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WHAT RETAIL STORE OPERATORS EXPECT FROM EMPLOYEE WORKSHOPS

by

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Too often we plan, organize, and present educational programs based on what we ourselves think participants need to know. Too seldom do we check out what they think they need to know. Then we wonder why the workshop's evaluations were lower than we expected and why "re-peats sales" for the program do not materialize.

As we recently began to plan a Fresh Seafood Merchandising Workshop, we decided to do a "customer survey!" In this case, however, we defined the "customer" as the person who made the decision as to whether or not to send a seafood department manager to the workshop. We went to the person making the investment decision. Specifically, we wanted to know what the decision-maker would want a workshop participant to get from the workshop.

The answers we got from this "customer survey" specifically referred to fresh seafood department managers. They should, however, be applicable to other educational programs offered to the same level of management personnel.

To get answers to the above question, we talked with over twenty-five retail grocery store operators. Some of these were multi-store operators; some were single store owner-operators; some were

retail store managers. The answers from all were consistent. They can be summarized as follows:

A. They wanted immediate pay off to the investment. Specific procedures, techniques, or ideas which could be incorporated into departmental operations immediately were mentioned by every decision-maker interviewed. The majority of the comments related to obtaining information regarding quality maintenance and sanitation, and merchandising of marketing fresh seafood. Specific wants mentioned frequently were: (These, of course, related directly to a seafood department manager.)

1. Displaying the product.
2. Commodity characteristics relative to shelf life, handling, and packaging.
3. How to promote (in the department).
4. Varieties and characteristics.
5. Inventory management.
6. Pricing strategies.
7. Sanitation.
8. Quality identification and maintenance.

9. Handling customers.

10. Salvage techniques.

B. They wanted seafood managers to come back with an appreciation for the importance of the department to overall store sales and profitability. In other words, a workshop should motivate managers to recognize that the seafood department plays an important vital role in building and maintaining total store sales. Some specific comments of wants regarding this were:

1. "An understanding that seafood is a vital part of the business."
2. "That seafood can be a profitable segment of the meat department."
3. "That to have a successful seafood 'department' requires training and management just as other departments do."
4. "How to motivate people at store level to become interested in seafood merchandising."

C. Some decision-makers also wanted the workshop to include "background" information. Retailers felt a seafood manager and personnel assigned to a seafood department should be knowledgeable of the characteristics of the seafood products they were selling, know its geographical origin, and be able to suggest alternative methods of home preparation. Some examples of this type of informational wants were:

1. Seasonality.
2. Cooking methods.
3. Consumption figures.
4. Nutritional information.
5. Supply information, e.g.

a) Source of supply.

b) Product form.

c) Consumer acceptance.

6. Consumer oriented information relative to seafood.

This formed the basis on which we planned our Fresh Seafood Merchandising Workshop, see Exhibit I. Much of what we learned during the "survey" conformed to our hypothesis. However, it was quite useful to have concrete data to confirm this. We concentrated on the immediates with limited emphasis on the "philosophy" and background information.

Program implications from observations about the market survey and the first Fresh Seafood Workshop:

1. Retailers attending the workshop were enthusiastic and interested in the market potential for fresh seafood. This attitude was also demonstrated by most of the retailers during the fresh seafood survey.
2. Retailers were most concerned with the immediate results to be obtained from a seafood marketing educational program. A considerable number of questions were asked about on-site merchandising. The focus of the questions asked were: "how to do it" and "where do we get consumer information about the product, its preparation, nutritional values, etc."
3. Retailers wanted to become more knowledgeable concerning sources of supply and possible suppliers to support fresh seafood markets.

EXHIBIT I

Fresh Seafood Marketing Program

VA Tech Sea Grant, PFMA, and NARGUS

Program

8:30 - 9:00 A.M.	Changes in the Trends of Seafood Marketing and Consumption in the U.S.A.
9:00 - 10:00	Philosophy of Operating a Fresh Seafood Marketing Department (Purpose, Objectives, and Action Plan)
10:00 - 10:15	Coffee
10:15 - 11:30	Developing a Management System for the Seafood Department-- Defining the Duties, Authority, Controls, and the Training Needs of the Seafood Department Manager
11:30 - 12:00 N	Maintaining Quality and Sanitation Standards in a Seafood Department
12:00 - 1:00 P.M.	Lunch
1:30 - 2:30	(Continue) Maintaining Quality and Sanitation Standards in a Seafood Department
2:30 - 3:00	Effectively Merchandising a Seafood Department
3:00 - 3:15	Coffee
3:15 - 4:45	(Continue) Effectively Merchandising a Seafood Department
4:45	Summary of Workshop

Overall Objective of the Fresh Seafood Workshop

To train seafood department managers (*) who can effectively procure (buy), process (change the product form), package, merchandise, and perform other managerial duties in a seafood department to maximize sales, instore traffic, profit, and customer satisfaction.

(*) This workshop is also oriented toward general managers or store owners so that they may participate to determine if they should (1) get into the marketing of seafood at retail and (2) expand existing departments.
