



Mary Wacker

Coffee and Conversation with Mary Wacker

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Mary Wacker over a cup of coffee on a recent autumn afternoon. Between her training and consulting business and work on her forthcoming book, Mary's schedule is full, but she graciously squeezed in some time for a conversation about her career, her current work and her new book, *Stories Trainers Tell: 55 Ready-to-Use Stories to Make Training Stick*.

Although Mary has been running her own consulting and training business for 15 years, she started her post-college career as a guitarist and singer. After three years of playing local clubs, as well as performing on the road, she decided to get a "real job" and landed at the City of Milwaukee.

It was while Mary worked for the City that she became interested in training and development work and joined ASTD, where she has held many positions over the years, including President. Her growing passion for training

led her to a position as an education coordinator at St. Luke's Hospital, where she acquired her expertise in areas such as customer service and leadership development.

In 1988 Mary decided that launching her own business offered the best opportunity for her to continue learning and growing. She founded M.B. Wacker Associates, an organization development and training firm that specializes in team building, leadership development and customer service.

Mary credits her involvement with ASTD with her smooth and successful start as an independent consultant. He says that her ASTD connections "fueled my business base," which has grown primarily through referrals.

It's been said that consultants can play one of three roles: that of expert, collaborator, or an extra pair of hands. Mary's preference is clearly in the collaborative realm; she prefers

to work with her clients as a collaborator who assists them in achieving goals that are in alignment with their vision, mission, and values.

Mary also works with Future Milwaukee on a part-time basis as its Program Director. Her intense concern about the community in which she lives has prompted her involvement in this organization that helps to train and groom future community leaders.

Mary's most recent endeavor is her forthcoming book, *Stories Trainers Tell* (co-authored with Lori Silverman), to be published by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer and ASTD Press in spring of 2003. Mary is passionate about the powerful role stories can play in training. She believes that if trainers see themselves as storytellers, they will become more "thoughtful and playful" about the way they use stories.

In addition to providing over 50 actual stories that trainers can

use, *Stories Trainers Tell* also explains why stories are powerful, how stories can be crafted to make a point, and how to link stories back to the training. Each story in the book includes key points, debriefing questions, and a follow-up activity. The legal and ethical issues of using other people's stories are also addressed.

Mary Wacker is clearly a person who loves what she does. She thrives on the variety of projects and the variety of industries with which she is involved. Her passion for her work and her community, along with her dynamic energy, make her an asset to ASTD and to the training and development field.

Don't miss Mary's presentation at the Chapter Awards Banquet. See page 1 for details.