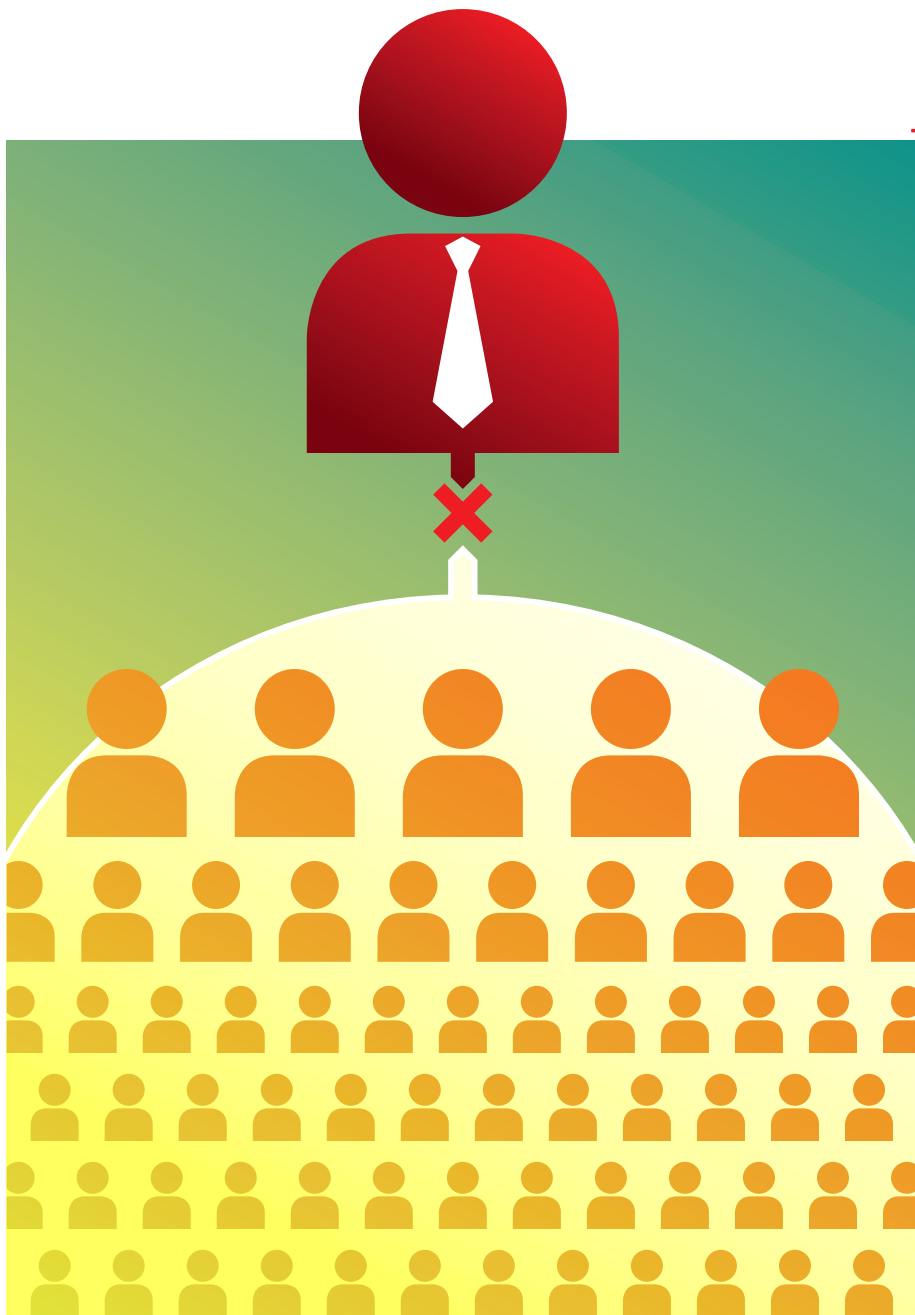


# Psychological Associates Trains the Best

BY BILL BEGGS JR.

Clients Reside in 'C' Suite or Come from Factory Floor



What's the difference between executives at Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Blue Bunny ice cream? Hint: It's not only the tattoos, leather vests, braids in the beard and pony-tails...on the men.

Actually, when it comes to polishing up their leadership skills, there's not that much difference between the folks in the "C" suite—the CEO, CFO *et al.*—regardless of what sort of company you're trying to run, and run better.

"It's all people skills," says William E. Beane, Ph.D., senior vice president of client services at Psychological Associates in Clayton. "Leadership means making things happen through gaining the commitment of people. How do you use interpersonal skills? How do you gain the allegiance of your direct reports? How do you 'manage up'?"

In the recent comedy "Horrible Bosses," three supervisors so toxic as to inspire homicidal tendencies in their underlings were incapable of getting their arms around the concept of WIIFT—What's In It For Them. Think the oily, slicked-back Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*...Sigourney Weaver (and all her gloriously awful 1980s hair) in *Working Girl*...Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*...and you have a glimpse of how the goals of the organization can be subsumed by the ego of the individual ostensibly in charge. WIIFM (What's In It For ME) is the centerpiece of their management style.

“The CEO who’s ‘a legend in his own mind’ isn’t helping anyone. Our sweet spot is interpersonal skills. It permeates everything we do.”

– William E. Beane, Ph.D.  
senior vice president of client services  
**Psychological Associates**



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We all recognize this in a former, hope-to-goodness not current, boss.

As an extraordinary individual moves up the ladder, his cult of personality may ascend with him. Perhaps he becomes more adept with systems and hones a keener organizational savvy. Meanwhile, subordinates may be fearful of sharing original ideas in high-level meetings, and become detached or ineffectual yes-men and sycophants who applaud the chief’s every utterance. Of course, the chief doesn’t realize that his inner circle is so disengaged because he’s painted himself into a corner. It’s one thing to establish an open-door policy but quite another when everyone’s too afraid of you to show up unsummoned.

Since 1958, Psychological Associates has worked with companies big and small, St. Louis institutions and Fortune 500s here and out of town, training both top executives and the rank and file to recognize and change obstructive behaviors for the good of the order.

“The CEO who’s ‘a legend in his own mind’ isn’t helping anyone,” least of all himself, Beane points out. “Our sweet spot is interpersonal skills. It permeates everything we do.”

Ill feelings in the rank and file, among workers on the floor, whether in retail or on an assembly line, can clog the productivity pipeline. CollaborAction is the firm’s name for the product that helps defuse such issues without an “I win; you lose” result.

“No resentment is the outcome of win-win,” says Beane.

The founders, Robert Lefton and V.R. Buzzotta, after 50 years are still involved with the company, more in an emeritus role.

Under president Ann Beatty, who was in New York with a client on the day of our visit, Psychological Associates has brought in a coterie of younger execs with doctorates who have helped the firm manage through the recession and become more technology-driven in training, assessment, coaching, survey delivery and organizational/team diagnostics. To serve its multinational clients, the company has developed a global network of partners to support its efforts worldwide.

Still, Beane emphasizes, although much of the work has shifted to the web, classroom coaching, often side-by-side with peers, can’t be replaced. Skills don’t exist in a vacuum; they must be applied in the context of engagement, commitment and high performance.

The company has worked in recent years to build its talent management offerings: assessment, coaching, succession planning and executive development. Although many

of those programs have some off-the-shelf similarities—and would translate well whether being used at Harley-Davidson or Emerson, Blue Bunny (Wells Dairy), Bunge or Brown Shoe—each is tailored to be more organization-specific.

Psychological Associates was one of the first firms of its kind to videotape trainees, the better for them to see their behaviors and make adjustments where recommended. The equipment isn’t as cumbersome nowadays, but the principle is the same.

“We don’t just tell managers what to do,” Beane says, emphatically. “We have a heavy emphasis on practice and feedback in small groups so that they learn *how* to do it.” ■

