Food Industry Education and Training

by
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Naturally, I wanted these two-day seminar programs to fulfill their purpose effectively and well, but I just couldn't guess at the needs of the members and be on sure ground. Some kind of a "predictor" was needed to help me get a handle on the CFDA seminar program. I asked myself the following questions:

1. Who benefits from the programs? Avoid structuring for size or geographical local?

2. Who attends? Top management? Middle management?

3. How close do we actually come to serving our member needs?

4. How well are the programs supported by our members?

On the basis of what I think I found out from this self-evaluation of past records, I interviewed our key members. Some of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, some by phone. The interview was structured so there would be validity in the response patterns. I wanted the questions to be comprehensive in their thrust, yet be as brief as possible and easy to understand. The essential points covered were: (1) How the member feels about the role of the association in providing educational seminars, (2) the degree of the member's support of the programs, (3) recommendations as to when and where programs should be conducted, and (4) suggestions relating to speakers.

I found that 80% of our member houses felt the association's role in educational seminars very important and only 4% felt it not important.

A cross tabulation with dollar volume indicated the largest member wholesalers had the greatest interest in the association's seminar programs. I tried to draw some correlations from this, but my conclusions seemed to be self-serving so I dropped this cross tabulation approach and stopped trying to reach extrapolated conclusions.

I will confess at this point that I examined the structure of our seminar programs with the intentions of improvements. In the tradition of greener pastures, innovations look very inviting. I found, however, that there was a broad base of member approval of past programs (86% of members rated our programs as good or excellent)--CFDA is basically doing the right things now.

Perhaps the clearest message I received concerned the program speakers or maybe I should say the caliber of program speaker. Programs should be designed with the full understanding that participants value their time, attend voluntarily, and demand to take something tangible and specific from the program. It is requisite, therefore, that speakers be highly professional and have demonstrated expertise.

In closing, I would like to leave the following three personal beliefs with you:

1. Membership education through a formal seminar program is a recognized association responsibility.

2. It is becoming increasingly more important and will continue to do so, and finally,

3. Careful planning for an on-going meaningful seminar program will continue to be one of the top priorities of Cooperative Food Distributors of America in the years ahead.

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COLONIAL'S APPROACH TO CONSUMER AFFAIRS

by
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For those who do not know us, Colonial Stores is an Atlanta based chain of 384 stores located from Southern Maryland to Central Florida. Our store names are Colonial, Big Star, Richway, and in some areas, K-Mart.

In 1976 we will celebrate our 75th anniversary. In those early days, even before it was the "in" thing, Colonial Stores took the rights of its' customers and its' corporate responsibilities seriously. As a result, we have grown and prospered.

The Consumer Affairs Department, well-grounded in home economics, was established in 1952 by the President's office at management level at corporate headquarters. From the inception, management's concept was the desire for customer representation in a man's world because 23 years ago consumers were customers and that equated with women. We have always had ready access to the company's policy makers with freedom to speak to any issue.

The success of our customer-consumer program has been flexibility. We have changed directions and emphasis many times in the last 23 years because there have been significant changes in customer needs and in supermarketing.

Many of our early activities were in the realms of a TV cooking school, weekend menus, and recipes because our job was to meet customer demands as we saw them at that time.