



IN MEMORIAM

Robert Tannenbaum
Professor of Anderson School of Management, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1915– 2003

Bob Tannenbaum, whose humanist vision profoundly affected the field of organizational development for more than 50 years, died March 15, 2003 – but you don't have to believe that if you don't want to. If you choose not to, you'll have plenty of company. Why erase from your mind the presence of a man who constantly affirms you! Bob gave so much to so many and always from the heart. Others also wrote theories extolling the importance of recognizing feelings, valuing human spirit, and raising consciousness to realize one's inner potential. But unique was Tannenbaum whose ideas were made more profound by his personal being. People who came in contact with him instantly recognized his teachings whether or not they read what he wrote or focused on his words. And his presence had a ripple effect well beyond those who experienced him first hand.

Eventually becoming a psychologist without portfolio, Bob began his university work with an A.A. degree from Santa Ana Junior College (1935). He then moved on to the University of Chicago where he received an A.B. degree in business administration (1937) and a M.B.A. in accounting (1938). Concurrently, he took his first teaching job as instructor in accounting at Oklahoma A & M College (1937-39). He returned to Chicago in 1939 to begin Ph.D. studies in industrial relations. In 1942 he enlisted in the Navy serving as an officer in the Pacific teaching radar. In 1946 Bob returned to Chicago to finish his doctorate (1948). Upon completion he was recruited by Neil Jacoby, a former University of Chicago professor who was dean of UCLA's College of Business Administration, later called the Graduate School of Management, now The Anderson School, where he built, taught and served with distinction until 1977 when he took early retirement.

Bob's first UCLA position was acting assistant professor and assistant research economist while his last, self-named, was professor of human systems development. Bootstrapping from deep-seated beliefs about the importance of personal consciousness and the capacities of people to grow themselves psychologically, with derivative payouts in interpersonal sensitivity, Tannenbaum's work was a forerunner contributor to considerations of human capital as a corporate asset. From the 1950s through the 1970s, he was instrumental in establishing UCLA's Graduate School of Management as a key center of thought and practice in the fields of organization development and leadership training. During this period he helped found the Western Training Lab, which promulgated a derivative of T-groups that became known as Sensitivity Training, and played an important role in the evolution of the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science, which spearheaded the drive to utilize group dynamics as an important pedagogy for promoting increased awareness of self and impact on others as essential to team play in the corporate environment.

Bob Tannenbaum's intellectual work described organizational systems not as machines with interchangeable human parts, but as living communities that can be designed to enable people to grow and learn while achieving business goals. His writings, as well as his teaching and consulting, reflected the value he placed on people, and his belief that, to a great extent, leadership effectiveness derives from awareness of one's own basic assumptions about human nature and the testing out and revision of those assumptions.

No matter how you cut it, Bob's seminal contributions always began with the ones he made interpersonally, with students, colleagues, and clients, and his everyday interactions with almost everyone he encountered. However, they also include his written words. His 1961 book, with Irving Weschler and Fred Massarik,

Leadership and Organization, was significant in making the academic and practical argument for the use of group dynamics in developing leaders and teaching them how to operate effectively. His articles (with Warren Schmidt) “How to Choose a Leadership Pattern” (1958) and “Management of Differences” (1960) both set Harvard Business Review records for reprint requests and were reprinted in publications worldwide.

Bob’s charismatic impact created a demand that produced a second, post- UCLA, career – consulting and counseling executives and change agents on the use of self in facilitating organizational effectiveness. He was an active contributor to Pepperdine University’s Master’s Program in Organizational Development; he led workshops for the NTL Institute, counseled with top executives and their spouses at his home office in Carmel, and continued professional writing. Among his jewels is an oral autobiography produced by David Russell (1987) as part of the Oral History Program for the Humanistic Psychology Archive at the University of California, Santa Barbara and an edited book of readings (with Newton Margulies and Fred Massarik) written by people associated with the Behavioral Science, then Human Systems, now Human Resources and Organizational Behavior group he founded at UCLA, titled Human Systems Development.

During his life Bob received many honors that he valued greatly but about which he seldom talked. They include an honorary doctorate from the Saybrook Institute, Fellow of the NTL Institute, Diplomate from the American Board of Professional Psychology, Distinguished Member of the OD Network and first recipient of the American Society for Training and Development’s (ASTD) Lifetime Achievement Award where his arm-chair talks were spiritual legend.

Born in Cripple Creek, Colorado to Henry and Nettie (Porges) Tannenbaum, Professor Tannenbaum and his sister (the late Emma Elconin) were raised in Southern California. He is survived by Edith (Lazaroff) Tannenbaum, his loving wife of 58 years; two daughters, Judith Tannenbaum and Deborah Ingebretsen; son-in-law Jim Ingebretsen; three grandchildren, Sara Press, Emma and Gus Ingebretsen; and grandson-in-law, Andrew Harkness. In addition, he is honored and loved by countless friends, colleagues and students.

Samuel Culbert