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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study was to determine selected aspects of the small business food service operators' perceptions regarding the need for training adult food service workers in the Altoona area of Pennsylvania. Information was gathered to help determine the operators' perceptions of the type of training, training site, and their commitment of money and time. Questionnaires were sent to all food service operators who were not members of a chain food service organization. Two follow-up letters, and a selective telephone follow-up resulted in a 31% return, which did not demonstrate an avid interest for a food service training program. The respondents who were favorable toward further training were characterized by a larger yearly volume of business. Respondents supported the idea of utilizing the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School facilities for inservice training. Promotional considerations for potential food service clientele also are explored: in-house training programs for small food service business operators; interaction of the Cooperative Extension Service home economist, the home economics departments in high schools, and the city sanitarian; service clubs; voluntary community youth groups; high school clubs or organizations; and the feasibility of licensure of food service workers. A bibliography is appended. (EA)

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Employer Perceptions of the Training Needs of the Adult Food Service Employee: A Case Study of the Altoona Area, Pennsylvania

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of the Altoona Area, Pennsylvania

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This study is part of a larger paper entitled "Employer Perception of the Training Needs of the Adult Food Service Employee: A Case Study of the Altoona Area, Pennsylvania."

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CAPSULE DIGEST

The main purpose of this paper was to determine selected aspects of the small business food service operators' perceptions regarding the need for training adult food service workers in the Altoona area of Pennsylvania. Additional information was gathered to help determine the operators' perception of the type(s) of training needed, their willingness to make a commitment of money and time in order for the food service employee to take advantage of such training, and finally to help determine their feelings concerning the site for such training.

The importance of a well-trained food service worker to the small business food service operator has been well-documented. The effect of training can be realized daily by management in meeting its objectives of satisfied customers, which leads to a more favorable margin of profit. Because the cost of training is too great for the individual small business food service operator to absorb, the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School presents an appropriate in-service educational center capable of meeting the needs for low-cost, high-quality food service worker training.

The major expected findings of this paper were: 1) the area small business food service operators would respond positively to the need for food service training for their employees; and 2) the area small business food service operator would respond positively to the idea of using the facilities of the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School as the in-service education center.

The population for this study consisted of all food service operators licensed by the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania, with the

exclusion of food service operators which were members of chain food service organization since such organizations usually supply member franchises with employee training programs.

A mailed questionnaire was used to gather data concerning determination of selected aspects of employers' perceptions regarding the need for training of the adult food service workers in the Altoona area of Pennsylvania, establishing the feeling toward the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School as an educational center for such training and the importance placed on the well-trained food service worker by the small business food service operators. Information was gathered concerning the operators' opinions of training needed which could serve as a basis for a food service training curriculum.

Items were included in the questionnaire in order to permit examination of the major expected findings comprising:

1. Capacity of the food service establishment.
2. Yearly volume of business.
3. Number of employees that the employer is responsible for training.
4. Number of employees in specific areas of training desired.
5. Special training problems.
6. Operators' opinions regarding a level of training desired.
7. Operators' choice of training site.
8. Operators' expected charge for training course.
9. Operators' opinions regarding who should absorb this cost for educational programming.

The initial mailing, two follow-up letters, and a selective telephone follow-up resulted in a 31 percent return of completed questionnaires. The 31 percent mail and phone response did not demonstrate an

avid interest on the part of the small business food service operators toward food service training for their employees. Thus, the findings to be given below are not meant to be generalized to all small business food service operators in the Altoona area, but rather only to the respondents. The operators who did return a completed questionnaire are characterized by a small yearly volume of business, low number of employees required to do the job, small capacity for the serving of food and limited budgets to afford the released time necessary or the expenses involved for the further training of their employees.

The respondents who answered positively concerning further training in food service for their employees were characterized by larger yearly volume of business, larger capacities, and more employees than the small operators. The larger business food service operator apparently realized the benefits of employee training on profits.

More specifically, the preceding analysis of data indicated that major expected finding one was not fully supported by the data presented in Tables 2 through 8. One may conclude, however, that even though this major expected finding was not substantiated by the data from particularly the smaller business food service operators, the need for further training did receive enough support in the study to suggest the possibility of establishing an in-service education program for food service employees in the Altoona area of Pennsylvania. If a course of this nature was established and reasonably priced, it could be expected to be successful in attracting participants. Furthermore, the potential students resulting from those employers who answered positively to the need for further employee training could fill several classes to start

such in-service educational programs. The number of such potential students ranged from 161 to 270 according to the data received.

The data supported the major expected finding that small business food service operators in the Altoona area would endorse the idea of utilizing the total facilities of the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School for the in-service educational center for a food service employee training program. The degree of endorsement received must be viewed from the prospective that the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School met the objective criteria for a training site set forth in the early part of this paper.

Considerations for the Future

The total facilities available at the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School must also be considered as an extension service for those small food service business operators willing to consider in-house training programs. Perhaps the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School through the adult school could coordinate extension programs of this type. Educational material and/or instructor consultation could be made available to the small business food service operator upon request. Other educational delivery systems, such as public television, and correspondence courses, need to be explored for their feasibility in delivering appropriate educational services for localized industrial needs.

Adult education depends greatly upon promotion. The need must be realized, then the educational programs developed to fill this need. If these potential students were placed in an adult educational program for food service training and they were proved to the food service

operator to be valuable assets to his or her establishment the lines of communication and promotion indeed would be opened.

Promotion is enhanced and strengthened by people-to-people interaction. Specifically, the adult education administrator must view the potential food service clientele as being derived from several sources. The home economist in the Cooperative Extension Service⁴ has a great deal of human interaction through pamphlets, newspaper correspondence, demonstrations, television programs, and so on. Traditionally, the home economist has been viewed as a source of vital and objective information. The public trusts his or her recommendations. Communications based on trust is an essential counterpart of promotion.

A second source to help open these lines of communication and promotion would be the departments of Home Economics in high schools which touch the lives of each of the students they serve. The interest that a home economics department can generate in the lives of these students is enormous.

A third source for promotion to be considered by the adult education administrator of the Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School would be the city sanitarian. The city sanitarian can walk softly, yet carry a big stick in promoting food service training. A sanitarian could award points from a pro-rated scale to a food service establishment at the time of inspection with regard to top quality, well trained employees. If one or more food service workers had been through a course at the local Altoona Area Vocational-Technical School, such points could carry a double bonus as they would be the property of the food service worker as well as of the food service establishment. These

points could serve as one criterion for future job promotion at the food service establishment or at another food service establishment. Moreover, such a rating scale could be used by the food establishment in advertising.

A fourth area of possible promotion for food service employee courses could be the service clubs. Service clubs such as the Elks, the Rotary, the Moose, and so on usually have an educational program chairman. These service clubs often carry the food service operators among their memberships. What better method of promoting food service education than by explaining and gaining support for the program than through this method? The word of mouth among business leaders of the community can be quite advantageous to the restaurants here or to the food service director.

Another viable source of promotion for the adult education would be the various voluntary youth groups within the community. The 4-H, Future Farmers of America, and the scouting programs are very much interested in promotion. The techniques they use of educating one person who will in turn educate others can be borrowed for adult education planning for food service workers. The food service program at vocational-technical schools will hopefully build a basis for this type of thinking. The multiplier affect is also a good way to help initiate the interest for an educational program.

The high school again holds a great deal of potential for program planning. Students are always seeking memberships in clubs. The origins of a Future Food Service Workers of America section club in Vocational Industrial Clubs of America or as a single club is a possibility.

It can be the beginning of a sense of dignity for many workers. Another area overlooked as potential food service workers are the non-vocational students in high schools. Many of these students work in order to obtain sufficient resources to pursue higher education. The place they work will usually be at a food service establishment. They work as waiters, waitresses, cafeteria and counter personnel, cooks' helpers, dining hall workers, grill workers, and so on. Certainly, a food handlers course should be available at the high school level for this grouping of persons. A final source for promoting the need for food service workers' in-service educational programming would be through the local chapter of the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association. Through this organization, new members could be invited to attend food service training. Prior to invitation the educational materials from the local area vocational-technical school should help to mutually benefit the local restaurant association chapter and the training program.

In brief, promotion has two factors for consideration, formal and informal. The esprit de corps that adult education leaders can promote will enhance the informal leaders to begin and sustain food service training. It is this informal aspect of promotion that we have been addressing to this point. Let us now turn for just a moment to the more formal considerations of promotion.

Barbers and hairdressers provide us with one look at the formal side of promotion. The right to work in these professions is through licensure. The food service worker, similarly, comes in contact with the health of millions of persons during the year. Certainly the licensure of a food service worker would emphasize the importance of the profession and the need for food service training.

This study dealt only with the small business food service operators' perceptions of the need for further training for their food service employees. A follow-up study to determine the food service employees' perception of their need for further training would be a worthwhile effort in order to compare the similarities and disparities of these two categories of persons for the purposes of comparison and for the purposes of establishing a total educational in-service curriculum that would enhance the status of the food service employee and the food service operator in the eyes of the consuming public.

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