

EXERCISE 8.3

Backwoods Mail Order Company*

Overview

HR professionals are often contacted by an organization to design and deliver a training program to meet a specific problem in the organization (e.g., declining productivity, increasing customer complaints). In some cases, the organization has already conducted a needs assessment and has some idea of what the specific problem is. The HR professional may be asked to review the needs assessment findings and design a training program to meet the specified needs or goals. This exercise provides you with information about a company and the needs assessment findings in order to design a training program.

Learning Objectives

After completing this exercise, you should be able to

1. Review results from a training needs assessment and design a training plan to address the needs, detailing training objectives, training techniques to use, and the length of training.
2. Outline an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the training program.

Procedure

Part A: Individual Analysis

- Step 1. Before coming to class, read Exhibit 8.3.1, which contains the background information on Backwoods Mail Order Company as well as information about the needs assessment that has already been conducted.
- Step 2. Complete the questions found on Form 8.3.1.

Part B: Class Discussion and Small Group Analysis

- Step 1. As a class, review responses to Form 8.3.1. Discuss the learning objectives of the training program, the training techniques to be used, the duration of the training, and the plan for evaluating the training.
- Step 2. In groups, write out ideas for the types of questions that should be included in a reaction form of the training. Each group should draft its own reaction form and share the form with the class.

*Contributed by Steve Long.

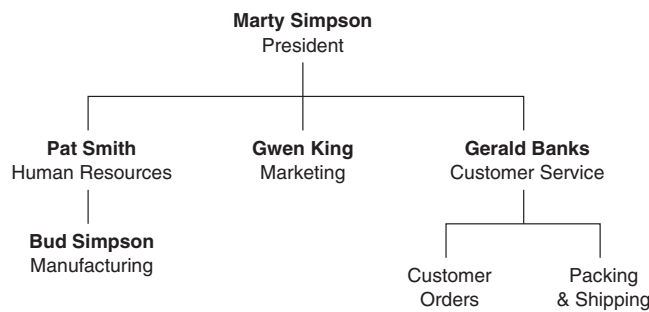
EXHIBIT 8.3.1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON BACKWOODS MAIL ORDER COMPANY

Backwoods is a telephone and mail order company that specializes in camping supplies and outdoor clothing. Gerald Banks is the operating manager of Backwoods' customer service department. He is interested in training his 40 employees in the customer orders group to be more effective in filling customers' orders, more helpful in answering customer

questions, and more polite in dealing with customer problems and complaints. To familiarize you with the company and the job of customer order representative, an organizational chart and job description are provided below.

BACKWOODS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



CUSTOMER SERVICE DIVISION

The customer service department consists of 40 employees and four supervisors in the customer orders group and 32 employees and three supervisors in the packing and shipping group. Employees are evenly divided into two shifts: a day shift (7 A.M. to 3 P.M.) and a night shift (3 P.M. to 11 P.M.). Employees in the customer orders group handle incoming calls from customers and record customers' orders on a central computer system that checks the availability of each item ordered. Orders are then transmitted to the shipping department, where shipping clerks pull the items from inventory and pack them for overnight delivery.

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR CUSTOMER ORDER REPRESENTATIVES

- Takes customer orders by telephone or direct mail.
- Answers customer questions about product prices, sizing, colors, features, and availability.
- Assists customers on the phone in determining equipment or clothing needs based on season, climate, or use requirements.
- Enters phone and mail orders into on-line order processing computer system.
- Processes returned merchandise, completes a defective merchandise form for quality assurance, and routes serviceable merchandise for repackaging.
- Handles customer complaints about problems or defects in merchandise, wrong sizes, or mistakes on customers' orders (wrong products delivered).
- Responds to questions about orders from employees in the shipping and handling group.

THE TRAINEES

The trainees will consist of the 40 employees in the customer order group as well as their four supervisors. Customer service employees

earn about \$7 per hour, and supervisors earn about \$9 per hour. All employees must receive training, yet service must still be available to customers (i.e., you cannot put everyone through the training at the same time of the day or there will be no one to handle incoming calls from customers).

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- The majority of merchandise returns (78 percent) are due to problems in size, features, and/or color selection.
- The majority of these errors (54 percent) result from mistakes in entering the order data correctly into the computer system.
- Many of the errors in sizing or features could be avoided if customer service representatives were more knowledgeable about the products' sizing and features (e.g., certain items run larger than standard sizing).
- Incorrect labeling and inventory of products are responsible for fewer than 8 percent of order errors.
- Customer order representatives have never been formally trained in dealing with customer complaints.
- The customer order work area is cluttered and noisy.

GOALS FOR THE TRAINING

- Reduce merchandise returns due to data entry problems.
- Improve the attitude of customer order representatives.
- Help customer order representatives to really understand product features and sizing (e.g., suitable climate range for a sleeping bag).
- Create a positive image of Backwoods Company to customers and employees.
- Reduce sizing errors by having representatives check customer knowledge of differently sized items (e.g., that jacket runs large).
- Encourage representatives to check with mail-order customers on difficult handwriting or potential problems with item sizing or features.

FORM 8.3.1

Name _____ Group _____

Based on the background information provided in Exhibit 8.3.1, respond to the following questions.

1. Write several clear, measurable objectives for the training to be delivered to the employees in the customer order group.

2. Develop a recommendation for the training plan that includes the training techniques that should be used and the length of training.

3. Offer a plan for evaluating the training program. Describe the criteria that will be used and the design you will employ.