

## Case Study: The New Market Roll Out

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### THE SITUATION

A famous heritage brand food company had invested in a new \$25 million production facility in a new regional market where it had no prior presence. They knew the new delivery van driver sales force would be pivotal to their success, but they came to the realization late only several months before the committed roll out that they had the major business problem – they didn't know how to train the new sales force that they were already in the process of hiring. This unique family business had a history where all of the driver sales reps had been trained one at a time by their fathers and relatives as jobs were handed down from one generation to the next. The company did not have a written formal process or standards and did not know how to train an entirely new sales force in (what we quickly learned) was the art and science of selling a perishable product! This was a larger scale example of a common problem –people who have the knowledge are not readily capable (or willing) of conveying that knowledge to others. (Note: This is not unusual – ask an experienced chef why he performs certain techniques and he may look at you with a blank stare – he has forgotten why, he just does it.) The biggest management challenge with this roll out was the chain store requirements that all routes to all stores had to begin on day one – no phase in was permitted. Here we were with less than 3 months to get them up and running!

### THE SOLUTION

I admit this was a fun project for us as we had to ride the delivery vans with the experienced sales drivers and observe and ask them detailed questions of what, how and why they did the things they did in grocery stores of all sizes. Never mind that we had to be on the trucks at 5 am and there was no passenger seats in the vans. Most of the driver sales reps had over 20 years of experience and knew their jobs so well that, at first, it was difficult to get them to explain why they did what they did. Furthermore, this was compounded by some reluctance of the drivers to be observed because of a testy union-company relationship which we had to work hard to overcome. Working with a panel of over 15 experts, we recorded and formalized the rules, steps and procedures which were surprisingly complex given the different store and restaurant requirements along with seasonal and weather variations to product demand. We worked with the managers as trainers, and helped them prepare curriculum and case materials.

### THE RESULTS

The new workforce learned their new jobs in an intensive three week training program and successfully hit the road on roll out day. There were very few problems and customer reception to the products was high. The chain stores were pleased and the company now had a complete business expansion model which it could deploy in other markets.

## SUMMARY

The challenge of getting the people who possess vital knowledge to share it with others is not unique, nor limited to, heritage businesses. In fact, in our knowledge economy, this is an increasingly common business challenge. Our observation has been that companies underestimate the difficulty of creating an environment, which must include the processes and individual motivation, for consistently sharing knowledge across the business. The barriers to this are large and include all kinds of personal, political and systemic problems that have to be identified, acknowledged, and overcome. One useful lesson from this case is that the client needed to incorporate much earlier a clearly thought out knowledge strategy into its expansion plans. In your own organization, have you recently performed an audit of your communication and knowledge to ensure that everyone is getting what they need?