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**METHODS OF DEVELOPING AND FURTHERING
EMPLOYEE-CUSTOMER RELATIONS**

by

William W. Adams

An Abstract

**Submitted to the College of Business and Public Service of
Michigan State University of Agriculture and Applied
Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**Department of General Business
Curriculum of Food Distribution**

Approved

E. A. Brand

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An Abstract

This thesis deals with the nebulous but important relationship between employees in retail food chains and the customers they serve. It strives to isolate and study those factors which can contribute to a bettering of these customer relations which are herein defined as that collection of significant acts, attitudes, and interchanges that take place between company personnel and customers, and that are at best productive of good will and loyalty on the part of customers toward a company's stores, products, and personnel.

Since the temperament and ability as well as the attitudes of employees are important considerations in this matter, the areas of personnel recruiting and screening come under consideration. The usefulness and limitations of tests and interviews are discussed, and the merits of recommendations by employees are weighed and found useful when the loyalty of personnel is once established.

The third chapter treats the training phase of this problem. The need for a positive approach and the reasons for courtesy are discussed. The benefits of building a strong tradition, and training by example are put forth, as is the need for some negative checks on how well the training is received.

Finally, the thesis considers the environment for courtesy—those factors which contribute to the friendly, interested attitude that is a pre-requisite for sound employee-customer relations.

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Satisfactory working conditions, the propaganda of posters and the personnel publication, contests and courtesy campaigns, effective supervision and store meetings, institutional advertising, the molding of the customer's attitude, and the sense of belonging inculcated by profit sharing, stock plans, and bonuses are all included in the discussion and analysis of those elements that make for an environment of courtesy.

The general conclusions reflect a need for sound recruiting, screening, and training processes, as well as the effective use of those elements that constitute the environment for courtesy. Generally speaking, companies that treat their employees with fairness and consideration have the best chance of having sound employee-customer relations.

The summary chapter contains a questionnaire check list covering those areas discussed in the body of the thesis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge his indebtedness to all those who have made this thesis and the school year that preceded it possible. In particular he would like to single out the following for special thanks:

Dr. E. A. Brand for his wise guidance and the inspiration he provided throughout the year.

Dr. D. J. Luck who proved friendly and helpful on a number of occasions and who served as thesis director.

Fisher Brothers Company of Cleveland who sponsored the author for this year of study.

The National Association of Food Chains that promoted this food distribution program.

The author's wife whose indomitable patience and long hours of typing made this thesis possible.

Michigan State University

July

1956

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A. EXPLANATION AND DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER RELATIONS

This thesis deals with one of the most important and one of the least tangible areas in the food distribution picture, public relations. More specifically this is an attempt to isolate and analyze that phase of public relations that is here referred to as customer relations, a facet of public relations that is narrower and more elusive than even consumer relations.

While consumer relations deal generally with the likes, dislikes, and interests of the consumer public, they are more concerned with these as they bear on production and marketing problems. Customer relations are more the problem of the retail outlet and deal with those actions on the part of company personnel that lend personality and an air of courtesy to an otherwise coldly impersonal store.

This area is worthy of consideration since it remains as the one great variable among the top food distributors of the country.

In today's tightly competitive situation the once dominant variations in price, display, layout, and other physical features of food stores now tend to equalize, making one store much like another. More and more important is the task of seeing to it that the shopper identifies your store as 'her' store.¹

¹ Public Relations, Scott Advisory Service Publication, p. 2.

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As an important and distinguishing element in food distribution, customer relations are worthy of study and research. The first step in any such study is a formal definition of terms. This is made difficult by the very elusiveness of the customer relations concept which not only renders impossible a genus and specific difference type definition, but makes a descriptive definition unsatisfactory in many ways. However, an attempt is certainly in order and should prove valuable if only by reason of its being the first or one of the first of its kind.

Definition: Customer relations comprise that collection of significant acts, attitudes, and interchanges that take place between company personnel and customers, and that are at best productive of good will and loyalty on the part of customers toward a company's stores, products, and personnel.

This attitude is ideally marked by a courtesy and consideration on the part of personnel that has generally been reserved for those who own their own business, but which is now the goal of progressive retailers who have come to realize the inestimable benefits accruing to sound customer relations.

B. SCOPE OF PAPER

This thesis is dedicated to the pursuit and amplification of methods aimed at developing and furthering sound customer relations for a retail food chain. To this end there will be considerations of the various aspects of the customer relations problem beginning with and centered around the essential element of the whole study, the human beings who make up the personnel of a particular company.

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Since the men and women who represent and make up the company are the ambassadors of courtesy and consideration, and embody in themselves the personality of the company, the recruiting, screening, and training of these people have a part in this study. If the personnel of a company is inextricably connected with a sound customer relations policy, then where workers are obtained, how they are selected, and the training they undergo cannot be neglected in the search for the road to courtesy.

In addition to those elements that fall under the general heading of personnel, there are considerations of environment that are also felt to be very important to sound customer relations. Carefully selected and trained men and women who work in clean, well-lighted, air conditioned stores, carrying a reasonable work load and receiving adequate compensation are fundamentally well-disposed toward treating customers in a friendly and courteous manner. That employees who are treated in an equitable and courteous manner are more likely to be good customer-relations men is not a revolutionary observation, but it is an important one. People seem inclined to do unto others as others do unto them.

Carefully selected and trained personnel operating in an atmosphere of courtesy may not guarantee ideal results, but they provide the firmest possible basis for a successful customer relations program. This thesis attempts to build as sound a program as possible that will give a retail food chain an organization that will personify friendly service and customer courtesy. This will be accomplished by careful attention to personnel selection and training, and a chain-wide atmosphere of friendliness and fair play.

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In addition, some consideration should be given to the promotion of personal identification of employees' own welfare with that of the company as a whole. To this purpose, the work includes discussions of such fringe benefits as profit sharing, stock issues and bonus plans. The customer relations program proposed in the summary contains all these elements and ingredients that go into the recipe for company-customer courtesy.

C. RETAILERS HAVE A SPECIAL PROBLEM IN CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Better customer relations and higher morale in general are very much like the weather. Everybody's talking about it, but no one is doing anything. All retail food companies are concerned with morale and friendliness, the intangible factors that add character and warmth to otherwise austere stores. None has done very much about it.

It is felt by many that good customer relations are the greatest asset a retail company has after the bare essentials of sound business have been established. Yet no company has, or feels it has, the answer to how this atmosphere is to be attained. Many have tried, but none has conquered. All realize that this area of employee-customer relations is the vast, untapped area that has not as yet been explored and exploited, yet all admit that herein lies treasure beyond measure.

Unlike manufacturers or wholesalers, the retailer has no protective middleman between himself and the ultimate consumer. Though the success or failure of his enterprise will be affected by his merchandise, his prices, his location, and many other factors, a vital consideration will be how his store is regarded by his customers and others with whom he has dealings. These compose his public. Its attitude will be the cumulative result of numerous and in some cases indefinite and fleeting impressions that combine to form a chain's public relations.²

² Tom Mahoney, Rita Hession, Public Relations for Retailers (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949) p. 1.

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It is the purpose of this work to delve into these indefinite and fleeting impressions and into the acts and attitudes that cause them with the hope that some tangible principles and methods might be found to serve as a guide for better and more fruitful public relations. To this end, the attempts being made by several chains will be reviewed and categorized. This study will be augmented and analyzed by a consideration of customer relations in the abstract, with the resulting principles discovered, serving as norms and guideposts.

Since throughout all public relations considerations the human element inevitably runs, there will be some discussion of the raw material for sound attitudes, i. e., the personnel of a company.

If the type of manpower involved is important, then the "who", "where", and "how" of personnel hiring become worthy of attention. Who makes the best emissary of good will? Or, is there no such person as a best type? Where do companies feel they find the most satisfactory recruits? How do they screen out undesirables from among the recruits? Since the individual employees make the substantial contribution to sound customer relations, these and similar considerations are an important part of the over-all study.

Since the training in a company is that furnace through which cross raw material is passed in the hopes of producing a usable and satisfactory worker, this too has a place in the public relations' picture.

Finally, since there are many intangible locales that effect the over-all morale and attitude of a store or company, these too will be brought under scrutiny. It will be seen that a negative approach to the problem—"Say 'Thank you' or be fired!"—cannot hope to inculcate a

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lasting attitude in personnel. For this reason, these positive approaches to the matter in hand are studied. It will be seen that courtesy and morale constitute an attitude that best thrives in a distinctive atmosphere. This atmosphere is one of courtesy and satisfaction.

It is felt that the man who works in a clean well-lighted store, doing a job that is within his capacity, under the direction and encouragement of sympathetic, understanding, and courteous administrators, and for a substantial remuneration will have the best chance of being a good public relations man for his company. If he feels his work is appreciated, and that he has a reasonable opportunity for advancement, he will most likely pass on the good will he feels. In other words, good morale generally equals good customer relations.

The small food chains' biggest advantage along with tightened control is the personal interest in the business that they are often able to generate.³ Personal interest makes for that extra effort, that added service, that friendly smile, all of which add up to a store where people wish to shop.⁴

Mr. W. C. Ferguson, personnel manager of American Stores Company, mentioned the fact that Penn Fruit Company could place a relative of the owners in many of its first stores as one reason for that company's great success.⁵ Personal interest made for success.

³ "Pint Size Super Makes Big Impression On Small Town," Progressive Grocer, April, 1956, pp. 78-85.

⁴ "Castrogiovanni Family Work Together, Push Sales Over \$750,000," Progressive Grocer, July, 1955, p. 70.

⁵ From a lecture delivered at Michigan State University, May 3, 1956 by Mr. Ferguson.

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D. FRINGE BENEFITS AND MORALE

Food chains of all sizes are trying to inculcate this personal interest, realizing that it is a company's most potent merchandising weapon. Many companies are turning to fringe benefits that not only increase over-all personnel morale, but also direct that morale down lines that should be most productive of good customer relations.

The best focused benefits are shares of company stock, profit sharing, and bonuses. The rewards from these benefits are somewhat remote from the day-to-day actions that make for sound customer relations, but they mark a definite step in the right direction. The man who owns a share in the company or stands to benefit from increased business is, in general, better disposed to give the extra effort and attention necessary for good customer relations than the man with just a job. Such plans cost money. This expenditure must be balanced against an intangible return of good will, but those companies which have inaugurated these programs express themselves as happy with the outcome, as contacts indicated.

Delchamps, Incorporated, a nineteen store chain out of Mobile, Alabama, attributes much of its success in maintaining happy, interested employees to its profit sharing and bonus plans.⁶ However, a study of this company shows that the reason for its success goes deeper than these fringe benefits and resides in the basic attitude of the owners. They feel that courtesy and consideration invite emulation and imitation. They also believe in profit sharing and the like, but they place these benefits in their proper perspective.

⁶ Joseph J. Trout, "Profit Sharing, Bonus Plan Have Contributed to Delchamps' Success," Progressive Grocer, March, 1955, pp. 124-128.

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Incentive plans, as President Alfred Delchamps points out, are part of a good employe relations program, but they alone are not enough. In Delchamps' case, these benefits are more an outward manifestation of the company's attitude toward its employes rather than an attitude in themselves. The basic premise in the Delchamps' attitude toward its employes is that of the family; in a family, the good of all is considered, good things are shared by all, equally and fairly.

So it is with Delchamps; profits are shared, retirement is provided for, and just as important, consideration is given on the job. The firm has never gone outside its organization to hire an executive, other than the Auditor and Advertising Manager; the President's door is always open to hear any employe complaint, large or small. Employes are welcome to buy stock in the organization too, although it is not sold on the open market.

Such sincere interest in employe welfare is bound to be reflected in the employe's sincere interest in his work and in his customers. And for proof of this, one need look no further than the company's expansion in one generation from a single, five-employe store to one of the dominant—if not the dominant—food retailing organizations in its territory.⁷

This company reflects the use of fringe benefits in their proper light. Much of the criticism people have for programs of profit sharing and stock purchases stems from instances where they have proven noticeably ineffective at producing greater employee responsibility and interest. The reason for this in almost every case lies in the company's attitude about and use of these benefits. Where they are employed as a bribe or a reluctant concession, they inevitably fail to produce the desired effect.

Men cannot live on bread and benefits alone. Where the profit sharing plans have to be dragged from tight-fisted management or thrust forward begrudgingly by a hard-bargaining company, the results will be

⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

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no more fruitful of improved morale than the annual five cent per hour raise. Where such benefits are a reflection of an over-all friendly attitude on the part of concerns, then they have the atmosphere they need to produce satisfactory results. Teamwork and a sense of belonging cannot be inculcated where no one wants to be on the team.

While fringe benefits have their place in the total picture of improved morale and subsequent sound employee-customer relations, they are no panacea that will solve all management's problems. These benefits can implement a public relations program, and, in their proper perspective, are valuable assets, but they are useless if not supported by a sound basic philosophy of the labor-management relationship.

Delchamps has the basic attitude on which can be built a successful employee-customer relations program. Whether this attitude was externalized through profit sharing or in some other way, the results would be the same. The attitude is the cause, the particular manifestations by means of fringe benefits and the like are merely occasions wherein this basic attitude is seen.

Food chains have kept pace with the fringe benefit movement. In many cases this has resulted from union pressure, but in others it has been an overflow of management's basic desire to share profits with the men who have helped make these profits possible. A survey of Super Market Institute members in 1950 showed the following percentages taking part in various fringe benefit programs. The percentages here listed are especially impressive in the light of the fact that they were taken several years ago and have increased since then.

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Super Market Institute Members Offering Employee Benefits, 1950⁸

Health insurance	59%
Group life insurance	50
Retirement plan	14
Profit-participation plan	
For store managers	60%
For store department heads	48
For supervisors	29
For all store employees	18

The retail food industry's attitude toward these benefits was keynoted in 1953 in a speech by Sidney R. Rabb, chairman of the board of Stop & Shop, Inc. when he said:

Our guiding principle is this: Human relations can be healthy and constructive only when they are mutually satisfactory. We are convinced that a course of action that benefits the owner of a business at the expense of the employee or the customers is not sound, in the long run.

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Stop & Shop's greatest asset does not appear on its balance sheet. That asset is the people of our company. No business can operate without people. Similarly, no business can prosper in the long run unless it obtains the willing cooperation of its people.

What then is our enlightened self-interest attitude toward our employees?

To me it means that we must deal with each person fairly, have respect for his human dignity, and treat him as an important member of our team. This goes far beyond our elementary obligation to pay an employee for his work.⁹

⁸ M. M. Zimmerman, *The Super Market*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., First Edition, 1955) p. 283.

⁹ Ibid., p. 281.

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Other food chain executives have frequently singled out the employees as the key to success, and reiterated the need to treat them with the respect and consideration that is their due.¹⁰

Whatever this attitude is called, it boils down to a philosophy that should underlie the bestowing of any and all fringe benefits, if satisfactory results in the matter of improved employee-customer relations are to be hoped for. Fringe benefits can be a great aid in bolstering morale and helping the employee identify his good with the good of the company. This identification is the first step in a sound customer relations outlook.

An additional point in favor of fringe benefits in relation to this study is their ability to reduce turnover. In general, the veteran employee, or one who feels a permanent attachment to a company, will tend to identify his welfare with that of the organization as a whole. From this foundation can be erected a sound employee-customer edifice, if only the other requirements, to be treated in subsequent chapters, are satisfied.

Thus, fringe benefits are seen as contributing to improved morale and greater identification of the employee with the organization. As far as they go, they are both useful and desirable, but cannot be expected to solve all employee-customer relations problems by themselves. To be of any help at all, they must spring from and reflect a general benevolent attitude on the part of management. They must be an

¹⁰ E. G., Mr. T. J. Conway of Fisher Brothers Company, Cleveland, in his annual reports to the directors and department heads of the company.

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externalization of a company's feelings for its employees; only in this way can they be fully satisfying, and only in this way can this program extend in its effects to those part time workers who can have little share in the actual benefits.

E. THE APPROACH

The positive and negative approaches to the employee-customer relations problem will be studied further in a subsequent chapter, but negative will herein refer to employees' reactions to superior's commands.

The "old school" psychology of customer relations for a long time took the view that courtesy consisted in a neat appearance, a "good morning", and a "thank you." To this end many chains tried a negative approach to courtesy by incorporating it into their training programs. Unfortunately, commanded courtesy does not run deep enough to hold its course under a cross flood of adversity. Chains could train their employees to say "thank you", and threaten them with loss of merit points or dismissal if they failed to comply, but come the rush on Saturday or a series of grumpy customers and the hollow, superficial training would fail.

There is some merit even in the negative approach, but the mere outward trappings of courtesy are not nearly enough to satisfy the requirements of ideal employee-customer relations.

The incorporation of courtesy in the training program is worthwhile, but any attempts to force it on employees must inevitably lead to failure. People cannot be ordered to be kind and considerate. The "old school" method of commanding without giving reasons may suffice

in the army and for routine functions, but courtesy demands a reason. It is too difficult without one. Courtesy also demands courtesy itself. The blustering superintendent and the grouchy manager have little hope of finding courtesy among their subordinates, while the cheerful, helpful, considerate superior has a good chance of being surrounded by men and women who mirror his mood.

Thus, satisfactory employee-customer relations demand a positive approach if hoped for success is to be attained, and in a matter so important, nothing short of success can be tolerated. Since this quality is contagious and spreads downward along the lines of command, the campaign should not only be positive, but should also begin at the top echelons of management. The program will only be as strong as the weakest, least courteous executive.

The following excerpts from an article by a restaurant chain president are very applicable to the present problem and are equally true for the retail food business. In fact courtesy is even more important in today's food business, since the few opportunities of contact with customers should be capitalized on if store personality and friendliness is to be established.

While self-service is becoming more evident in many chain fields, service and courtesy still rank high on the list of pre-requisites for success.

We at Hody's not only consider courtesy as the most vital ingredient that goes into a restaurant operation, but we feel that without it no restaurant can be a profitable venture for long . . .

Our entire program of personnel relations is therefore keyed to courtesy. All new employees receive an eight-page pamphlet titled, 'Courtesy' which outlines chain policies in handling customers. In this pamphlet we try to point out that courtesy is not a single virtue but rather a

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combination of such attributes as attentiveness, friendliness, cleanliness, alertness, politeness, civility, kindness, and cheerfulness.

We feel that courtesy is something that cannot be demanded, but is a state of mind that must be cultivated at all levels of management: top executive... and unit department head.

Courtesy must be earned, and management's attitudes and policies toward its employees go a long way in the success of the program.

To encourage a courteous climate among our employees, we offer many privileges such as advancing money . . . offering bonuses . . . and prepaid health, welfare and hospital plans, as well as prepaid life insurance.

But the payoff for any program occurs at the point of sale, and it is at store level that policy and practice either dovetail or go their separate ways. Our all-inclusive program commences at executive level and extends to every employee in every store.¹¹

All the statements in this article are as applicable to the retail grocery business as to a restaurant chain. Some of the remarks deserve repeating. Mr. Hoedemaker provided courtesy material for his employees, but he supported this with a philosophy and policy of courtesy that began with an idea, permeated through top management, and was externalized in employee benefits. Store meetings were also added to the program to provide constant reminders that courtesy and service rank high as "pre-requisites for success." The entire program has a realistic, positive ring to it, that promises better results than any negative approach.

¹¹ Sidney Hoedemaker, "Courtesy...top-management problem," Chain Store Age, November, 1955, p. 279.

Another phase of the positive-negative approach is manifested in management's handling of employee grievances. Since high morale is an important preliminary to courtesy, the attitude of management in dealing with personnel complaints will set the pattern for good or bad employee-customer relations.

Executives with chips on their shoulders are poor risks for a company that wishes to insure itself against discourteousness. The positive approach in this matter is merely one more plank in the foundation of courteous organizations. Some of the steps in this positive approach to complaints are embodied in a recent trade journal article.¹² The main points are as follows: supervisors make sure the door is always open for complaints, grievances are settled whenever possible as they come up, a suggestion system which solicits criticism is inaugurated, there is an annual survey of employee morale—resulting in action, and information is distributed before the "grapevine" distorts it.

This equitable treatment of employees results in better morale and more considerate personnel, and these in turn tend to produce improved customer relations.

In general, the positive approach goes by the maxim that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Rather than trying to motivate through relying solely or primarily on fear, the positive approach strives to lead, encourage, and do all things which should culminate in the employee's personal desire to be courteous. "Appealing

¹² "Five ways to stop gripes before they start," Chain Store Age, November, 1955, pp. 278-279.

to the desires rather than the fears of employees constitutes the basic idea of positive motivation.¹³

This is much more difficult to accomplish than negative motivation, but the results are more satisfying and more lasting. It consists in a wide variety of appeals that will be discussed more at length later in this work. The main fact to be established here is that good public relations, motivated in a positive way, begin with a sound relationship between employer and employee. "No company can have good public relations and have poor or bad employee relations ... A company without a fair and considerate policy toward employees has nothing on which to build a public relations program. It is in the position of trying to build a house without a foundation."¹⁴

The rise of public relations and most personnel departments marks a definite, positive step toward better employer-employee relations and through this to a more satisfactory relationship between employees and the general public. This is the positive approach to the problem in hand.

F. GOOD RELATIONS: AN ATTITUDE

Through all this previous discussion one fact constantly emerges, that good customer relations depend principally on an attitude. It has been seen that the mere external trappings, engendered by an

¹³ Michael J. Jucius, Personnel Management (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Third Edition, 1955) p. 483.

¹⁴ Bertrand R. Canfield, Public Relations (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1954) p. 45.

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authoritarian negative approach, break down under pressure. Unless there is a contagious atmosphere of courtesy in an organization, there can be little hope that the front-line personnel will serve the best interests of customer relations with any consistency. Therefore, the courtesy campaign must begin at the top echelons of management and be allowed to permeate down through the company.

There will still be a need for reminders in the way of signs,¹⁵ posters, cartoon sequences,¹⁶ contests,¹⁷ and oral suggestions, just as there should be a negative check on discourtesy or slovenliness, but the principal consideration in promoting a lasting, well-founded courtesy campaign will be the example and attitude of superiors. Courtesy breeds thoughtfulness and considerateness. It is based on an attitude and thrives in an atmosphere of friendliness. Greatest proof of this can be seen where a negative approach to courtesy is attempted. Friendliness cannot be forced, but where it is had, the results are most gratifying. Without it, not only the personnel of a company, but the business in general will suffer. "Disgruntled, unhappy unsold employees in their individual contacts with the public may do more harm than all those who seek to develop public good will can overcome."¹⁸

¹⁵ "Signs of employe courtesy," Chain Store Age, November, 1955, pp. 122-123.

¹⁶ cf. Chain Store Age, January, 1956, insert.

¹⁷ "Customer Relations," Chain Store Age, January, 1956, p. 9.

¹⁸ Rex F. Harlow, Marvin M. Black, Practical Public Relations (New York: Harper and Brothers, Revised Edition, 1952) p. 116.

There is no merchandising program as effective as the selling power of a courteous and enthusiastic employee, but a person cannot be bribed or bullied into being friendly. It is an attitude, and attitudes must be lived, not learned by rote.

When management builds up a strong and enthusiastic employee personnel throughout its organization, the good will so established radiates good will wherever the employee goes. The problem of selling products is usually given plenty of attention in an organization. But the problem of selling the organization which the products represent is often sadly neglected. Selling the organization begins by selling it to the employees.

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First attention should be given to improving employer-employee relations, and then to delving into the problem public. . . . good employee morale is the foundation of sound public relations. What an employee thinks of his company will be reflected in the attitude of the general public through all his contacts on the outside.¹⁹

To foster and encourage this courteous attitude, companies spend millions of dollars each year. They maintain personnel and public relations departments. They sponsor campaigns, exhibit movies, publish personnel papers, provide posters and signs. They may even provide a negative check by means of a shopping service.²⁰ They bestow a plethora of fringe benefits and other morale-builders. They do all this to establish an attitude, and when they are finished spending and planning they can only hope for success. They realize that courtesy cannot be bought. They know that "although advertising and physical attractiveness can contribute to good public relations for a retail store, a far greater

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁰ Will Oursler, "Shopping for Courtesy," Reader's Digest, May, 1956, pp. 153-154.

contribution can be made by friendly and competent employees."²¹

This paper has thus far discussed the general problem involved in developing and furthering employee-customer relations. It has considered the fact that a correct attitude in the minds of employees is necessary to attain this goal, and has gone on to analyze some of the factors that lie behind this attitude. Morale builders such as fringe benefits were proposed and studied to see what value they might be.

Some important phases of the problem that have not yet been scrutinized are those of the raw material, the personnel, that must acquire this attitude, and how it is to be trained. The following chapters will discuss the personnel that might be considered ideal for obtaining the best results in sound employee-customer relations. This study will not restrict itself to the theoretical, but will consider what is actually being done in the retail food industry today. Since the personnel of a company will play a decisive part in determining that company's public relations success, the who, where, and how of recruiting the right people will be considered. An answer will be attempted to such questions as: Is there an ideal type of individual for dealing satisfactorily with customers and other employees? If so, where is he recruited and how are his qualifications ascertained? Where do the food chains look for their employees?

Next comes the question of training. How are these recruits trained? How is their conduct controlled and supervised?

Mahoney and Hession, op. cit., p. 26.

Finally, the environment for courtesy and cooperation will be studied in detail. Those factors which contribute to high morale and an attitude of courtesy will be reviewed. Working conditions, communications, rewards, supervision, example, propaganda and the like will all come under the focus of this paper's attention.

The final goal will be a group of tangible methods for finding and training the right men in the right environment. A sound and productive system of employee-customer relations will be the end product.

G. TYPE AND SOURCE OF INFORMATION

In pursuit of this intangible and elusive subject of sound employee-customer relations the author has made use of several of the more recently published personnel and public relations books along with a few of the older volumes on these subjects. These, it was felt, sufficed for the theoretical background to the problem.

Since the subject under consideration is a contemporary and practical one, principal sources were (sought from) the companies that face this problem and the current trade publications that write about it.

Such magazines as Progressive Grocer and Chain Store Age will be referred to often while articles from other periodicals like American Business, The Harvard Business Review, and Dun's Report and Industrial Progress will be quoted from time to time.

To find out what some successful chains are actually doing in this matter, a questionnaire was dispatched to a number of successful grocery companies. A cross section has been sought. Chains varying in size from fewer than a hundred to several hundred stores were

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included in the list.²² Some are spread over many states while others confine their operations to a single city.²³ Chains in all parts of the country were contacted, National Tea out of Chicago, Stop and Shop from New England, Red Owl of Minneapolis, Colonial from the South and several other companies stretching from the east coast to Iowa and the Dakotas. The results of the survey thus conducted are incorporated in the body of this work as well as collected in a table at the end of the thesis.

Finally, notes from lectures and personal interviews with leaders in the retail food industry have been used throughout the paper.

22 E.G., Penn Fruit Company and Grand Union Company.

23 E.G., Jewel Tea Company and Fisher Brothers.

CHAPTER II GOOD PERSONNEL: THE RAW MATERIAL FOR SATISFACTORY EMPLOYEE-CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Electric eyes and mechanical gadgets can open and hold doors, welcome customers, express thanks, and provide many comparable services, but these technological services can never be mistaken for courtesy or friendliness. They can never give a store the warm, friendly, personal feeling that is the goal of sound employee-customer relations.

At least in this area, machines cannot adequately replace the human element. People are pre-requisites and the raw material for friendliness. Without human beings there can be no real courtesy or warmth in the retail business, and this fact more than any other makes questionable the radical trend toward complete self-service. Complete self-service may become widespread some day, but after this happens there will still be need for individuals to lend personality to the stores. Self-service meat provides hostesses, and managers are encouraged to be "on the floor" to greet and assist customers. The efficiency of self-service can never satisfactorily eliminate the human element in retail stores if friendliness and courtesy and personality are to be retained. People remain as the raw material for sound employee-customer relations.

The value of this raw material cannot be exaggerated, just as the importance of friendliness cannot be minimized. If a company has veteran, loyal personnel, it is usually safe to predict they will also have a loyal customer following. People look for friendliness in a retail store.²⁴ And companies find that the attaining of this friendly atmosphere affords many problems that begin with the raw material--the personnel who represent the organization on the firing line.

It is, therefore, of some importance to this thesis to consider the source and characteristics of what can be referred to as desirable personnel.

In attempting to categorize the "ideal" grocery manager, Columbia University expended much time and effort only to arrive at the conclusion that there was no "ideal" manager type. The same can be surmised for the personnel in a store. People who are friendly, patient, active, healthy, and intelligent are needed. These qualifications fit the type of worker desired by any retail concern. In some businesses and occupations one or the other of these qualities or characteristics might be omitted, but almost any retailer would assert the need for a balance of these attributes in a person who will deal with the consumer public. Therefore, no specific ideal type can be categorized as the best raw material for courtesy.

Individuals who might be called extroverts or introverts would not automatically be considered preferable merely by the weight of one or the other of the appellations. The day a test is devised that

²⁴ The second of the Jewel Tea, Company's ten commandments that customers want is friendliness. Only cleanliness surpasses it in the consumer thinking.

can delve deeply into a person's character and come up with qualities like conscientiousness, friendliness, dutifulness, honesty, and the like, it may be possible to pinpoint the ideal person automatically. Until that day, if it ever comes, food distribution and every other business will have to rely on the methods at hand for selecting suitable material.

A. HOW RECRUITS ARE SELECTED

1. TESTS

While there is no specific class or type of person that could be classified as ideal for the retail food business, there is a general intelligence and personality area from which chains hope to draw their personnel. To this end they will often give one or several examinations in addition to interviewing the applicants.

These tests can take a number of different forms, but they are aimed at the problem in a negative capacity. That is to say, the results of these quizzes will not point to particular individuals as very desirable, but they will eliminate those who would most probably prove unsatisfactory. An unsatisfactory I. Q. score or psychological test rating would put the odds so against the man's making a success in a business as complex as food distribution that it would be very rash to hire the man. In these cases a test could serve the recruiter's purpose well, but for every one man who is eliminated by these tests there are many in the shadows of and above the minimum point, who need much more screening before a final decision is made. "This task of

separating acceptable from nonacceptable candidates is very difficult, particularly in 'twilight' cases and in cases where the candidates succeed in passing the preliminary hurdles."²⁵

Though there is probably a place for such testing in the modern personnel recruiting picture, the tests are quite limited and negative in scope for the selection of "ideal" public relations employees. In other words, such examinations have their place in recruiting and are employed by many companies,²⁶ but their value is limited. It is limited in that a good grade in these tests is no assurance of a good prospect, and in that while these examinations may eliminate intellectually undesirable persons, they are of more doubtful merit in screening out those undesirable by reason of personality and character.

The chief value of such a plan (of tests) is negative in nature. That is, the absence of the necessary training, experience, mentality, and interests to do a given job is an excellent indication that a person cannot do the job, but the presence of these traits is no guarantee that a man will do the job. (Because of the importance of attitude, domestic relations, lack of motivation or incentive, etc.)²⁷

Thus testing has a place in the screening of food distribution personnel, but it cannot hope to solve all the problems inherent in the procedure.

Most large companies use general information and simple mathematics tests with some, such as the Kroger Company, relying heavily on I. Q. exams. National Tea and others also employ psychological tests as part of their screening procedure.

²⁶ cf. statistical chart.

²⁷ Lee Lockford, "Selection of Supervisory Personnel," Personnel, November, 1947, p. 199 as quoted in Jucius, op. cit., p. 191.

2. INTERVIEWS

Since "even the most enthusiastic supporters of tests do not insist that decisions regarding applicants or employees be reached solely on the basis of test scores,"²⁸ some additional screening method is needed if the most desirable work force is to be obtained. (The consensus of opinion in food distribution circles²⁹ favors the personal interview, and this is had either with a member of the personnel department or with a store manager. "The interview is one of the most commonly used methods of seeking to derive information from job applicants."³⁰

One of the most useful features of interviewing is that it gives the company an idea, ~~albeit-subjective~~, of the personality of the prospective employee. The reliability of a personality questionnaire depends "upon the individual's willingness and ability to rate himself frankly and honestly."³¹ Since many people answer such questionnaires in the way they think the company wants them answered rather than honestly, such tests are very inconclusive. It is much more difficult to disguise personality traits in an interview. While the results of such a conference will be less objective and less easily measurable than written examinations, they will, nonetheless, be more reliable if the interviewers know their job. Thus there is good reason for the popularity of interviews in screening and selecting prospective employees.

²⁸ Jucius, op. cit., p. 189.

²⁹ cf. statistical chart.

³⁰ Jucius, op. cit., p. 116.

³¹ Ibid., p. 185.

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A second feature of interviews that should make them highly productive of good personnel is the informational exchange that ideally takes place. For the interview

is more than a means of getting information. It also involves, first, giving information that will help the applicant make up his mind about the company and, second, giving advice or suggestions that may serve to change the attitude, mental or emotional, of the interviewee.³²

There is, then, a golden opportunity in the interview method for sounding out a man's personality and directing his thinking along lines productive of sound employee-customer relations. Not only can this device be used profitably in selecting men who give every indication of entering into the friendly spirit of the company, but it can also provide an excellent opportunity for planting the first seeds of "courtesy thinking" in the minds of new employees.

The interviewer can sell the food business as a career to the applicant. He can begin the indoctrination process at the point of first significant contact and can lay the foundation for that esprit de corps that is the earmark of every courtesy-orientated company. More will be said later of the importance of this spirit, but it will suffice to remark here that this spirit is extremely important and the first individualized efforts toward attaining it are very logically placed in the screening interview.

The interview is an immediate preliminary to induction and as such offers some of the same possibilities for indoctrination.

³² Ibid., p. 166.

✓ The induction stage provides an excellent opportunity to develop attitudes of new employees toward their new employment and surroundings. The mind of the new employee is more open to suggestion and change than it perhaps will be again during his tenure with the company.³³

More will be said subsequently of the value of early training in this matter of courtesy and spirit, but through it all the principle behind these suggestions for training and friendly atmosphere is the belief that

if an employee is convinced that he is working for a good company and a good cause and has the arguments to prove his convictions, he is one of the best channels by which the public is also convinced of the merit of the company and the cause.³⁴

3. REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

References and the like, though often subject to prejudice and subjective, emotional thinking, are, ~~nonetheless~~, useful as part of the selection process. They cannot stand as the sole criterion, but "personal observation is undoubtedly widely used and weighs heavily in reaching decisions in the selection process."³⁵

The general idea of references has lost some ground since they all must be checked if any weight is to be placed in them. Therefore they make for extra work on the part of the personnel department, and even after this work is done, the results are subject

³³ Ibid., p. 162.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 147.

to question . . . "inasmuch as most people are reluctant to make reports that may hinder the chances of others, their opinions are not likely to result in accurate appraisals unless carefully controlled."³⁶ Control means prompt and careful checking with the most reliable of the sources, which is troublesome and time-consuming labor.

Of more value and generally more easily checked are those recommendations which come from persons already employed by the company. These recommendations are especially valuable and productive of dependable personnel in cases where the company as a whole is marked by a family spirit and a high degree of loyalty.

In a company where the work force is happy, satisfied, and even enthusiastic, the chances are that these workers will be inclined to spread the good word and thus influence their friends to try to find jobs with the concern that has done so well by them. If the company's spirit is one of marked loyalty on the part of the personnel, there is every reason to hope that these loyal employees will take care as to whom they recommend.

An added check on what might prove rash endorsements of unsuitable prospects might be the introduction of a stock plan or profit sharing in a company. Where a man sees his financial gain as closely related to a company's over-all profit success, he will be less likely to support the application of someone he knows will prove a detriment to the concern.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

Finally, many of the larger food chains³⁷ make it a point to have their managers interview and pass on all store-level applicants before they are finally accepted. Thus no manager will have to accept a new or full time employee against his will.

Furthermore, many companies permit managers to do their own hiring when it comes to part time workers, thus omitting the costly procedures that a personnel department must use. There may be some criticism of this, but the fact remains that managers are at least as much concerned with their particular store's success as anyone at headquarters. They have a great amount of incentive for selecting well. However, there is very likely room for some training, accomplished in meetings with the superintendents, that will better equip the managers to screen part time applicants.

There is much to recommend this training program as long as managers have a share in the hiring function. This could be one more link in the chain of methods constructed to better employee-customer relations in a company.

B. THE SOURCES; WHERE TO RECRUIT

While no all-inclusive answer can be expected to the question of where the best manpower material can be found, there is a possibility that some light can be thrown on the matter of recruiting by considering what a few of today's successful food chains are doing.

³⁷ cf. statistical chart

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³⁷ cf. statistical chart

There is certainly no one best source of supply for food chain personnel, since no two people are alike and no education or environment has yet succeeded in turning out two identical human specimens. One chain may steer clear of college recruiting because of unhappy experience with college men. Another may prefer to recruit executive trainees from A University rather than B, due to very satisfactory results with A graduates. Some companies send personnel men to local high schools to interview seniors, while others depend on advertisements in newspapers, store posters, and recommendations by employees. There is no fool-proof method, but some consideration of what is being done may serve as a guide to future activities.

Generally speaking, companies tend to recruit from those areas from which they have experienced the most satisfactory results. If they find that store employees only recommend top-flight men, they will make these recommendations the foundation of subsequent recruiting programs. Most oil wells are drilled in areas that have produced oil in the past, and personnel departments are most inclined to sink recruiting money in the shadows of successful recruiting programs.

Below are listed the sources from which several of the food chains of the country draw their employees. This list is meant to illustrate the sources that some companies have found productive of "good" personnel.³⁸

³⁸ From a questionnaire distributed to a representative group of food distributors.

Red Owl:

Red Owl has slightly different problems due to being mainly a wholesaler-type operation that leaves the emphasis for recruiting on an individual store basis. They list recommendations, store applications, and advertisements as their sources of supply.

Wrigley:

This company listed recommendations of employees and newspaper advertising as its source of manpower.

Colonial:

Colonial only listed employee recommendations as the area most productive of good personnel.

Fisher Brothers:

This company considers employee recommendations and applications by interested parties as yielding the most courtesy-conscious personnel.

The predominant note throughout these answers seems to be that people contacted, encouraged, and recommended by those already employed by the company make the best personnel. This is not surprising when good employee-customer relations are used as the norm. People who are happy and contented in their jobs are well disposed to courtesy and to recommend the company to others. People who identify their own good with the company's, will only endorse those who will be inclined to do likewise. Good employer-customer relations make for a successful retail organization, and, in turn, for successful personnel.

Grand Union:

This company actively recruits from both high schools and colleges, takes recommendations from employees, and also runs ads in local newspapers. Grand Union is centered in the rather difficult manpower area of New York City which probably explains the need for advertising.

Loblaw:

This chain recruits in high schools and colleges, and advertises for personnel in newspapers.

Stop & Shop:

On the questionnaire returned, this concern numbered sources in the order of importance. They are as follows: 1. High school recruiting, 2. Recommendations, 3. Applications made by interested people, 4. Reactions to store posters, 5. Newspaper advertisements, 6. College recruiting.

Penn Fruit:

This company numbered newspaper advertisements first, then recommendations, and finally high school recruiting.

National Tea:

This concern listed recommendations, high school recruiting, store posters, advertisements, and store applications—all categories listed with the exception of college recruiting.

It might well be concluded that the most productive sources of good personnel are the acquaintances of company employees who by this very contact have, even before application and indoctrination, a knowledge of the company and its ideals. These personnel-endorsed applicants have the additional fact to recommend them that they come to the initial interview already once screened if the endorser is conscientious and loyal to the company.

In this quest for sound employee-customer relations it has been seen that the quality of the raw material, the manpower, is very important. Thus the recruiting, screening, and selecting of personnel play an integral part in the final outcome of the project. Because of this, careful personnel-function techniques are most important, not the least of these being the "where" of recruiting. While no set rule can be proposed to cover all food chains and every case, it is possible to pinpoint one particularly fruitful area for the recruiting effort. If the experience of several successful food distributors carries any weight, then those men and women who come to the company with the endorsement of other employees will most often prove satisfactory.

If the end products of courtesy and consideration are to be attained, then the beginning of the process, the initial personnel function, must be carefully and thoughtfully executed. Recommendations provide a possible insight into a recruit's personality, a factor which the personnel department has a difficult time in ascertaining.

It is quite true that psychological tests, physical examinations, and reviews of past performance can yield much valuable information. But personality does not so easily lend itself to objective measurement. We must, in fact, give up the idea that tests measure skills and aptitudes.³⁹

Thus, a personal appraisal of the individual by one who knows both the job requirements and the person applying can go far toward screening out undesirables. A reliable endorser who knows an applicant's background can be a great aid in finding personnel capable of successfully executing a sound employee-customer relations program.

Personality may be regarded as the resultant of an individual's total experiences since birth, modified by his inherited characteristics and tendencies. We may therefore view the individual as a product of his total background. To gain some insight into his personality make-up, we must get some clue to the individual's mental sets resulting from this background.⁴⁰

All this can be boiled down to the following recommendation as regards recruiting: the company that can and does rely heavily on recommendations by employees has an advantage over those who must seek personnel on the open market.

A company that treats its employees well and has their interests very much at heart will generally be considered a good place to work. Employees will tend to tell others about the merits of their place of employment and will thus become natural recruiters. If the company has built up a strong loyalty and esprit de corps, the employees

³⁹ Arnold S. Judson, "New Approach to Executive Selection," Harvard Business Review, March-April, 1954, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 127-128.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

can usually be relied upon to recommend only those who will be as good for the company as the company will be for them. In this way the recruiting function is simplified and able to utilize within its scope an effective and inexpensive screening process.

Equally important in the evolving of the finished product, the courteous and considerate employee, is the training phase of the operation. While no amount of training can transform an undesirable, unhappy, or unwilling recruit into a model of good employee-customer relations, poor training can seriously handicap, hinder and disillusion even the best prospect.

This paper does not claim that courtesy in all its ramifications can be taught, but training, formal and informal, can:

1. Give reasons for courtesy. Provide motivation and a desire.
2. Teach the rudiments and outward manifestations of courtesy.
3. Instruct by example.
4. Remind employees of the need.
5. Remedy misconceptions and careless ways.
6. Provide negative motivation by counter-checks, supervision and corrective measures.

In this thesis supervision is included under the general heading of training and as a part of the atmosphere of courtesy, since the training process in this matter of courtesy never ends, and instruction, direction, and supervision are continuing and overlapping processes.

Training in this matter is not the responsibility of any one department or group in the chain. The coordination and direction of the program is often in the hands of one man or department,⁴¹ but the training function is performed by all members of the organization who come in contact with the trainee.

Training is both formal and informal, and as such the entire company takes part. Besides the positive and negative approaches to the problem of courtesy to the customer, there are the intangible but very important factors like good example and tradition that help mold the trainee into an effective customer relations man. Good example and tradition must be transmitted by all members of the group to prove a convincing element in informal courtesy training.

This chapter deals with the training of the carefully-screened recruit, and marks another level in the building of sound employee-customer relations in a retail food chain.

A. POSITIVE APPROACH

Positive, formal training of the new employee should begin with the initial interview by a personnel department representative, but the man may well be influenced informally even before he decides to work for the company. Institutional advertising and the attitude of employees can blend to give a food chain a reputation for friendly,

⁴¹ E. G., Grand Union uses a public relations man as do Penn Fruit, Wrigley, and National Tea. Loblaw gives the job to the personnel department and Stop & Shop divides the duty between personnel and line management. Colonial leaves this courtesy and consideration training direction in the hands of line management.

personal service. This reputation can permeate the atmosphere of an area in such a way that applicants will come to the company fully aware that courtesy and consideration are trade marks of the chain, and that these qualities are expected of all personnel of the company. New employees, then, have informal pre-indoctrination training, if friendliness is deeply ingrained and apparent in the company, and if the advertising department has given some space to lending prestige and personality to the chain. This, then, is the primary training area a food chain has.

Next in order is the first occasion for formal training, the application interview. At this time the personnel manager or one of his representatives can explain that courtesy is an essential for a retail establishment and is considered one of this company's greatest assets. Thus, even before a man is hired, he is given the chain's requirements and reasons for courtesy. This is as important to the company as the later technical training for the job. "Broadly speaking, any worker's effectiveness, in terms of himself, depends upon his 'know-how' and 'know-why'."⁴²

Since courtesy to customers is a manifestation of good company morale, it is important to begin early to implant a sound attitude in the employee, and this initial interview is the place to start. It suffices here to mention the fact that this first formal contact is an important one. In framing this early approach, it must be borne in mind that

⁴² Jucius, op. cit., p. 291.

every factor in a business—its objectives, ideals, leadership, function, faculties, environmental aspects, organization structure, procedures, and control—and how it is planned, organized, and controlled, affects the morale of employees.⁴³

The willingness of employees to co-operate in something like courtesy and considerateness to customers is also affected by the knowledge they possess about various company practices and policies, therefore the personnel department should begin at the outset to explain the company and its policy on customer relations.⁴⁴

Once the man is hired, it is imperative that the company make every effort to start him off correctly. A recent trade journal article well exemplifies this need as the following excerpts illustrate:

Once an operator has hired the new employe, it becomes the operator's and the other employes' responsibility to see that the newcomer gets the right start.

Training begins at the moment an employe is hired. He or she starts immediately gathering bits of information and forming opinions of your store. The kinds of experience he has during the first few days on the job are important because these early experiences make lasting impressions. You must start early to develop and train all three aspects of the employe's being:

1. His desire to do the job and to make good must be cultivated from the very moment he is hired.
2. His ability to do each job must be developed as quickly and as completely as possible.
3. He should be helped and encouraged to increase his skill in getting along with people from the very start of his career.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., p. 295.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 296.

⁴⁵ "How to Get Your New Employe Off on the Right Foot," Progressive Grocer, April, 1956, pp. 197-198.

First day training is necessary in courtesy as well as in techniques and these three aspects of a man's character can be utilized in producing sound apostles of courtesy and consideration. The man's desire to be courteous must be fanned by giving him reasons, positive motivation, for doing well in this regard. If he can see his own welfare tied inextricably to the good of the company, and the company's success as dependent on his personal customer relations, he will have the motivation necessary to carry him through the difficult situations that will inevitably arise.

The man's ability to be a good "customer man" has been partially ascertained by the recruiting and screening processes, but only by observing him in action under pressure can a final stamp of approval be placed. Such a test will come up early and it is up to the veteran members of the organization to help, encourage, explain, and prompt the new man, but also to make note of any incurable impatience or bad temper that might render the newcomer undesirable. All temperaments are not suited for the rigors of retail selling, and early discovery of such a type is important if the over-all friendly character of the company is to be maintained.

While a smiling face and friendly word may be badges of courtesy, they are only one part of the many-faceted jewel that is good customer relations. Courtesy is manifested in a neat appearance—clean, fresh uniform, polished shoes, combed hair, clean hands, and the like.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

A clean store is a courteous store. It is considerate as well as good business to give people what they want. In a survey conducted by Jewel Tea Company of Chicago, it was found that cleanliness ranked first in the customers' minds when asked what they wanted in a grocery store. Since pleasing the customer is a basic principle of courtesy, Jewel's "ten commandments" are worth listing here as reflecting what one large group of consumers wants.

Jewel's Ten Commandments⁴⁷

1. Clean and White... Inside, outside, front and back...Swept, scrubbed, and shining.
2. Friendliness...The deep-down kind that comes from picking nice folks to work with us, and giving them good pay, fine working conditions, and a chance to get ahead.
3. Self-Service...Easy-to-reach shelves, easy-to-read labels and prices, easy-to-get-around aisles, easy-to-find merchandise, easy-to-wheel gliders, easy to get help when you want it.
4. True Quality...Careful, critical food-buying, better-than-Government requirements, kitchen testing of all new items, and all big shipments.
5. Freshness...Early morning deliveries of iced-fresh produce at every store every day...Meats, fish, dairy products kept under constant refrigeration.
6. Low Prices...Because we're cash-and-carry, because we're big enough to buy in big lots and because our folks work as a team to avoid waste, we can sell everything at everyday rock-bottom prices... exactly the same in all Jewel Stores.
7. Honest Weights...No funny business; no dried-out goods; no butcher's thumbs...you always get every ounce you pay for.
8. Variety of Foods...More good things to eat, more well-known brands, more variety of foods.

⁴⁷ From that company's leaflet.

9. Fair Dealing...Everybody served in turn...The same friendly service to all customers.
10. Jewel Guarantee...We will never knowingly disappoint you. Money back on any purchase if you say so—and with the Jewel smile.

These "ten commandments" add up to ten ways in which a company can show courtesy and consideration to its customers. Neglect of any one of these can nullify all the other work done in pursuit of good employee-customer relations. A friendly smile will not entirely offset a dirty apron or a sloppy uniform. A warm greeting is forgotten long before withered produce or a dishonest weight. Any training program that is dedicated to the furthering of employee-customer relations must necessarily contain references to the necessity for neatness, honesty, and displaying and selling nothing but fresh, top-quality merchandise.

1. HONESTY

Very little has been written about honesty in stores, but it is a matter of no small import. Customers who are knowing victims of dishonesty through false claims, misread scales, veiled deceit, and the like are not only lost customers, but also spreaders of the word. A lax or indifferent policy on the part of a company as regards honesty rules out any possibility of bettering customer relations. No one likes to be cheated, and any sign of maliciousness in this area can only alienate one-time customers and all who come in contact with them.

Not quite as damaging as outright dishonesty, but a serious failing nonetheless, is carelessness in marking prices on merchandise. The shopper who finds several commodities she wishes to buy priced a few cents over the shelf tag will not be inclined to favor the store or

company that allows such discrepancies. Likewise, the people who are consistently stopped at the check-out stands while someone checks a price stamped illegibly on a can are not going to be well disposed toward the chain.

2. PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND STORE CLEANLINESS

When a customer enters a food store she has her eyes wide open! Not only is she quick to spot and take advantage of a bargain, but she is equally alert to the appearance of those who serve her.⁴⁸

This opening paragraph in one of Progressive Grocer's "Customer Relations" articles points up the necessity of maintaining neatness not only in the store proper, but also in the personnel who serve the public. Such items as the following appear in new employee check lists: "Personal appearance is very important. People like to shop where employes are neat and clean."⁴⁹

The matter of personal appearance has become more and more important in the minds of today's retail food distributors as they strive to erase the stigma of the dirty apron, and elevate their business to the level of a highly respected vocation. In the food business, many feel that cleanliness is next to and resultant in prestige and profits. People like to shop a store that reflects in its physical appearance and personnel that hygienic quality that shoppers like to find in connection with the food they buy and eat.

⁴⁸ "Good Grooming starts with your uniform," Progressive Grocer, May, 1956, p. 97.

⁴⁹ "How to get Your New Employee Off on the Right Foot," op. cit., p. 198.

Few things are more important to the customer than the appearance of the store personnel. No matter how the plate glass window in the front of the store may sparkle or how the displays may glisten, the entire effect is lost on the customer who has just watched the produce man in a sloppy uniform handle her merchandise with dirty hands.⁵⁰

More and more food distributors are putting cleanliness and neatness of store and personnel in a category with competitive prices and imaginative displays as factors in successful merchandising. As one policy booklet, given to new employees, puts it:

The nicest thing about a good place to shop is the fine service customers receive. People naturally flock to a store where the employees are pleasant, neat, courteous and know what they're doing.

'A clean, spotless store is the best possible invitation to shop. It is the first thing a customer notices and the first impressions mean a lot! Remember it is your job, not the other fellow's, to keep our store clean.'⁵¹

Thus, the appearance of clerk and store are both important factors in courtesy. An appearance on the part of either that offends the customers' sensibilities is a poor foundation on which to build sound employee-customer relations. These areas of courtesy are included in the observations of Merit Protective Service and other similar shopper organizations.

⁵⁰ "Good Grooming starts with your uniform," op. cit., p. 102.

⁵¹ Glenn R. Silverthorne, "How to Make Employee Training Pay Off," Progressive Grocer, June, 1955, p. 74.

Its (Merit) courtesy survey covers everything about a business—from the condition of the sidewalk out front to the manner, appearance, and language of personnel. Merit operatives note whether clerks converse or straighten stock while customers wait. . . . Are the male clerks clean-shaven? Are clerks using objectionable language? Are they neatly and cleanly dressed?⁵²

Personal appearance and a clean store are very important ingredients in the recipe for a successful employee-customer relations program.

B. THE NEGATIVE APPROACH

As was pointed out in the introductory chapter, the negative approach to courtesy will not produce satisfactory results if relied on as the sole element in the program. A company can impress on employees the need for considered friendliness to customers, can order them to adhere to the externals of courtesy, threaten them with disciplinary action or dismissal if they fail to comply, but all this can only result in a thin layer of surface courtesy which will tend to rub off under pressure.

There may well be a place for a negative phase to the courtesy program, but this place can never have more than a small share in a successful campaign. Courtesy, like love and laughter, will not last long if forced. Positive motivation is required.

Some negative motivation—based on fear—may be desirable in dealing with weak human beings, but it must be carefully regulated lest it defeat the whole purpose of the courtesy program.

⁵² Oursler, op. cit., p. 153.

New employees can and should be told that courtesy is expected of them, they should be reprimanded within reason when an offense in this matter comes directly to a superior's attention. The fact of "shoppers" should be made clear (women, employed by the company, who shop in the various stores to check prices, procedures, and courtesy). "Good morning" and "Thank you" should be made part of checker training, and failure to comply should be reason for loss of merit points. Employees should be made aware of the fact that excessive or continued discourtesy will result in dismissal. This should be the extent of negative motivation. Any badgering or extreme threats can only produce sullen, disgruntled, inwardly hostile employees. The smiles these men may wear are not likely to prove very durable.

Discipline must be weighed with considerations of the inherent difficulties of the retailer's lot. Most problems that companies try to solve with force and fear could be solved more readily and more decisively by training and explanation. Merit Protective Service had this to say:

Actually, 75 percent of all workers give honest efficient, courteous service. Typical Merit reports praise clerks for going out of their way to help customers, and for their cheerful politeness under difficult conditions. Most outright discourtesy comes from young untrained employees. M. H. Hament, president and founder of Merit, says, 'The public can be extremely difficult and exasperating, particularly for the inexperienced employee. And all of us, including salespeople, have off days. We need four or five reports at least before we can see a clear pattern. And we never try to taunt or trap an employee into a blunder or an argument. We're conscious that we're dealing with human beings, not machines.'⁵³

⁵³ Ibid., p. 154.

The moral to be drawn from this in considering the negative approach is that patience and perspective are most necessary in regulating discipline. Courtesy cannot be forced, and while some check on the actions of employees may be desirable, a company should proceed with care and moderation in this matter lest extreme strictness and hasty punishment nullify the courtesy program by instilling fear and anger in the employees.

C. TRADITION AND EXAMPLE

One of the strongest and most profound of the training factors in molding a new or holding a veteran employee in the ways of courtesy is company tradition. While the concept of tradition is an elusive one, the fact is very real and very effective in developing satisfactory outlooks and attitudes on the part of company personnel.

Webster defines tradition as the oral transmission of information, beliefs, customs . . . something handed down from the past; an inherited culture, attitude, etc. For a food chain it is that collection of attitudes and beliefs that have become identified with the company and the personnel who represent and comprise it.

When courtesy has become part and parcel of this unwritten, but very real, rule of tradition, it can be the most effective means of training new and maintaining old personnel in the ways of better employee-customer relations. Tradition has the ability to inculcate a way of life in people that is much more profound and readily accepted than any number of directives and formal regulations.

Tradition is transmitted more or less informally through the example and remarks of veteran employees. A company's regular personnel can be the greatest, most effective medium through which the ideals and attitudes of the organization can be promulgated and kept alive.

Much of the effectiveness of the smaller, more compact food chains lies in their ability to perpetuate this tradition. They are able to maintain a more constant personnel group, reside in a single community, build a personality through a constant treatment of regular customers. They have the time, opportunity and personnel to build a tradition. They have the personal interest to give service and establish a reputation for courtesy. They can employ local people who share their interest in the community and the business. Through it all the small chain can train and maintain a tradition of good employee-customer relations.

In the smaller company, the closer contacts between management and people down the line and in different departments make it possible to explain the business continually and effectively. The aim is to make everyone feel he's a part of the business and that its success and his own success are synonymous.⁵⁴

Since most training takes place on the store level and is conducted informally and formally by whoever happens to be able and available, it is imperative to a successful training program that a sound tradition of assistance and good example be instilled in the workers throughout the company.

⁵⁴ "Training Them To Grow With the Business," American Business, January, 1956, p. 17.

From box-boy to president, everyone in the food chains is undergoing constant training. And about 90% of it is on-the-job training . . . From the initial interview with the manager as the new employe starts his job to the day of his appointment as manager of his own store, in-store training under the manager's supervision is going on continually . . .

Personnel must learn not only grocery know-how, but how to get along with customers and with fellow workers. Naturally much of the training responsibility is delegated down the line.⁵⁵

Much of this training down the line is done through the spirit and good example of experienced employees who embody and transmit that tradition which has become an integral part of the company and transformed it from an aggregate into a family-like organization. "The power of example thus becomes one of the most vital parts of any program aimed at stimulating employees for self-improvement."⁵⁶ A notable example of this is Detroit's J. L. Hudson Company where new employees are traditionally given companionship and consideration by their fellow employees to such an extent that workers who have left for one reason or another often come back for visits with their friends. This considerateness spills over to the customers to such an extent that many will shop exclusively at Hudson's.⁵⁷ A sound tradition and good example have done their job.

⁵⁵ "Training—A Process That Never Stops," Chain Store Age, August, 1955, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Robert B. Ross, "Stimulating Employees to Self-Improvement," American Business, January, 1956, p. 23.

⁵⁷ From a lecture by Professor E. A. Brand, Michigan State University, May, 1956.

D. THE REASONS FOR COURTEOUS ACTIONS ARE IMPORTANT

The whole modern school of motivational research is dedicated to finding the inner motives and reasons why people do what they do. This approach is sound, at least in theory, because people by nature are looking for the reasons why they do or should do a particular thing. By the same token, this training program, aimed at improved employee-customer relations, will only produce meaningless surface response and reflex actions, unless the trainee is given a rational explanation of why he should be courteous.

The fact that a man will lose his job if he is not courteous is a negative reason, but an effective one withal. Of more value are the positive motives, the explanatory reasons for acting in a particular way. Some of these might be:

1. Courtesy is contagious. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
2. The company and, through it., you will prosper by having contented regular customers. Courtesy brings customers.
3. You never know what is troubling a person. Your kindness could save the day for a distraught shopper.
4. Your company has a reputation for friendly service. You were selected because you have the ability and personality to maintain this laudable tradition. Don't fail yourself, your fellow workers, and the company.
5. Your working companions depend on your cheerfulness towards them and the customers you serve. All your jobs are greatly dependent on how much Mrs. Shopper likes you and the way you treat her.

6. Courtesy is our company trade mark and no one can advance without wearing it.

This is just a sampling to indicate a few possible approaches to the task of giving employees reasons for being friendly. A person can be told to do something, but the most effective results are attained when the employee knows why he is asked to act in a certain way, and is thus motivated to do so. "A manager's value is in direct relation to his ability to motivate."⁵⁸

E. CHECKS AND COUNTER-CHECKS

Informing employees of what is expected of them and why, reminding them periodically, and remedying misconceptions and mistakes all have their place in the training of employees. Explanation and motivation have already been discussed and the matter of reminders will be treated in Chapter IV since it also falls under the heading of environment and propaganda. There remains, then, a need to discuss that phase of formal training that checks on what has been learned and how it is applied, with an eye to providing a remedy or correction.

Human nature being what it is, there is need for occasional check-ups even on the best store employees to ascertain whether they are still observing at least the externals of courtesy and friendly service. The managers and superintendents do this through their constant alertness to what is happening in the stores. Checker-trainers

⁵⁸ "Building The Management Team," Personnel Journal, March, 1956, vol. 34, No. 10, p. 384.

visit stores and observe their former pupils at work. One of the points the cashiers are graded on is politeness. Most chains employ their own price and courtesy checkers who shop a number of the company's stores each week and turn in reports on the efficiency and friendliness of the store personnel. Some companies engage the services of organizations like the Merit Protective Service cited above.

Another means of evaluating employee-customer relations before a negative result is shown by a loss of business, is through customer-research surveys. These can be carried on by the company and consist in brief interviews with customers either in or near the store, or at their homes. Such surveys can not only alert a store to an unwholesome situation or discourteous employee who has escaped observation, but can also bring to light profitable answers as to why Mrs. Housewife prefers store A to store B.

Checks and counter-checks are a negative aspect of training, but they do have their place. People cannot be forced to be courteous, but a diplomatically administered program of counter-checks can do much to keep employees alert to the necessity for courtesy without rendering them sullen and rebellious. While no one enjoys criticism, most well-meaning employees will accept corrective advice if it is unoffensively administered and based on fact. A person should not be "called down" for one provoked offense, since everyone has a bad day once in awhile. As Merit Service commented: "We need four or five reports at least before we can see a clear pattern."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Will Oursler, op. cit., p. 154.

Of great value on the positive side of the ledger is the report of excellence that most stores will receive once they or their customers are inspected. Managers could do much to build morale and esprit de corps if they would publish the reports that praise the store's spirit and personnel, as well as those that might contain some criticism. Such a posting followed by a personal word of congratulations and thanks to all the employees individually could lay the foundation for an unshakable tradition of courtesy and consideration.

Counter-checks, too, have their place in the over-all training for better employee-customer relations.

CHAPTER IV THE ENVIRONMENT FOR COURTESY AND COOPERATION

A. WHAT IS MEANT BY ENVIRONMENT

This thesis is concerned with all factors contributing to better employee-customer relations. It deals with human nature and courtesy. It is interested in the institution and maintenance of spontaneous friendly service. Such courtesy and cooperation must come from within the individual if it is to endure.

Certain outward manifestations of courtesy might be forced from employees, but anything deep and lasting must spring from the personal conviction and desire of each clerk. For this reason, the thesis has dealt with the personnel problems of recruiting and screening as well as the matter of training, in which positive motivation was stressed. Now the matter of environment is studied. Webster defines environment as "surroundings, the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism, etc." For the purpose of this thesis, environment will deal with working conditions, the informal training of posters, personnel publications, and the like, rewards and opportunities, supervision, institutional advertising, customer attitudes inasmuch as these can be influenced in advance of personal in-store contacts, and, finally, that sense of belonging that is so important a motivational factor for courtesy. In general, this chapter discusses and analyzes those elements which an

employee looks for in a job. It goes on the supposition that an informed, satisfied, and loyal employee will best promote sound employee-customer relations.

What Most Employees Are Looking For In A Job⁶⁰

If you can get your new employees to like their jobs, the battle is half won. The experts have come up with some principles of what makes people like their jobs. Among them are;

1. Good pay
2. Good working conditions
3. A successful business
4. Steady work
5. An opportunity for advancement.
6. Treated with respect
7. Knowing the facts about what is going on.
8. A feeling of doing something worth-while and really contributing to the store's success.
9. Interesting and satisfying work that will hold his or her interest.

B. WORKING CONDITIONS

While a well-balanced, carefully trained individual may give every indication of being an apostle of good employee-customer relations, even the most promising prospect will be hard-pressed to practice courtesy and consideration with any consistency if the conditions under

⁶⁰ "How to Get Your New Employee Off on the Right Foot,"
op. cit., p. 202.

which he works are unduly bad. The pressure of too long hours, too much work, or dangerous, unpleasant tasks does not leave much room for friendliness. The clerk who is treated in a harsh and discourteous manner by his superiors will not be inclined to render friendly service to customers. "How clerks treat customers depends largely on how the clerks are treated by the store management,"⁶¹

Companies, in their zeal to sell the public directly, have often neglected their own employees. They have forgotten that "selling the organization begins by selling it to the employees."⁶² The conditions under which people work are the elements that sell the company to its employees. If work loads are reasonable, physical facilities safe and adequately comfortable, and superiors courteous and just, then morale will be high and the company will have accomplished the most important prerequisite for an environment of courtesy and cooperation. Companies are realizing more and more the need for high morale and what it takes to attain it.

We do realize today that the pay check and tangible job benefits are only a small part of the over-all needs that must be met by management to create a high level of morale. Morale cannot be changed overnight by one-shot attempts to curry favor. It results from the individual feelings of workers about everything that they experience in their working environment.⁶³

Food chains such as Jewel Tea and Grand Union have made great strides in this matter of building morale by studying employee needs

⁶¹ Mahoney and Hession, op. cit., p. 26.

⁶² Harlow and Black, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶³ Robert Saltonstall, "What Employees Want From Their Work", Harvard Business Review, November-December, 1953, vol. 31, No. 6, pp. 72-73.

and taking steps to remedy them.⁶⁴ Trade journals have made concerted efforts to assist food distributors in building an environment of contentment and satisfaction in which courtesy has the best chance of thriving. Such check lists as the one listed above provide food distribution executives with a norm against which they can measure their own employee benefit programs and thus ascertain where they might be failing.

If courtesy begins with personal contentment, then food chains must examine working conditions carefully to ascertain if they are doing all they can to foster an environment in which sound employee-customer relations can flourish. Cleanliness, safety, adequate facilities and equipment, just and considerate management are all essential to this program. No element can safely be neglected. For this reason and because courtesy must begin at the top executive level, this program must stem from the convictions of the company's president and board of directors. If they treat those under them with justice, consideration, and thoughtfulness, then their employees should reflect some of that spirit.

A belief on the part of management in the essential dignity of each worker, who has hopes, fears, and aspirations of his own, . . . inevitably filters down from the boss through all levels of management to the employees.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ From lectures delivered at Michigan State University by Messrs. Morris and Moseley, vice presidents of Jewel Tea and Grand Union respectively.

⁶⁵ Saltonstall, op. cit., p. 76.

C. PROPAGANDA

Propaganda, as a concerted effort to spread particular doctrines and information, is here used to embody the movies, posters, personnel publications and all that are aimed at reminding employees that courtesy is an integral part of retail business.

Movies such as Marshall Field's By Jupiter have been made available to companies and do a wonderful job of teaching the important and serious problem of courtesy in an informal, humorous, and entertaining manner. The same can be said for Chain Store Age's very interesting cartoon series.⁶⁶ Posting these in a store offends no one, yet provides a subtle reminder to employees that courtesy and friendly service are shown by deeds.

Companies themselves often post signs aimed at reminding personnel of one phase or another of courtesy.⁶⁷ While this author feels such imperative signs as "Smile" and "Think" do much to antagonize most employees, there is a place for courtesy signs. Thriftway showed more insight and imagination when they drew a down-in-the-mouth face on a placard with

Please Park All Long Faces
in the back room...it's
Courtesy Week and
TIME TO SMILE!

The humor of the reminder removed the "bossy" element that many people object to. Benner Tea Company had good results with "It's Time To Smile"

⁶⁷ "Signs of Employee Courtesy," Chain Store Age, November, 1956.

surrounding a disembodied set of smiling lips. Management should not attempt to bludgeon employees into courtesy, but can do much in promoting it if they go about the project in a subtle and imaginative way.

Another fruitful area for poster reminders is in the matter of personal appearance. Progressive Grocer summarized what some retail food distributors are doing in the following paragraph:

Reminders for Cleanliness Program⁶⁸

Washroom reminders have been found effective in many stores. One company uses a full-length mirror in all store washrooms to remind employees to check their appearance. One store uses a full-length cut-out picturing an employee ready to go to work, with notations at those points most frequently overlooked. Still another store frames the full-length mirror with notations of points to be checked. There are many other methods that can be used. But for continuing results be sure to have some method of reminding personnel.

Articles on courtesy in trade publications are useful,⁶⁹ but of more value are editorials, articles, and contests run in the personnel publication. Only a small percentage of employees will read the trade journals, but almost all personnel will read some or all of a well-written company publication.⁷⁰ In addition, people are found to be unusually receptive to what they read, even in company papers.⁷¹ All

⁶⁸ "Good Grooming Starts with your uniform," op. cit., p. 102.

⁶⁹ cf. Glenn R. Silverthorne, "Four Ways to Build Better Customer Relations," Progressive Grocer, July, 1955, pp. 133-138.

⁷⁰ One survey showed that 73 per cent of employees in one company read their publication thoroughly and another 24 per cent at least glanced through it. Canfield, op. cit., p. 434.

⁷¹ The International Council of Industrial Editors' survey of company magazines alone found that industry is investing about \$109 million annually on corporate publications used in public relations programs. Ibid., p. 418.

this combines to make this an excellent medium for influencing personnel toward better customer relations.

Contests asking for articles on "what friendly service means to me" or on means of bettering employee-customer relations can be run very conveniently through such periodicals, while articles and editorials pointing up courtesy are also very effective. In any case, the personnel publication can and should be used as a subtle "propaganda" device aimed at furthering courtesy and cooperation in the chain through improving the general environment of the organization. Personnel publications are dedicated to interpreting company policies, informing about the company's products and operations, explaining the company, giving recognition to employees, bridging the gap between home and job, promoting safety and health habits, encouraging ambition and ingenuity and education, and ultimately serving as a liason between management and labor.⁷²

All these can contribute to a better environment for courtesy and cooperation.

D. REWARDS

Some companies find that rewards, contests, and courtesy campaigns are productive of favorable results. They believe in helping personnel help themselves and the company by staging contests aimed at promoting better employee-customer relations.

⁷² Harlow and Black, op. cit., pp. 271-272.

While only half of the companies responding to the questionnaire listed "rewards and contests" as among the means used to promote courtesy, the response on courtesy campaigns as successful courtesy promoters was surprisingly good.⁷³ Six of the eight companies contacted answered that they employed courtesy campaigns, and three of the four that numbered their choices in order as they felt they contributed to enhancing employee-customer relations singled out these campaigns as most important. One company rated them fourth, while the other two chains merely checked them as contributing factors.

While the sample in this survey was small, a response as definite as this lends some validity to the supposition that courtesy campaigns are worthwhile. At least it can be said that they have a place in environment-molding for some chains.

Liberal markets of Dayton has a "Carry-out boy of the month" award consisting of five dollars and a picture in the employees' magazine. The aim of the contest is to boost employee morale and encourage courteous box-boy service. The points taken into consideration are careful handling of customers' packages, clean, neat personal appearance, and a winning smile.⁷⁴

While the idea of paying people to be courteous is repugnant, rewards, contests, and campaigns can be used as a reminder and encouragement for better employee-customer relations. If the campaign is forced on employees, it can only result in grudging lip service to

⁷³ of. statistical chart.

⁷⁴ "Checking the Chains," Chain Store Age, January, 1956, p. 9.

the externals of courtesy. If the opinion of food distribution students who have been in companies using courtesy campaigns carries any weight, then these campaigns are not as well received and successful as top management seems to think. In general it can be said that rewards, contests, and the like can be effective if presented in a positive, low-pressure manner, and not forced on employees against their will.

E. SUPERVISION, LEADERSHIP, AND STORE MEETINGS

Effective supervision and leadership play important parts in producing courtesy-minded employees. Human nature being what it is, some supervision will always be necessary. Friendliness being what it is, leadership and good example become prerequisites for a successful employee-customer relations program.

Questionnaire results⁷⁵ showed six of the eight responding companies listed "Effective Supervision" among the most fruitful areas for promoting courtesy, while the same percentage endorsed "Example" as belonging high on the list. Seven out of eight chains mentioned talks by supervisors as one important form their courtesy training takes.

Much has been written above on the merits of good example and courtesy beginning at the very top of the company. Here it is considered in its effect on the general work atmosphere.

⁷⁵ cf. statistical chart.

Supervision here refers more to the promotion of teamwork and coordination in the company rather than any strict totalitarian rule. It embraces cooperative effort and decisions, committee discussions, and the recognition of individual effort. A company that is actively promoting friendly service, that is making use of every means available to obtain and train reliable personnel, that is supplying directions and reminders aimed at bettering employee-customer relations, and is generally providing an environment for courtesy, can be said to have supervision and leadership geared to a sound courtesy program.

More particularly in this section, supervision and leadership refer to the use of store and department meetings for hearing and discussing decisions relating to customer service and employee attitudes. Where the people who are to put a policy into effect have a part in formulating the policy, there will be more likelihood of cooperation. Where the reasons behind a ruling are explained and discussed, intelligent conformity is generally forthcoming.

People react more favorably to a group decision than to the dictatorial authority of one person. Representation on a management committee brings better teamwork between heads of divisions or departments.⁷⁶

The president of a manufacturing company had this to say concerning programs in which employees have a voice:

⁷⁶ Marion L. Briggs, "Committee Management—Is It Effective?" American Business, February, 1956, p. 18.

Our objective . . . is to give more of our men chances to contribute directly to the improvement of the company, while improving their own potentials. The secret of success is to know your job, to give it 100 per cent of your ability, and to be able to get along with people.⁷⁷

While these remarks were made by the top executive of a manufacturing concern, there is no reason why they should not be at least equally true for retailers where the human element counts so much.

Last year(1955) Progressive Grocer ran a series of articles dealing with a successful program of personnel relations in a small western chain. The third article was concerned with store meetings, about which the author wrote:

Getting key personnel together once a week enables me to integrate all out efforts and stimulates co-ordination of all departments. It also provides all of us with opportunities to discuss problems and work out harmonious solutions.⁷⁸

Store meetings, wherein department heads or all the members of a particular department come together, can provide a spirit of teamwork as well as an opportunity to work out problems.

No matter how well trained a group of employees may be at one time, inevitably, there will be some 'backsliding' in behavior, speech or dress. Some practices that customers do not like. Such practices seem to be contagious and may soon be widely adopted by employees. Group meetings provide a much more effective medium for correction than person-to-person correction.

These meetings also provide an opportunity for the management to praise a staff for its efforts during the preceding month.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ "Training Them To Grow With The Business," op. cit., p. 16.

⁷⁸ Glenn R. Silverthorne, "Our Plan for Successful Store Meetings," Progressive Grocer, August, 1955, pp. 145-146.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

Thus, supervision and leadership through the medium of store meetings can provide an excellent area in which to promote better employee-customer relations in a retail food chain. Group discussion, committee problem solving, and all that go into a store meeting can contribute greatly to enhancing the environment for courtesy.

F. INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING

As Mr. Val Bauman of the National Tea Company has said: "If you tell people something often enough, they are going to start believing it."⁸⁰ With this thought in mind, a food chain's institutional advertising can be employed to a double purpose. Not only will such advertising help lend a chain personality and distinguish X company stores from those of all its competitors even though they are all handling approximately the same line of merchandise, but these ads can also help to implant in employees' minds the need for friendliness and courteous service.

If an employee hears and reads about his company's friendly, smiling clerks, often enough, he will generally be inclined to act in accordance with this ideal. Mr. Bauman gave as an example the matter of clean stores. If a company talks long enough and loudly enough about its immaculate supermarkets, it will eventually have all its stores in line. Some will be inspired and others shamed into added effort, but the results will be the same.

⁸⁰ From a lecture delivered by Mr. Bauman at Michigan State University, May, 1956.

Food chains seem more interested today in the possibilities of institutional advertising as a supplement to their present advertising programs. The fact that these advertisements have a dual value should make them doubly attractive to chain executives.

Institutional advertising can give a store or stores prestige and personality only if the personnel affected live up to advance billing, but the very fact that a company advertises its friendly service should have some influence on the actions of the employees.

This type of advertising will often contribute to team spirit and improved esprit de corps and in so doing will aid in establishing the general atmosphere and environment so helpful in furthering sound employee-customer relations.

G. CUSTOMER ATTITUDES

Something new and different in promoting the environment for courtesy in a food chain has come into some prominence in retail food circles recently. The National Association of Food Chains has engaged a large New York public relations firm to publicize and dignify the industry for the general public. One of the aims of this public relations group is to introduce the general public to the fact that the retail food business has come of age as an important business. The position of store manager is presented to the public as that of an executive responsible for the management of as many as a hundred men and over a million dollars yearly.

Store managers and other store personnel are being encouraged to take an active part in community projects. In one way and another

the business of retail food distribution is being "sold" to the masses who comprise the food chains' customers. There is an attempt to elevate the food business, and one of the results of this should be greater respect for the men and women who man the scales and check-out stands in the supermarkets of America.

Institutional advertising by food chains also has its effect on customer attitudes. Low prices, ample facilities, wide variety of selection, and friendly service from clean, bright, comfortable stores should do much to render shoppers cheerful and friendly. When they read about all these accommodations in the newspapers and hear about them on the radio, and then observe them first-hand in the stores themselves, they should be well disposed not only toward the store and chain in general, but also toward the personnel who staff the supermarkets.

Friendly customers are a very important adjunct to the environment of courtesy and cooperation. Employee-baiters can quickly break down even the best intentions on the part of store personnel. This move to lend prestige to the food business reacts on employees and customers alike to add its contribution to friendly service by increasing mutual understanding and pre-disposing shoppers to tolerance and respect for the function that supermarketeters perform.

H. THE SENSE OF BELONGING

The great success of the family-run store lies in the identification on the part of store personnel of their welfare with that of the business in general. Family stores are friendly because no matter

how a worker might feel, he or she will be courteous and amiable because pleasing customers builds profits and profits are money in the bank to Papa Joe and Son John and Sister Kate.

Identification of store welfare with personal gain is unequalled as a promoter of desirable attitudes. The sense of belonging, of being a significant member of the team, of prospering as the company prospers, is probably the most effective single ingredient in a successful employee-customer relations program.

Generally speaking, companies with low turnover rates have courteous personnel, and turnover is lowest where employer-employee relations have been most congenial and where management has given the personnel good reason for remaining with the company.

Just and considerate treatment of employees is essential in this matter, but frequently an added incentive is desirable. Many companies that pride themselves on the morale of their work force have seen fit to add additional loyalty-binding elements. The following was written in 1955:

The Grand Union Company also believes that every employee should have a personal sense of identity with the business he helps to build every day.⁸¹

Not too long after this was written, Grand Union inaugurated profit sharing in the chain, feeling that this was an excellent means of promoting this personal sense of identity with the company. Grand Union also offers stock to employees.

⁸¹ Sidney Schwartz, "Proven Incentive Plans Raise Employee Morale," Super Market Merchandising, XX, September, 1955, p. 56.

Loblaw, Jewel Tea, Colonial, and the Kroger Company are four large chains who have felt it to be good business to offer profit sharing to their employees.⁸²

Delchamps, Incorporated, as cited in the introductory chapter, has experienced remarkable results with its profit sharing, bonus, and stock plans. Its turnover is "less than 1/2 of 1% a month"⁸³ and this includes part-time workers as well as women who retire from business to raise families. This is an example of a smaller chain (\$23 million yearly) that has found that profit sharing and similar fringe benefits have great value in building a sense of identification between employees and the company.

The limitations of such plans are implied in this statement by Delchamps' President.

Incentive plans...are part of a good employe relations program, but they alone are not enough. In Delchamps' case, these benefits are more an outward manifestation of the company's attitude toward its employes rather than an attitude in themselves. The basic premise in the Delchamps' attitude toward its employes is that of the family; in a family, the good of all is considered, good things are shared by all, equally and fairly.⁸⁴

Thus, while profit sharing, bonuses, and stock plans are very desirable, they cannot be effective unless accompanied by the proper attitude on the part of management. If given grudgingly, they will

⁸² of. Statistical Chart

⁸³ Trout, op. cit., p. 126.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

have little more effect than union-negotiated raises. If bestowed in a positive manner on the initiative of the company, they can greatly augment the environment for courtesy and cooperation in a chain, since the man who has a tangible share in the company should be more careful to promote its welfare by his friendly service to customers.

By way of summary this chapter will set out in outline-questionnaire form the methods and means of bettering employee-customer relations that are contained in this thesis. In general, the check list will follow the order taken in the body of this work.

The thesis opened with a general discussion of the problems facing retail food distributors today with accent on the problems of the chain organization in this matter of sound employee-customer relations. Courtesy was seen to be an attitude of mind as well as external actions and as such not successfully engendered by force or threats. The need for a positive program that tends to integrate employees' goals with those of the company in which they work was also discussed.

The body of the thesis outlined a program for a food chain to follow in bettering employee-customer relations. Such elements as personnel selection, training, and the environment for courtesy were considered at length. The following check list, questions and recommendations, are a result of this study. Affirmative answers manifest an over-all alertness to the problems in hand and the presence of positive effort to maintain and further sound employee-customer relations.

1

Reliable Personnel:

While no perfect type personnel exists, there are certain basic requirements that can be looked for and certain areas that can be explored.

1. Do you recruit from sources that have been productive of good personnel in the past? Do you encourage employees to recommend people, and value their recommendations highly? (Loyal employees know the job requirements and the individuals they recommend well and are most likely to match the two in a satisfactory manner.)

2. Do you make use of the usual screening methods for new employees? Is at least a simple mathematics quiz used? Is there a comprehensive general information questionnaire to be filled out? Does a responsible personnel man interview the applicants? Are references checked where there is any doubt? Are employees who leave the company interviewed as to the reason?

3. Are company aims and ideals clearly presented to the prospective employee at the initial interview? Is he told what is expected of him in courtesy as well as in directly productive work?

Trained and Integrated Personnel

1. Is the new employee introduced to courtesy in the first interview? Is he introduced around the store to personnel and facilities by the manager? Is someone appointed to show him his duties for the first few days? Is this first trainer instructed on the necessity for

inculcating courtesy? Is the newcomer given time to find himself and learn the layout of the store and his duties in it? Does the company have a set of "commandments" on the order of Jewel Tea's wherein the new employee can see what is expected of him? Is there a booklet, manual, or the like which the trainee can read and which gives a positive explanation of employee-customer relations? Is honesty and fair dealing a written and unwritten law in the chain? (Dishonest people lose respect for themselves and others alike.) Are a neat personal appearance and store cleanliness early lessons in the indoctrination program? Is someone in addition to the trainee responsible for what is to be learned, i. e., is the trainer also responsible?

2. Is there a set rule on customer courtesy and some check that it is followed? Are consideration, insight, and moderation shown in disciplining courtesy failures? (However, several violations should merit dismissal.)

3. Does the company have a strong tradition of friendly service? Do older employees help younger men? Are the veterans the most courteous of employees or are they resting on their seniority? (Recommendation: a contest for employees asking them each to write up the fellow employee that best exemplifies friendly, courteous service.)

4. Are reasons for being courteous given? Some examples of possible reasons are as follows: a. Courtesy is contagious. Do unto others... b. The company and you will prosper by maintaining contented customers. Courtesy keeps customers. c. You never know what is troubling a person. Your kindness could save the day for a distraught shopper. d. Your

company has a reputation for friendly service. You were selected because you have the ability and personality to maintain this laudable tradition. Don't fail yourself, your fellow workers, and your company.

e. Your working companions depend on your cheerfulness towards them and the customers you serve. All your jobs are greatly dependent on how much Mrs. Shopper likes you and the way you treat her. f. Courtesy is our company trade mark and no one can advance without wearing it.

5. Do you make use of checks on employee courtesy, e. g., company-employed shoppers who check on prices and courtesy, agency reports, customer interviews? Are favorable reports published and followed up as readily as bad ones? Are managers encouraged to praise employees for the good points that are reported as well as correct them for failings?

The Environment for Courtesy and Cooperation

1. Working conditions. Are your pay rates as good as or better than competitors, and in line with salaries in your locality? Are working hours carefully adhered to? Do you pay for unscheduled overtime? Are key employees, managers included, given sufficient time off? Are stores adequately manned, or are personnel overloaded with work on the excuse of greater efficiency? Are superintendents and managers freed from excessive pressure themselves so that they will not in turn have to overburden subordinates unduly? Are stores well-lighted, clean, and safe? Are they reasonably warm in winter and cool in summer? Are employees considered first when store temperatures are considered? Are employee needs studied periodically with a view to providing

greater security and satisfaction to the work? Are superintendents, managers, and department heads advised to treat subordinates in a reasonably friendly manner? Are they told to examine the situation and themselves carefully before they bark or bite?

2. Propaganda. Do you make use of Chain Store Age's cartoon sequences on courtesy by posting them in stores? Are inoffensive posters used at least occasionally to remind employees of the need for cheerfulness and a neat, clean personal appearance? Does the personnel publication sometimes carry articles, cartoons, or editorials on subjects that further employee-customer relations? Are contests on "What friendly service means to me" run once in a while for employees—with ample rewards to the winners?

3. Rewards. Some companies have found courtesy campaigns and contests such as that for "carry-out boy of the month" to be useful. Generally speaking, however, you cannot buy courtesy.

4. Supervision and Store Meetings. Since some effective supervision will always be necessary, are superintendents and managers alert to the needs of courtesy? Are they themselves courteous? Is there cooperative effort in making decisions, i. e., are those employees affected, sometimes asked their opinion on a problem? Are committee discussion techniques sometimes used when introducing a new policy, especially when it regards customer service or working conditions? When the people who are to put a policy into effect have a part in formulating the policy, there will be more likelihood of cooperation. Is this maxim ever applied? Are formal and informal personnel "get-togethers" encouraged?

4. Institutional Advertising. Do you make use of institutional advertising to build the personality and spirit of the company? Do you occasionally advertise your stores as places where friendly service is a by-word?

5. Customer Attitudes. Do you have an active public relations department? Do you attempt to sell customers on the services rendered them by the men and women who staff supermarkets?

6. The Sense of Belonging. Do you attempt to "sell" the company to employees by even such simple devices as using "our" and "we" in talking of the chain? Do you reward length of service? Do superiors make efforts to "get to know" those under them? Are employees informed of major decisions as soon as feasible? Are major changes discussed with and explained to at least key employees? Is every reasonable effort made to retain reliable workers? Are people transferred and talked to before dismissal is considered? Do you offer employees some added security through hospital plans? Do you give any fringe benefits that would tend to lower turnover, like insurance plans? Have you any benefits that would encourage employees to identify their welfare with that of the company such as profit sharing, bonuses, or stock plans? Is such a benefit closely and apparently tied to profits in such a way that employees can clearly see the connection between the company's success and their own? Are these benefits sold to the employees in such a way that they fully understand what they consist in? Are any such plans or programs given willingly and with obvious enthusiasm rather than grudgingly and with reluctance? Is any one person or committee in the

company responsible for bettering employee-customer relations?

This summary can provide a check list for and point out weak areas in an employee-customer relations program. The conclusions drawn throughout this thesis are embodied in the questions and recommendations herein contained. While this problem presents many difficulties by its intangible nature and the fact that it deals essentially with often unpredictable human nature, this work has attempted to pin-point the problem areas and supply practical suggestions toward furthering employee-customer relations.

The most important principle that this thesis tries to convey is that companies should not expect employees to be courteous and considerate unless they treat the employees in a courteous and considerate manner. Courtesy cannot be forced, but it can be inspired and encouraged. Courtesy cannot be guaranteed, but the odds can be banked in its favor if only companies will make use of the means at hand.

The End

1

STATISTICAL CHART

QUESTIONS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Personnel Sources?								
High School	x	x	x	x	x			
College	x	x	x					
Ads	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Store Posters			x		x		x	
Recommendations	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Store Applications			x		x	x		
Screening Methods?								
General Information	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Psychological tests	x		x	x	x			
Simple Mathematics tests	x			x	x			
Interviews by Managers					x	x		x
Interviews by Personnel Department	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
What Form Does Training in Courtesy Take?								
Training Manual		x	x	x			x	x
Posters	x	x						
Personnel Publication	x	x	x				x	
Lectures by Managers	x	x	x			x		x
Lectures by Supervisors	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Lectures by Personnel Department	x	x	x			x	x	x
Who Administers Program?								
Public Relations	x			x	x		x	
Personnel		x	x		x			
Line Management			x	x	x			x
No one						x		
What Factors Are Considered Important In Maintaining a Satisfactory Employee-Customer Attitude?								
Close Supervision			1	4	x	2	2	x
Satisfactory Working Conditions		1	2	3	x	6	3	x
Posters, Signs, etc.		6	5	6		7	4	
Institutional-type Advertising						8		
Personnel Publication		5	3		x	4	5	
Example		2	4		x	3	1	x
Public Address System						9		
Rewards and Contests	2	7		2		5		
Courtesy Campaigns	1	4		1	x	1		x
Store Mail Reminders				5	x			
Incentives Like								
Profit Sharing	4	3						x
Stock Holdings	3							
Store Staff Meetings		8						

Key: 1. Grand Union, 2. Loblaw, 3. Stop & Shop, 4. Penn Fruit
5. National Tea, 6. Red Owl, 7. Wrigley, 8. Colonial

Numbers are used to designate consecutive choices when so indicated by respondents.

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"The Food Distribution program at Michigan State
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