

Left handers; handling life in a 'right' world

By Alise Refson
Of the Emerald

John Hawkey, left-handed senior, has always hated right-handed chairs. He has to "sit sideways to write all the time," Hawkey says, so he looks for seats on the left end of a row to avoid bumping other students.

"It's almost better to use your lap," he says.

University Planner, David Rowe, admits left-handers have a problem "we've not paid much attention to."

Still, the University has given them some thought by installing left-handed chairs in some classrooms, Rowe says. Those few left-handed chairs are a real "blessing," Hawkey says.

Research spurred this token concern for the left minority. University planners aimed to eventually have at least 15 percent of classroom seats cater to the left-handed position.

University vice president for administration and finance, Ray Hawk, says the latest budget crisis has curtailed these intentions. But there are still far more tailored chairs now than there were 30 years ago, according to Loren Allen, left-handed GTF who works at the University physical plant.

Some left-handers, like Allen, opted to adapt instead of fight. A 25-year user of right-handed chairs, he says he prefers them and actually shuns left-handed chairs.

The existing left-handed chairs do have some shortcomings. In lecture halls containing fixed furniture, such as 150 Geology, the special seats can be found only at the row's end. Other classrooms force left-handers into obscure places. Thus, the left-hander must choose between isolated comfort or discomfort in the company of friends.

Prominent left-handers include: Harpo Marx, Bob Dylan, two Beatles, and ex-Pres. Jerry Ford

The answer may lie with an ambidextrous seat that the physical plant is looking to purchase. The seat, with a desk that covers the whole lap is designed to please both left and right handers. Meanwhile the plant has introduced another simpler solution in Gilbert Hall — tables.

Another cause for lefty annoyance is the growing reliance on No. 2 pencils, used to mark computer-sheet test forms. Forced to move from left to right, lefties often smudge work they've just completed — and thus either waste time erasing stray smears or risk a faulty computer reading.

Such gauche-pawed problems are the lifeblood of Lefthanders International. This society, founded in Kansas in 1975, is now the world's largest lefthanded organization, claiming 8,000 activists.

The organization encourages manufacturers to produce left-handed products and also acts as an information center for the availability of "all things lefthanded."

The club publishes a newsletter, a Bill of Lefts and the quarterly "Lefty" magazine to foster lefthanded sentiments and pride. Lefthanders International pays tribute to prominent left-handers like Harpo Marx, Charlie Chaplin, Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander the Great and Queen Victoria. The board of trustees includes former Pres. Gerald Ford and U.S. Sen. Bob Dole.

One member, Susan Ifshin of New York City, wrote "Keep fighting... I'm on your side!" after she described how she and all the other lefthanders present during a Graduate Record Examination, were made to sit in the back row "so that the lefties wouldn't cheat off the righties."

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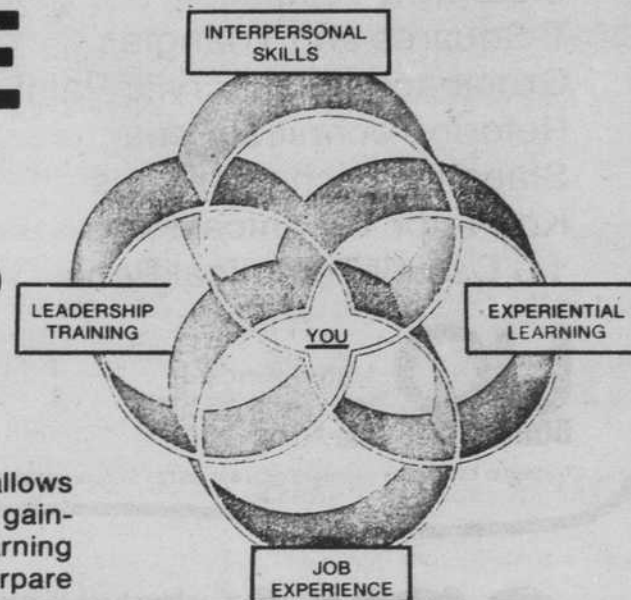
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