

ONCE IS NEVER ENOUGH

My wife, who taught for 25 years, was scheduled each year for at least two in-service days that the kids loved and the parents hated. The kids loved it because they had an extra day off from school. The parents, especially those who were working, had to re-arrange their schedule in order to make sure the kids were cared for and supervised. I don't think that the school system had these in-service days twice a year because they were trying to teach my wife how to teach. Rather, those days were used to introduce a new concept or method; to refresh old concepts or methods; and, perhaps, one of the most valuable reasons for those in-service days was to inspire. I know that Ellie would come home from an in-service day and say, "I'm really glad I did that. It was a shot in the arm for me."

Almost every profession – be it medical, legal, public safety, cosmetology, and even association executives – have in-service days or a continuing education program of some kind. I know, for myself, being a Certified Association Executive (CAE), I am required to obtain 40 hours of training during a three-year period that is related to association management in order to be re-certified. Every doctor, nurse, attorney, etc., are required to obtain additional education and training in order for them to continually and legally practice their profession.

Why should retailing and, in particular, grocery retailing be any different in our commitment to education and excellence? In my opinion, we shouldn't be any different! We are a very important and vital service segment of our economy. We serve the public in so many ways; and, today, there is a **much** greater level of responsibility vested in food retailers. The areas of food safety, food security, identity theft – all of these things – have elevated our level of responsibility to the consuming public.

So, it makes me crazy to think that, in most instances, when we train somebody to do a job in a supermarket, we consider them to be trained for life -- unless we would purchase a new front-end system; or, God forbid, we would have to train them again on that or on some other new technology. To be fair, I am sure that there are some companies out there that do have a continuing education program; and it would be especially meaningful if it were a refresher program. But, I can also tell you with great assurance that those companies are in the minority. Perhaps a good question to ask yourself is: Of the many companies who invested heavily (time and money) for many of their associates to be certified as food handlers, who has continued "in-service" training to refresh and confirm that the advanced food safety training is being used consistently and appropriately? Once again, with great certainty, I am sure that few companies are doing this.

When I think of customer service training, I think how natural and how much more effective it would be if it had in-service components -- that every single employee would be required to take a minimum of one or two hours' training **annually** to refresh and renew as well as to re-inspire associates to provide the very best customer service possible. The reinforcement of these principles and these kinds of programs is vital to their continued success and vitality. I just finished reading a book by Ken Blanchard – *Know Can Do* – and one of the main premises of the book is that people don't use the knowledge they acquire because it is not presented and reinforced on a repetitive basis – over and over and over again.

So, in summary, I would hope that this article, and the fact that we will be addressing this very subject at our Fall Management Conference on October 28, would inspire retailers of all sizes to commit to an in-service training mentality. Just because we have trained them on our cashier policies and principles, on customer relations, on food safety, etc., etc., that “once” is never enough. That training needs to be reviewed, reinforced and revitalized on a regular basis because ... once is **never** enough!

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