

# BUSINESS FIRST

BUSINESS FIRST

SMALL BUSINESS STRATEGIES

MARCH 30, 2001 1

## leading the way

Employee training program uses battle-proven techniques

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After 20 years of evaluating leadership training programs, University of Louisville professor Michael Boyle was skeptical he would see anything different when he decided to study a Louisville company's techniques.

But Boyle came back with a new attitude after his mid-March participation in a four-day leadership workshop by Leading Concepts Inc.

"They have got something that I have never seen before," said Boyle, assistant professor of leadership, foundations and human resource education at U of L's School of Education. "They have successfully transcended that leadership barrier where you can not only walk away understanding it theoretically, but you have very practical hands-on experience of how to do it. It's the best training program I've ever seen, period."

Dean Hohl, president of Leading Concepts Inc., has taught teamwork, leadership and communication skills to team leaders and executives full time for the past five years.

Hohl uses battle-proven techniques modeled after his experiences as a U.S. Army Ranger to teach participants certain principles in the woods that can be translated into business skills. The company offers one- to four-day workshops and conducts in-house consulting.

"We take what the military has been using to lead people into combat for 250 years and refine it to fit business," Hohl said.

As many as 1,100 executives and other workers have gone through the workshops, and Hohl has signed up several national accounts since he turned a part-time pursuit in teaching leadership training into his full-time occupation in 1996.

### Concept is a difficult sell

The company generated about \$1 million in revenue in 2000, said Hohl.

While Leading Concepts is financially

sound, Hohl has been surprised that demand for the training his business offers has not been more widely embraced. He said he never realized how difficult it would be to convince business leaders that Ranger training concepts translate well to the workplace.

"(Many people) think that military personnel are brainless robots that follow orders blindly," Hohl said. "And that's the furthest thing from what, at least, a Ranger team is all about."

Another challenge to overcome is measuring the benefits of the training, said Hohl. That's where Boyle's study comes in.

Boyle and doctoral student Timothy Ernst will examine the effectiveness of Leading Concepts' program as part of Ernst's thesis.

Ernst, who went through the four-day workshop with Boyle, is manager of training and development for Jewish Hospital Healthcare Services.

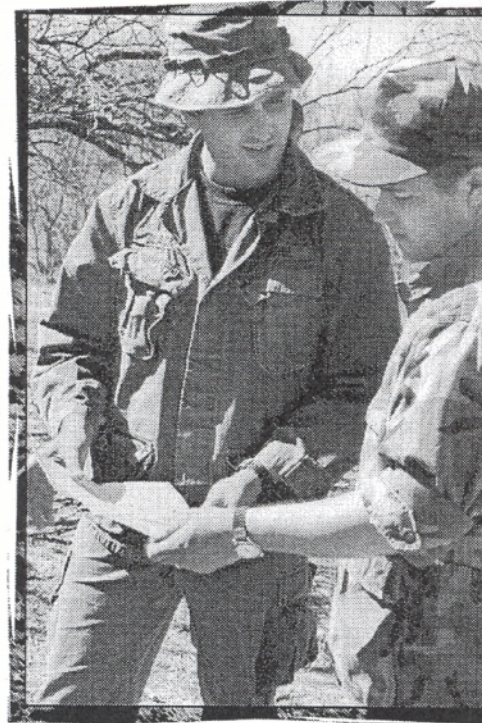
Boyle said he hopes to have preliminary results of the study ready in six months, but it will take about two years to complete the project. He and Ernst will do some "heavy-duty" research on people who already have been through the program, said Boyle. They also will do some pre-workshop and post-workshop tests with people who have attended.

Boyle said that being given free rein by the company's owner to study a program such as Hohl's is unusual because the results could go either way and the resulting thesis will be available for anyone to read.

Since the study is overseen by the college's doctoral program and it must be unbiased, Hohl is not paying Boyle and Ernst or the university to do the work, said Boyle. He would not say exactly what the study will cost, but said university studies on that level typically cost about \$80,000.

### Not the traditional training workshop

Some workshop props Leading Concepts uses are similar to other training seminars —



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEADING CONCEPTS

Leading Concepts Inc. president Dean Hohl, left, gives instructions to Ron King, a Domino's Pizza LLC manager during a boot camp employee training session.

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**Book deal:** Hohl and author Maryann Karinch recently signed a book contract for "Leading in the Midst of Chaos: The Army Rangers Clear Path to Victory," due in bookstores fall 2002.

flip charts, workbooks and notebooks — but that's where the similarities end.

The workshops are taught at various rural privately owned sites. The primary location is about 65 miles southeast of Louisville on land in Taylor County owned by an acquaintance of Hohl's.

Hohl said several national companies have sent employees through Leading Concepts workshops, including: Domino's Pizza LLC, based in Ann Arbor, Mich.; Skyline Chili Inc.

