms of philosophy and attitudes.

Darryl is grateful for the help and mentoring he received. When he was in a position to act as a mentor, he did so, starting with his first position after finishing his doctorate. As Darryl worked closely with instructors in community colleges for eight years, he coached and mentored them in the ID process. They were subject matter experts in their fields, not instructional designers. He also mentored an ongoing stream of interns from the University of California at San Jose. Today he continues informally mentoring junior instructional designers within his consulting company.

Darryl and his wife Jane (who, incidentally, was his high school sweetheart) operate DSA from their Monterey, California, office. The business has two main branches: public and inhouse workshops on ID, and customized ID and HPT consulting work. Darryl sees the consulting work growing larger, as clients increasingly move to enterprisewide solutions.

Future plans for Darryl? To continue doing what he is doing, while "leveraging what I know and do while learning new skills." 🏠

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