

## Spotlight On: INVESTMENT THINKING

### BRINGING THE BRAIN TO BEAR ON INVESTMENTS.

Edward Bassett, director of equities for the pension fund at E.I. DuPont De Nemours & Co., says he thinks the key to juggling is how you let the ball go, not how you catch it. It's a metaphor, he explains, for learning to control many ideas at the same time. Bassett points out that once you've achieved the correct speed and arc on each ball, you can calmly consider each in its turn.

Bassett learned juggling from Michael Gelb, founder and president of High Performance Learning, a consulting firm in Washington, D.C. Last week, Gelb addressed the National Investment Sponsor Federation meeting in New York. In the one-hour format allotted to him, Gelb said he would only be able to introduce the concept of "creative thinking," which he says results from bringing analytical skills into harmony with intuitive processes, "achieving a balance that is critical to the highest levels of performance."

Gelb, who studied psychology and philosophy, says he's spent the last 10 years teaching strategic thinking and information management skills, as well as communication and presentation workshops to groups as varied as teachers, policemen, royalty, and employee groups, including the staff at the DuPont pension plan.

Bassett attended a Gelb seminar about four years ago, was impressed by what he saw, and decided his staff could benefit too. Since that time, Gelb has visited DuPont once a year or so to spend a day with Bassett's 15-person staff. Bassett says DuPont, like most large companies, offers many staff development programs and that Gelb is the only outside source he uses for "human capital development." Gelb has been particularly helpful, says Bassett, in improving DuPont executives' communication and presentation skills.

Citing an often quoted survey in which a majority of respondents ranked their fear of public speaking above nuclear war, financial ruin and getting mugged, Gelb says that by understanding the "unique feeling that they want to convey" clients can learn to make marvelous presentations. One of the tools he uses is the "Alexander technique," which Gelb says was originally used in the theater to combat stage fright.

Gelb has written a book on this technique, and his new book, entitled *Present Yourself*, describes "mind-mapping" as it is used in presentations. Gelb explains that mind-mapping is a specific technique to generate more ideas in less time and to help "organize the thoughts that come naturally to you."

Another of Gelb's methods that Bassett says he found useful is "strategic study." Bassett points out that investment professionals are nearly bludgeoned with information. He says Gelb's approach proceeds from an understanding of "why we read things." After quantifying such things as what is relevant and what one would like to know, Bassett ex-

plains, one can read on an entirely different level and retain much more information.

The "strategic study" technique is a direct application of Gelb's central thesis that adults are capable of changing how they think. He says that once one learns to read, one rarely learns how to read faster with greater retention. Similarly, people don't realize they can improve their memories or change ingrained habits, according to Gelb. In a two-day seminar, Gelb says he can win over a skeptical audience by administering creativity and memory tests on which most people do poorly. He then teaches them techniques which result in vastly improved scores by the next day.

Most of Gelb's methods are, he says, derived from studies of brain and learning research. According to Bassett, Gelb starts his seminars by speaking about this research and "gets a few converts right there." Overcoming skepticism is not much of a problem for Gelb, according to Bassett. Bassett says his favorite definition of a top executive is one who can keep two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time and



Michael Gelb

be at peace. Such people, Bassett continues, tend to be open-minded enough to reserve judgment and honestly consider alternatives. And one must be secure, he acknowledges, to try some of Gelb's techniques.

Gelb also addresses the problem of stress. He says that senior executives often feel acutely aware of the people who are depending on them and attempt to "tough out" stressful situations. Professionals such as plan sponsors and investment managers generally must "learn to learn from adversity," Gelb says, and not get paralyzed by situations they can't do anything about, like falling markets. Gelb points out that most successful people have learned a lot of what they know from making some big mistakes. He says he teaches clients to use the pressure they face to their advantage, a concept he calls "optimum stress."

Gelb was confident he'd receive a good reception from the sponsor community at the NISF meeting. He says his career has shown him that people ranging from chairmen of the board to senior army officers to school kids can benefit from his techniques. And he says he keeps learning from his clients as well. Gelb poses a Sufi riddle, "Who learns more in a conversation between a wise man and a fool?" and answers that it is the wise man, because he has the ability to learn.