



TRAINING MEDIA REVIEW *by trainers, for trainers*

RATING



ABOUT THE STAR RATINGS

Outstanding	★★★★
Very good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Above average	★★★
Average	★★
Below average	★★
Poor	★

TRAINING MEDIA REVIEW provides objective reviews of training content and supporting technologies, advice on media-related training issues, research reports, and consulting.

www.tmreview.com

TOLL FREE 877.532.1838 TEL 617.489.9120

EMAIL editor@tmreview.com

©2007 by TMR Publications. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means without the written consent of the publisher.

TMR REPRINT LEADERFISH

OBJECTIVE REVIEWS AND REPORTS @ WWW.TMREVIEW.COM

LEADERFISH, DVD, ChartHouse Learning Corporation (800.328.3789, www.charthouse.com), \$249. Includes DVD and Personal Guide.

Review by Bill Ellet

I've never quite known what to think of the Fish family of products. The first video had a compact message centered on one unlikely business, the Fulton Fish Market in Seattle.

The market is now world famous. And Fish isn't just a video anymore but a brand. Taking a cue from Hollywood producers, ChartHouse Learning merchandised the content. Want a logoed hat or tee shirt? How about a lapel pin? You can buy it online.

I'm not saying that merchandising training videos isn't smart because it is. Video vendors serving the industry are desperately looking for ways to make money besides selling a video license. But it does raise the question of whether the content is just the hook for selling higher-margin items.

WHY I LIKE LEADERFISH

LeaderFish brings together many strands of the Fish "philosophy" in a six-part video and lengthy and slick "Personal Guide." After watching the video and reading through the guide, I have to say I like and admire the materials.

Reason #1: Leadership theorists and gurus with trademarked approaches will probably not think much of *LeaderFish*. It is all about practice--practice that can begin as soon as you've been exposed to the *LeaderFish* ideas. They're a mash up of various ideas that happen to work together and are easy to understand.

Reason #2: *LeaderFish* puts human values before work. That doesn't mean work isn't important. The reasoning is that good work begins with human beings who have particular needs and capabilities. However, the latter--the needs and capabilities part--isn't elaborated as something complex. *LeaderFish* keeps it simple and actionable. For example, work should be fun, but fun doesn't necessarily depend on the work itself.

Reason #3: *LeaderFish* is the teasing antidote to MBA business models and other ways of looking at an organization that lack one thing: people. The people are assumed. They will do what they are required to do according to the chosen model.

Reason #4: *LeaderFish* is about leadership, not about leaders, and leadership is not a solo performance but a collaboration built on good relationships. In the *LeaderFish* video, you see plenty of CEOs, owners, and presidents, but it gives even more attention to the rank and file--as it should. It's also about the benefits of relationships that have little or nothing to do with work.

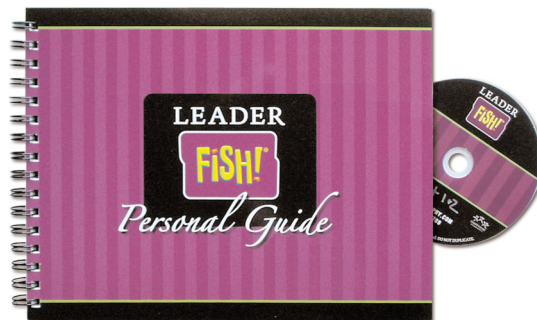
I once said I had a problem with the Fish philosophy because it seemed to ignore the organizational context. I felt the early videos implied that the burden of having fun was on employees--they just needed to change their attitude, no matter how the company might treat them.

Any hint of that lopsided responsibility is long gone. The executives and managers in this program are more than just humble. They realize that the individuals who usually have to make the biggest adjustments for an organization to be both fun and productive are the executives and managers.

NOT FOR EVERY COMPANY

Sadly, the companies that can make the Fish philosophy work are clearly exceptional. They take the risk of remaking their culture and are willing to build the top-to-bottom commitment to make and sustain the change.

I have been reading some case studies recently about troubled companies, and their cultures are typically a root cause of the trouble. Unfortunately, changing a culture is a hard thing to do and takes time. That's one fact that should be given more attention in this program, not to spoil the fun but to set realistic expectations.



LeaderFish is not for every company and organization. It has to be positively scary for many executives to even contemplate. They like things tightly controlled, and they like the prerogatives of power.

Power makes everything in an organization simple. Those who have power can compel those who don't to do what the powerful want. The venerable John Gardner, former secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, makes the point nicely. (He makes cameo appearances at the beginning of each segment.)

The power to compel doesn't mean the power to compel good performance. The powerless often don't do things well, especially when what they've been asked to do is stupid--which is often true because the "leaders" aren't ever as close to the work as the people who do the work.

Toyota got this a long time ago. Its leadership realized that thousands upon thousands of small changes conceived by the people who know the work best compound to big changes on a continuous basis. That's nothing like the one-off top-down changes conceived by management gurus that rain down on people in many organizations.

GOOD MIX OF EXAMPLES

The *LeaderFish* video presents people, companies, and even some stories that will be familiar to viewers of previous Fish videos. I personally am tired of Southwest Airlines as the preferred icon of a business that takes relationships seriously. The example is a little worn, and Southwest has been shown to have some serious people issues, namely risking customer safety by deferring maintenance.

The mix of companies is wide, from sprawling corporations like Sprint to small local businesses like a roofing company.



The people captured in the video are great. They are often amazingly articulate and insightful. My favorite is the roofing supervisor, a reformed curmudgeon. He learned to care about his charges, which meant that instead of yelling at them like a drill instructor he coached them on skills and stressed safety. *His crew isn't going to be falling off roofs. When he talks about the transformation he's gone through, his emotion is moving.*

I'm not sure the *LeaderFish* model is as coherent as other models. However, that might be imposing academic standards on an approach that doesn't want to fit into neat categories.

RECOMMENDATION

LeaderFish isn't for everyone. It is for companies, large and small, that are willing to give up conventional top-down leadership--really give it up--and think not in terms of hierarchy but of relationships. It's for companies that are willing to change the culture, which means a long-term commitment. It's for people who want to put human values at the forefront of work. Does that sound like your organization?

Bill Ellet (wellet@tmreview.com) is editor of Training Media Review and a writing consultant at Harvard Business School. His book, The Case Study Handbook: How to Read, Discuss, and Write Persuasively about Cases, was published by Harvard Business School Press in 2007.

