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When Job Aids Attack: On the Social History of Dubious Job Aids

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Abstract

In this paper we introduce the job aid as a cultural artifact in specific historical social contexts. Framing job aids as such within a broader context of social history enables human resource development (HRD) researchers and practitioners to critically reflect on training and development with a perspective on social justice vis-à-vis social responsibility. Using a targeted literature review, we present two historical cases of questionable job aids, specifically, in the so-called patent medicines of the early 20th century and the job aids used for training the Hitler Youth. Lessons learned from social history include recognizing the fundamental role that culture has in shaping not only what actions adult learners carry out, but also how the job aids can memorialize their performance. Further, it is posited that introducing the dimension of social history to training offers a more thorough and robust inquiry to critical HRD.

When Job Aids Attack

In the summer of 1905, an exasperated mother retrieved a box of *Kopp's Baby's Friend* from the washroom cabinet. Inside the box was a small bottle of the elixir she had purchased through mail order. This “King of Baby Soothers” offered the promise of putting crying babies to sleep (Adams, 1912). Indeed, the young mother must have thought that it would make her crying nine-month-old colicky baby feel better. She was unclear on the dosing instructions and read the directions from the box to assist her (Figure 1):

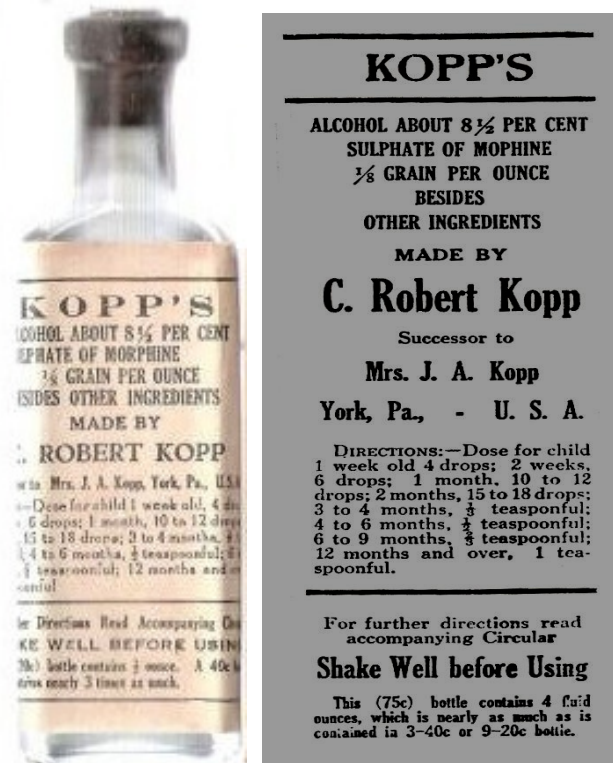


Figure 1. Bottle of and instructions to Kopp's Baby's Friend (circa 1905)¹

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¹ From personal collection of first author

A few hours after giving her infant half a teaspoon—per the dosing instructions—of the Kopp’s Baby’s Friend, “the baby went into a stupor, his pupils were pin-pointed, skin cool and clammy, heart and respiration slowed” (“Poisoned a child,” 1905, p. 24). Minutes later her baby was dead. An autopsy later revealed the cause of death to be a morphine overdose—the elixir’s main ingredient.

However, our focus here surrounds not malevolent elixirs *per se*, but the overall consideration of the *instructions that aided and abetted the performance*, the job aid. Expressly put forth is this overarching inquiry: “Should we in HRD concern ourselves with job aids that assist(ed) in questionable and sometimes lethal performance?” Although job aids are—axiologically speaking—value-neutral on their face, we offer examples where they have historically been the means to facilitate the ends of what might be considered dubious performance.

Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to proffer the job aid as a cultural artifact that can provide a snapshot of the culture from which it operates. This can be of value since viewing the job aid within a broader perspective of social history may enable human resource development (HRD) researchers and practitioners to better critically reflect on training and development vis-à-vis social responsibility and the corresponding social justice.

Fletcher and Light (2007) defined a cultural artifact as any meaning-laden ‘thing.’ This notion undergirds our theoretical framework because by viewing job aids as cultural artifacts of social history we can understand them *in situ*, therefore, embracing their social context as well (Fletcher & Light, 2007; Miller, 1998). A similar framework was employed by Moshenska

(2008) who considered *shrapnel* as a cultural artifact socially-constructed by children in England during World War II.

Performing such a review of job aids as historical documents is considered to be a reasonable framework for inquiry (Armstrong & Jones, 1987). This inquiry is a continuation of our interest in the critical hermeneutics of training manuals (Kopp & Desiderio, 2009).

Background of Authors' Interest

In the course of our broader research on the social history of training, we examined various job aids while collecting training and adult education ephemera. One particular item acquired, *Kopp's Baby's Friend*, was an old medicine bottle from the turn of the 20th century that shared the same last name as the first author (no relation). As part of its labeling, the medicine bottle included the dosing instructions, as is common with present day medication. Such instructions meet the requirements for job aids as they are created to assist adults in medication recall, comprehension, and adherence (Katz, Kripalani, & Weiss, 2006).

However, following our historical research into this particular medicine bottle, and then the patent medicine industry, in general, we were surprised to learn that those same dosing instructions were assisting adults, either at first use or subsequent uses after the adult had memorized the job aid, in facilitating death and injury to children, other adults and sometimes themselves. We subsequently began to ponder the job aids in other historical social contexts. The stream of inquiry, which considers adult learning from the point-of-view of social trends is a common modality (e.g., Barker, 2001; Jarvis, 1987; McCulloch & Richardson, 2000; Scheid, 1995).

On Job Aids

Job aids, sometimes called performance support aids² (Rossett & Schafer, 2006), are non-instructive interventions to improve performance. That is, according to Rossett and Gautier-Downes (1991), the distinction between instruction (or training) and job aids is down to depth and timing. Training, for example, usually occurs *before* the need arises, with the goal of developing human capital and building capacity (e.g., learning) built-in as part of the process. Job aids, however, are for more immediate performance, *when* the need arises, and there is no intent to develop the individual.

Job aids can take on many different forms: checklists, how-to instructions, laminated cards with phone extensions, scale models, and to-do lists (Willmore, 2006). They may be part of adult performance within or without the workplace. According to Rossett and Schafer (2006), job aids are “helpers in life and work...a repository for information, processes, and perspectives that inform and guide planning and action” (p. 2).

It is worth noting what job aids are *not*. Job aids should not be confused with *tools of the job*, specifically, items such as screwdrivers, laptop computers, and office chairs. Although these items support work, “the support of work is necessary, but not sufficient to make something a job aid” (Rossett & Gautier-Downes, 1991, p. 6). Unlike a job aid, which is a repository for

² It may be more contextually appropriate in a non-organizational setting to refer to job aids as *performance support aids*, whereas the performance improvement is in the context of the adult learner or in the case of the populace at large—adult education (e.g., civil defense training for the citizenry); for purposes of this paper, however, we will use the term job aids to represent both throughout.

information, a tool enables the adult to do something that would otherwise be undoable (Willmore, 2006).

Job aids are not only repositories of information to support life and work activities, but are also external to the individual. According to Bullock (1982), job aids are ubiquitous and can be found as "...labels on items in the refrigerator, traffic lights, numbers on buildings, telephone directories and step-by-step directions" (p. 36). Further, they can be located "on shelves above employees' desks, on walls beside equipment and chemicals, in drawers beneath computer keyboards, and on matchbook covers" (Rossett & Gautier-Downes, 1991, p. 4).

Notably, the utilization of job aids may be ultimately attributable to the fact that they are traditionally less expensive than formal training interventions and by saving the organization (or individual) time, they save money (Harless, 1986; Rossett & Shafer, 2006).

On Dubious Job Aids

Patent Medicines – Use Only As Directed

Patent medicines of the 19th and early 20th centuries were consumer health products peddled as quick and safe panaceas for a panoply of human maladies from colic to impotence (Adams, 1912; Fowler, 1997; Young, 1967). Patent medicines were sometimes referred to as "nostrums" from Latin *Nostrum Remedium* (our remedy) (Fowler, 1997). However, these products were frequently of questionable effectiveness³ and, as briefly described in the vignette above, could be lethal (Adams, 1912; Young, 1967). Following his investigation of such

³ In fact, the term "Snake Oil Salesman" comes from this industry and has come to be synonymous with being a swindler (Young, 1967).

nostrums, Adams (1912) labeled the industry as a whole as well as entitled his exposé as “The Great American Fraud.”

Patent medicines were unabashedly advertised with false claims of being safe. For example, makers of Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup asserted, “Mothers need not fear giving this medicine to their babes, as no bad results have come from the continued use of it. Many children have taken two and three dozen bottles and today are hearty boys and girls” (Kober, 1908, p.194). Further, the label read, “...a sure remedy for all ailments for babes one day old to two or three years. It contains nothing injurious to the youngest babe and if *given in proper dose* [italics added] will always relieve” (p. 198).

Even prior to Adams’ (1912) exposé on the patent medicine industry, Kober (1908) detailed how in December of 1905 a coroner’s jury in Baltimore, Maryland, warned the public not to use Kopp’s Baby Friend following the death of a “white infant, aged 3 months and 14 days, who had been given this preparation by his mother while suffering from indigestion” (p. 196). The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reported the death of twin children 6 weeks old in New Castle, Pennsylvania, caused by Kopp’s Baby’s Friend. “*The parents gave it according to the directions accompanying the bottle* [italics added]; six drops every two or three hours to keep the infant from crying” (“Opium Positioning,” 1907, p. 447). In the same issue of the journal, several more deaths were reported, namely, one of a child aged 10 months from Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup, another one of a child from the effects of Monell’s Teething Syrup, and still another one from the effects of Rex Cough Syrup. According to Adams (1912), patent medicines contributed to the rising mortality rates for adults as well:

Recent years have added to the mortality records of our cities a surprising and alarming number of sudden deaths from heart failure. In the year 1902, New York City alone reported a death rate from this cause of 1.34 per thousand of population; that is about six times as great as the typhoid fever death record. It was about that time that the headache powders were being widely advertised, and there is every reason to believe that the increased mortality, which is still in evidence, is due largely to the secret weakening of the heart by acetanilid [an ingredient in many patent medicines] (p. 32).

Adams (1912) went on to publish a lengthy list of fatalities collected from obituaries printed in the newspapers. In every case the person who died had taken a patent medicine containing acetanilid for headache relief without a doctor's prescription.

In addition to Kopp's Baby's Friend and Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup, patent medicine had other colorful names like Dr. Bull's Cough Syrup, Pink Pills for Pale People, Dr. Fahrney's Teething Syrup, Orangine Powder, and Dr. Davis's Headache Phenalgin to name but a few of the hundreds that existed and caused harm in the early 20th century (Fowler, 1997).

In 1906 the Pure Food and Drugs Act ushered in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The new FDA regulations and policies ultimately put an end to medical quackery of the so-called patent medicine industry (Adams, 1912; Fowler, 1997; Young, 1967). Each of the now historic patent medicines had in common a job aid as dosing instructions that informed the adult on how much and when to take the nostrum. As a result, it is reasonable to assert that the job aid in this social context aided and abetted death and injury.

It was the intervention by a governmental agency that finally put an end to the dangerous nostrums industry. However, from a social justice perspective, we argue that society cannot and should not depend on government solely to correct social irresponsibility. We agree with Brookfield (2001), Healy (1987), and others who suggest that adult educators, including those in the HRD field, should continue to critically reflect on and lead the ethical aspects of (workplace) education and performance, including the goal of intervention for social change, when required.

Did Nazis Use Job Aids?

Vocational training and labor methods used within the Third Reich have been researched and written about as part of the literature in social history (e.g., Allen, 2002; Ferencz, 1979; Gillingham, 1986 ; Trunk, 1972) and, specifically, within the context of HRD (Kopp, 2007; Nabb & Armstrong, 2005). A theme that emerges from this literature is how *ordinary* training processes were part of extraordinary and, sometimes, perverse contexts.

Continuing that stream of inquiry, we reviewed the Hitler Youth organization's 1934 and 1938 training manuals (Brennecke, 1938; Reichsjugendfusshrung, 1934)⁴, which serve as interesting case studies with respect to the job aids within these handbooks. The Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend (HJ)) was founded in 1926. However, its origins can be traced to 1922 (Kater, 2004; Lepage, 2008; Rempel, 1989). With its promise of generational transition, the HJ facilitated Hitler's dream of the Reich reigning for 1,000 years (Pridham, 1973). The HJ was divided into two sections, one for members ages 10-14 and the other for members 14-18. It was organized as a paramilitary structure with squads, platoons, and companies (Rempel, 1989). The

⁴ For the 1934 handbook, we utilized University resources and Internet translation software for assistance in English translation.

HJ has been compared and contrasted as the German equivalent to the Boys Scouts of America (Cupers, 2008; Lewin, 1947). From 1933 to 1939, the membership in the HJ was as follows:

1933.....	2,292,041
1934.....	3,577,565
1935.....	3,943,303
1936.....	5,437,601
1937.....	5,879,955
1938.....	7,031,226
1939.....	7,728,259

(“Office of United States Chief of Counsel for prosecution of axis criminality”, 1946, p. 318)

The HJ was led by Baldur von Schirach, a Reich youth leader of the Nazi Party (Goldensohn, 2004). Von Schirach also oversaw the content of the Hitler Youth handbooks and would later write his own book entitled *Revolution der Erziehung* [“Revolution in Education”] (von Schirach, 1938), explaining his views on the Hitler Youth movement. The first page of the Hitler Youth handbook (Reichsjugendfusshrung, 1934) includes a personal greeting from von Schirach himself that opened with *Mein lieber Pimpf!* (“My dear boy”), and concluded with *Heil Hitler, Baldur von Schirach* (a facsimile of von Schirach’s signature) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The cover and first page of a Hitler Youth Handbook (1934)⁵

⁵ From personal collection of first author

Vocational training was emphasized in the HJ. Von Schirach, along with Nazi labor leader Robert Ley, initiated the annual National Vocational Competition for Hitler (Kater, 2004; Lepage, 2008). Every year a new theme was developed at the national level for the Hitler Youth. For example, in 1934 it was the “Year of Training” and in 1935 the “Year of Apprenticeship.” The youngsters learned various trades that were judged, and the winners would get to meet Hitler (Lepage, 2008).

However, the *raison d’etre* of those handbooks was not just vocational education. What can be gleaned from the HJ handbooks is how the job aid shifts in and out from seemingly value-free repositories of information for vocational education to job aids that were overtly value-laden with ideological indoctrination of National Socialism and anti-Semitism. Indeed, von Schirach declared that he wanted to “imbue the youth with Nazi ideology and prepare them for membership in the Party and its formations” (“Office of United States Chief of Counsel for prosecution of axis criminality,” 1946, p. 319).

Hence, while there were dispassionate job aids that could be used to recall the working parts of a rifle (Figure 3) and the correct way to perform flag-based semaphore (Figure 4), there were also job aids that supported the narrative propaganda that introduced the ideas of Social Darwinism and eugenics, the study of improving the qualities of the (Aryan) population by discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or undesirable traits (e.g., Jews) (Childs, 1938; Goldensohn, 2004).

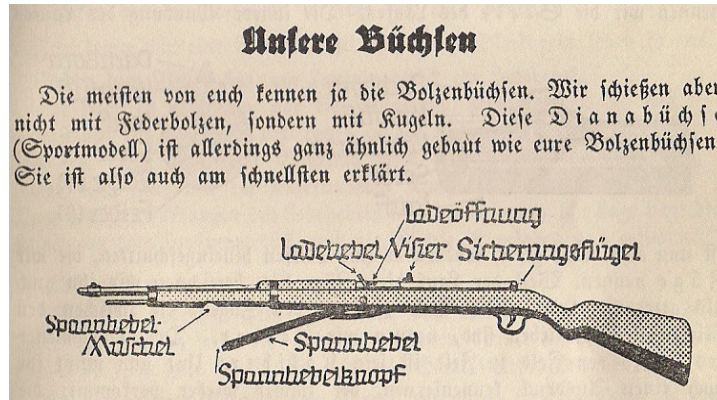


Figure 3: Diagram showing working parts of rifle (Reichsjugendfusshrung, 1934, p. 216)

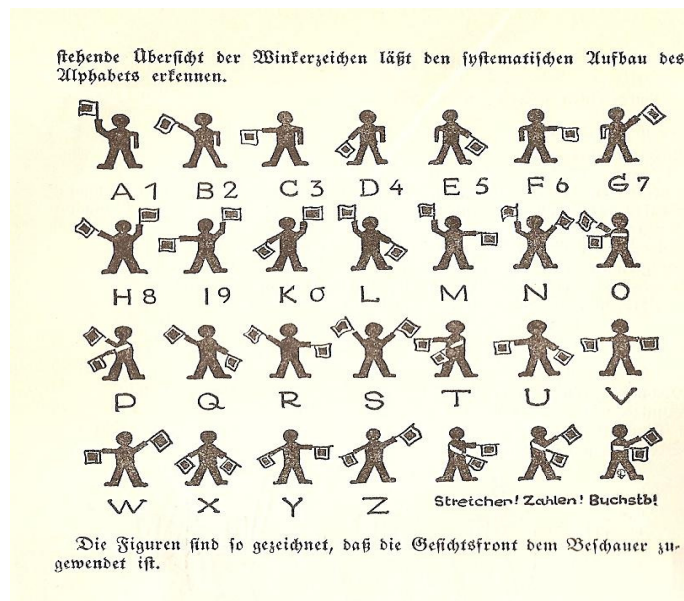


Figure 4: Job Aid on Flag-based Semaphore (Reichsjugendfusshrung, 1934, p. 212)

For example, the 1938 handbook discusses the superiority of the Nordic skull (Figure 5):

The skull of the Nordic man likewise grows narrow, long. The face is small. The breadth in proportion to length is 3 to 4. The shape of the face is striking, not unaccentedly round. The nose is high set. In proportion to the rest of the face, it is likewise small.

Now what distinguishes the Nordic race from all others? It is uncommonly gifted mentally. It is outstanding for truthfulness and energy. Nordic men for the most part possess, even in regard to themselves, a great power of judgment. They incline to be taciturn and cautious. They feel instantly that too loud talking is undignified. They are persistent and stick to a purpose when once they have set themselves to it (Brennecke, 1938, p. 13).

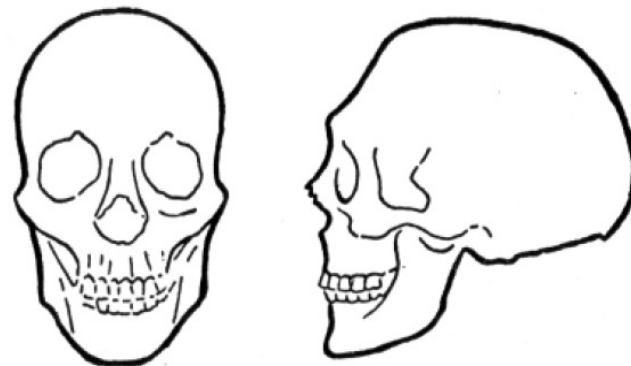


Diagramm zwei — Nordischer Schädel

Figure 5: Physiognomic Job Aid from Hitler Youth Handbook (Brennecke, 1938, p. 13)

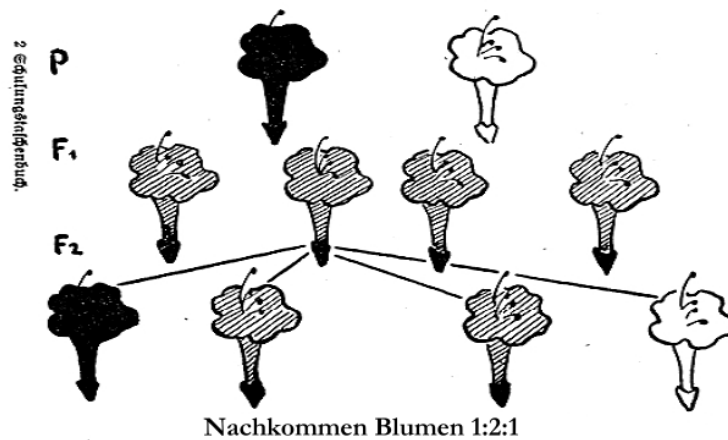


Figure 6: A Hitler Youth job aid making the case for eugenics (Brennecke, 1938, p. 22)

The 1938 HJ handbook also has a chapter on *Race Formation: Heredity and Environment* with narrative and associated job aids (Figure 6), which assist in making the case for racial hygiene with its attendant anti-Semitism:

A Jew both in Germany and in all other countries remains only a Jew. He can never change his race by centuries of residence with another people (Brennecke, 1938, p. 27).

Following the defeat of Germany, the HJ was disbanded by the Allies as part of the De-Nazification process (Lepage, 2008; Lisciotta, 2008; “Office of United States Chief of Counsel for prosecution of axis criminality,” 1946). At the Nuremberg trials, von Schirach was sentenced to twenty years at Spandau prison for crimes against humanity, but the charges against von Schirach and other HJ leaders also included an observation on how, by way of reshaping education and training, he corrupted millions of young Germans (Lisciotta, 2008; “Office of United States Chief of Counsel for prosecution of axis criminality,” 1946). In the end, von Schirach expressed regret regarding his perverse HJ leadership (Gilbert, 1995):

It is my guilt, which I will have to carry before God and the German nation, that I educated the youth of that people; that I raised the youth for a man who, for many years, I considered impeccable as a leader and as a head of state; that I organized youth just as I did. It is my guilt that I educated German youth for a man who committed murder by the millions (p. 349).

Indeed, we argue that the job aids incorporated into HJ handbooks played no small role in this perverse education and performance of HJ and, by extension therefore, the job aids were a party to the reshaping and the subsequent tainting of the German youth in Hitler’s Germany.

Discussion

We acknowledge the unique nature of the paper as we have introduced—by way of two examples—a new dimension to critical HRD in considering the social history of training. Indeed, the above represents only two cases of many we could have proffered as part of our broader research.

Our main purpose here, however, was twofold: 1) to introduce the job aid as a cultural artifact that was embedded in specific social contexts and 2) to whet future research interest among our colleagues so as to appreciate the role that culture and social context have in shaping not only what actions that groups carry out, but also the job aids that memorialize their performance both in the workplace and in society.

Taking into consideration the social history of training and adult education offers an additional dimension to critical HRD. Adding the dimension of social history to critical HRD is significant because heretofore evaluation of job aids and performance support aids has been essentially *binary*; that is, job aids were either viewed as assisting in performance (improvement) or not (e.g., Bullock, 1982; Rossett & Gautier-Downes, 1991; Willmore, 2006). We reject this binary notion and introduce the aspects of social history so to reframe the job aid as also a context-bound cultural artifact that is thus socially-constructed. Such a *post-modern* aspect to the job aid is valuable when reflecting on HRD and adult education being socially responsible and just.

Implications to Practice

Critical perspectives in HRD are still emerging (Brookfield, 2001; Elliott & Turnbull, 2006; Fenwick, 2004; Nabb & Armstrong, 2005; Rigg, Stewart, & Trehan, van Woerkom, 2004) and considered necessary (e.g., Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Hatcher, 2007). However, we propose, in addition to the traditional critical inquiries, such as the impact of power differentials or reflecting on how the performance paradigm may exploit human capital, a more robust critical inquiry by embracing the social history of training and adult education.

This paper underscores the current paucity of research in the HRD literature on the social history of training and builds upon few existing sources that have considered the influence of social context on adult learning, in general (e.g., Jarvis, 1987; Scheid, 1995).

To the extent that social history delves into how people lived, worked and interacted with their surroundings and artifacts and how those surroundings and artifacts impacted their lives including aspects of social justice (Cowie & Boehm, 2006; Fine, 2008; Stallybrass, 2000), social history should matter to HRD. Further, we argue that if social history is the study of the lives of ordinary people (Cowie & Boehm, 2006), it must therefore include the lives of ordinary *trainees*, as well.

We have to only look into present-day job aids, such as the one used in the operational procedures for the electric chair at the Department of Corrections, State of Tennessee (Figure 7) that reminds the operator of such requisite tasks as “...Step #3 Shave approximately a three inch (3”) diameter spot on the top of the executee’s head [...] Step #15 Doctor should examine

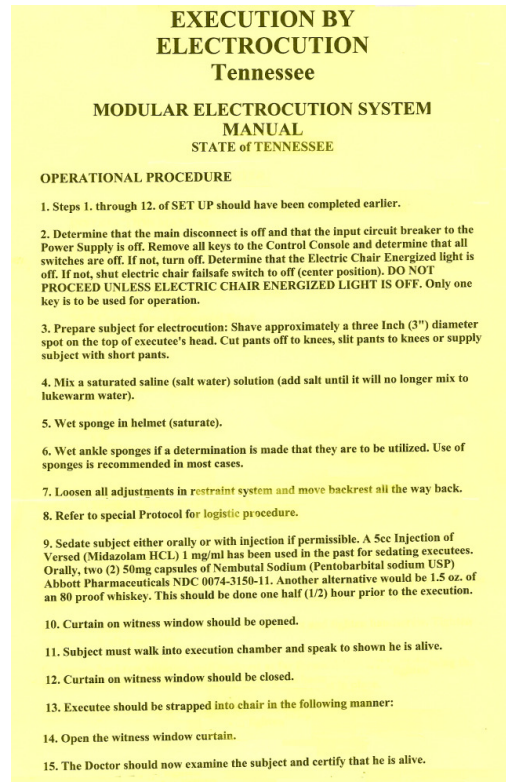


Figure 7: Job aid for the operating procedures of the electric chair (Leuchter, 1989)

the subject to certify he is alive, [...] to Step #25 Doctor should verify heart death of the executee” (Leuchter, 1989, p. 9), as a modern-day opportunity to reflect on the social responsibility and justice of job aids.

Indeed, we ponder what future generations of training and development professionals will glean from present-day job aids. The notion that social histories, as memorialized by the job aid utilized, can offer cautionary tales to us and detail the unintended, and sometimes intended, consequences of performance improvement should be of great interest. Such narratives can be useful to the field because, paraphrasing philosopher and poet, George Santayana (Wood, 2008), those (in training and development) who forget the past maybe doomed to repeat it.

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