

November 29, 20XX

Mr. Reginald Carridge
Regional Manager, Region 620
Evening Shades, Inc.
14 Harbortown Court
Pittsfield, MD 21782

Dear Mr. Carridge:

Enclosed is the report "Improving Employee Performance through Training and Clear Memos," per your request following my proposal memo of earlier this month.

This report analyzes the in-office correspondence of Store #5820 and seeks to improve the format. Additionally, training procedures are analyzed and suggestions are made to improve the training process.

Thank you for your time in reading this report, and I hope the findings prove useful for your decisions with regard to these matters in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jonas Daniel Dawson".

Jonas Dawson
Assistant Manager, Store #5820

Improving Employee Performance through Training and Clear Memos

Submitted to Reginald Carridge
Regional Manager, Region 620
Evening Shades, Inc.

By

Jonas Dawson
Assistant Manager, Store #4719

November 29, 20XX

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table of Tables | iii |
| Executive Summary | iv |
| Introduction | |
| Background | 1 |
| Purpose | 1 |
| Overview of Methodology | 1 |
| Methods | |
| Primary Research | 2 |
| Secondary Research | 2 |
| Results | |
| Importance of Consistent Training | 3 |
| Survey of Current Employees | 3 |
| Memo Analysis | 4 |
| Creating a Memo Template | 6 |
| Recommendations | 7 |
| References | 8 |
| Appendix A: Training Survey | 9 |
| Appendix B: Work Template | 10 |

TABLE OF TABLES

| | |
|---|---|
| Figure One: Responses to training survey..... | 4 |
| Figure Two: Example memo | 5 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recently at the Pittsfield Mall Outlets location of Evening Shades, the management has become increasingly frustrated at its inability to motivate associates to perform the duties assigned to them. After cycling through numerous associates, it is clear that some problem must exist that is preventing new hires from understanding their duties enough to accomplish them.

A survey for our associates was designed and administered to determine what the causes of the confusion could be. The results of this survey confirmed that a lack of consistent training was one contributing cause. Currently, corporate permits twenty-four hours of training. However, this region permits only nine of those twenty four hours because of payroll constraints.

Additionally, associates appeared frustrated and confused about tasks assigned to them. One reason was found to be the lack of a common template available for managers to use when assigning store tasks. As a result, managers are left to their own devices to compose documents for assigning tasks and monitoring employee completion. The great variation in the documents used by managers was found to cause confusion among employees. To rectify these issues, two solutions are recommended:

- First, a consistent training regimen totaling the corporate-allotted twenty-four hours should be implemented.
- Second, standard templates for in-store memoranda should implemented to improve associate performance and reduce employee turnover.

Introduction

Background

Within the past year, Store #5810 of Region 620 of Evening Shades has hired and lost one associate every three months. The allotted staffing for the store is only four associates, so the processing of one associate every three months is significant in terms of lost sales and resources spent on recruiting, onboarding and training. Additionally, because of the low number of associates, losing one can cause large schedule gaps, often resulting in unplanned store closings because of a lack of employee coverage. The lack of trained employees can also result in unplanned overtime on the part of our management, which not only costs the company additional payroll but is a considerable inconvenience to our full-time staff.

Additionally, new and under-trained employees often do not complete their assigned tasks adequately or at all. Because we often work in a single coverage environment, when associates do not complete their tasks, the next associate must complete the missed tasks on top of their own. Depending on the tasks that need to be made up, this can be very frustrating for the next associate or may even be beyond their abilities, leaving more responsibility for the manager.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the causes employee turnover. Analysis of associate training and of communications between the management and associates led to the identification of ways to improve training and communication, thus possibly improving associate performance, reducing employee turnover, and increasing store profits.

Overview of Methodology

The following methods were used to analyze manager-to-associate communication.

- Conducted secondary research to determine the role and importance of standardized store training in similar companies
- Surveyed current associates regarding their initial training and their knowledge of store operations
- Collected and analyzed sample memorandums from managers
- Analyzed primary research data to determine ways to improve training of associates and communication from managers

Methods

Primary Research

Primary research was performed at the Pittsfield Mall Outlets location of Region 620. Four of the current associates were administered a uniform survey with 10 questions pertaining to training and store operations. The results of these surveys were used to determine the uniformity of training at this particular Evening Shades location.

Additional primary research was collected in the form of internal correspondence at Evening Shades. This correspondence was analyzed to determine possible causes of miscommunication and provide a springboard for a duty assignment template.

Secondary Research

Secondary research was collected from a variety of peer-reviewed and open source articles to gauge the importance of uniform in-store training. Also, online publications as well as a management communications textbook were used to analyze the current memo style and suggest a template for the new style.

Results

Importance of Consistent Training

According to Owens (2006), training has always been a source of wide contention in business: “Training . . . is laden with issues regarding its contribution to organizational value and employee effectiveness” (p. 163). The less training provided translates directly to a lesser amount spent on training payroll, meaning lower upfront costs. However, future costs of undertrained employees can far outweigh the initial gains.

Owens (2006) sought to find what benefits training can have for employees in an organization beside the tangible learning benefits. Owens discovered that “employees who receive training will report higher levels of job satisfaction than those employees who do not receive training (p. 164). Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to perform better than dissatisfied employees. In tandem with job satisfaction, “Past research has alluded to the possibility that training may affect quit rates” (Owens, p. 164). Employee turnover can become a significant cost to the company, as not only must resources be devoted to finding an adequate replacement, but additional resources must be applied to train the new hire and sales are potentially lost due to inexperience. According to Sullivan (2007), “Studies indicate that the cumulative cost of losing a current employee and then hiring and training a new team member to replace them is approximately \$6000 per employee” (p. 56).

In addition to perceivable costs, additional pressure is put on other employees and management when turnover occurs (Cação, 2007, p. 24). If employees are not given enough training, managers’ ability to handle their own position in addition to the shortcomings of the staff can become insurmountable: “Results cannot usually be achieved by any single manager just ‘doing it all themselves’. Everyone needs to be good at his or her own job and preferably with a high degree of self-sufficiency too” (Forsyth, 2006, p, 34).

Because at Evening Shades we often work single coverage in our locations, training becomes even more important because we cannot always predict when we will need more coverage to meet demand. Under-trained employees will not be ready for surprises like this. However, trained employees will be “better prepared when [a surprise] comes, even if [they] don’t know exactly what it will be” (Bayless, 2007, p. 214). Employees that work alone often feel insecure, as they are in effect the manager on duty. This great responsibility can detrimentally affect sales if the employee is not confident in his or her abilities. However, as Sullivan (2007) found, “. . . training builds confidence. Confidence builds sales” (p. 18).

Survey of Current Employees

To illustrate the importance of uniform training, I composed a short test that was completed by four associates in store #5820. The questions tested for product knowledge as well as store operations. A copy of this survey is included at the end of this document in Appendix A. The figure below shows each question and whether the answer was correct or incorrect for each associate.

| | Allison | Austin | Phillip | Tricia |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Question 1 | Incorrect | Correct | Incorrect | Correct |
| Question 2 | Incorrect | Incorrect | Incorrect | Incorrect |
| Question 3 | Correct | Correct | Incorrect | Incorrect |
| Question 4 | Incorrect | Correct | Correct | Correct |
| Question 5 | Correct | Correct | Correct | Correct |
| Question 6 | Correct | Incorrect | Correct | Correct |
| Question 7 | Correct | Correct | Correct | Correct |
| Question 8 | Correct | Correct | Correct | Correct |
| Question 9 | Incorrect | Correct | Correct | Incorrect |
| Question 10 | Incorrect | Correct | Incorrect | Correct |

Legend

Correct

Incorrect

Figure One: Responses to training survey

The results of this survey illustrate how varied knowledge of products and store operations can be. These discrepancies also suggest lapses in training and how these lapses occur in different areas for different associates. Based on this survey, nine hours does not seem enough to adequately train an associate in the necessary details of store operations.

Memo Analysis

Frequently, tasks assigned to associates are not completed or are completed inadequately. As stated earlier, these failures can become frustrating to the person running the next shift, who must now complete the missed duties before completing his/her own. Figure 2 provides an example note left by a manager to one of the associates. It illustrates how problematic written communication can become.

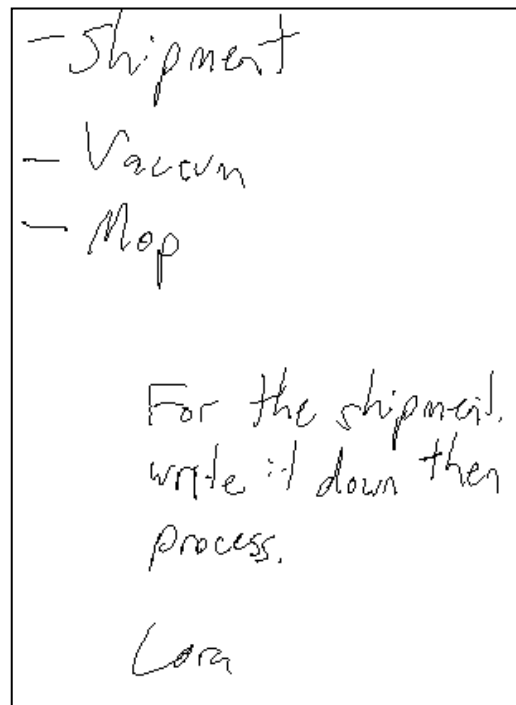


Figure Two: Example manager note

Reviewing this note, numerous potential problems can be identified. Bell and Smith (1999) address some common problems which this note seems to exemplify:

1. Not addressed to anybody for any particular time.

It is of no surprise that an Evening Shades associate may overlook this note. Not only is the note not specified to a particular recipient; there is no indication of when this note was written. Most people would assume this note was for someone else and quickly forget they even it.

2. The Telegram Writer.

Note the incomplete nature of the bottom part of the note. Readers are left to wonder what “it” is and what exactly should be processed.

3. The Scrawler.

Vacuum is misspelled. Thus, the credibility of the document is diminished, and associates may be more inclined to skip the note and question whether the manager really cared if the tasks needed to be accomplished in the first place.

Bell and Smith also suggest four questions to identify the completeness of a message:

1. What can be misinterpreted?

Unfortunately, virtually every part of this memo can be misinterpreted. Within the store, there are multiple rooms that can be mopped, as well as multiple sets of carpets. Additionally, there often can be multiple boxes waiting to be verified, and there is no identification of a specific box within this memo.

2. What options does the message allow me?

The note forces the reader to choose which shipment is meant, thus opening up the possibility of an incorrect shipment.

3. What response does the message seem to ask for?

This memo is simply a list of tasks. The writer makes a dramatic assumption that the reader intuitively knows exactly what the writer is thinking, which is always problematic in the work environment.

4. Does the message ask for that response in a specific way?

The memo does not ask for anything, although it should be asking the associate to perform certain duties and to verify their completion.

By most standards, this memo fails communicate adequately to support business operations at this Evening Shades location.

Creating a Memo Template

Since the current duty assignment memo is clearly unsatisfactory, a template must be created to fix the problem. According to Nancy Mercurio (2005), "More information is always better [and] when the purpose is clearly communicated in written documentation, the expectation is clear and the employees will be more attentive" (p. 12). Using the suggestions from the InfoMap website, a template (Appendix B) has been created for future memos intended to assign duties to associates.

Compared to the previous memo, the new memo format is much clearer in its intentions. The name and the date appear prominently at the top, reducing confusion of who is supposed to accomplish which task and when. The task headings are highlighted, guiding the reader's eye to the tasks. If the reader requires clarification on a particular task, there is a description area directly beneath. Guiding the reader's eye in this manner is the key to effective information mapping. As readers in a fast-paced business, we are inclined to skim a document and tend to only retain information that is highlighted or bolded. The above document adheres to these precepts, as suggested by the principles of info mapping (*InfoMapping*, 2007).

Using the questions which Bell and Smith present, one can see the distinct difference between the original memo and the new template:

1. What can be misinterpreted?

The memo is clearly written to a particular person for a particular date, and descriptions of each task are provided. Thus, the possibility of misinterpretation is greatly reduced.

2. What options does the message allow me?

Options have been reduced to carrying out the task assigned and described.

3. What response does the message seem to ask for?

This memo is asking for certain tasks to be completed, and it does so in a succinct and clear manner.

4. Does the message ask for that response in a specific way?

The memo itemizes each task clearly with a description beneath and a checkbox to be used.

Recommendations

From the research performed, it is apparent that the store should strongly consider using the total twenty-four hours of allotted training payroll instead of nine. The additional training will likely bolster associate confidence, leading to better sales as well as increasing job satisfaction and reducing turnover. As the research predicts, the cost of the additional fifteen hours will be outweighed by benefits to the store's overall business and profit margin.

With respect to associates not performing their duties, it is clear that a revised assignment memo is a necessary first step toward resolving this issue. Previous manager memos were ambiguous and contained little explanation as to who the note was for or when the assignments were supposed to be completed. The new memo template provides space for each of these important elements, as well as space for the major tasks and descriptions if the reader requires them.

Training payroll should immediately be increased to a total of twenty-four hours region wide. Because this amount is allotted by corporate, no special permission will be required from the Regional Vice President. Also, the template for the assignment memo should be distributed via email to all Evening Shades locations in Region 620.

References

Bayless, M. (2007). Five steps to running a successful shift. *Gourmet Retailer*, 28(8), 214-215.

Retrieved from <http://www.gourmetretailer.com>

Bell, A. H. & Smith, D. M. (1999) *Management communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

Cação, R. (2007). Maturity in large scale corporate learning. *International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning*. 7(3), 24-28. doi: 10.3991/ijac.v7i3.4005.

Forsyth, P. (2006). All wings and no feet. *Engineering Management*, 16(2), 34-35. doi:

11.1835/0265.43.4.500

Information mapping (2007). Retrieved November 9, 2007 from <http://www.infomap.com/>.

Mercurio, N. (2005). Managing employee expectations: The simple truth. *Canadian Manager*, 30(2), 12-13. Retrieved from <http://cim.ca>

Owens Jr., P. (2006). One more reason not to cut your training budget: The relationship between training and organizational outcomes. *Public Personnel Management*. 35(2), 163-172. doi: 10.2772639.ppm

Sullivan, J. (2007). "Penny-wise" strategies for hiring, training and retaining staff lead to same-store sales gains. *Nation's Restaurant News*, 41(36), 18-56. Retrieved from <http://nrn.com>

Appendix A: Training Survey

- 1) Is Bolle a Luxottica brand?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- 2) What is CR39?
 - a. An alloy in Oakley frames
 - b. A type of lens similar to polycarbonate
 - c. Scratch-resistant compound
- 3) How long do customers have to EXCHANGE glasses?
 - a. 30 days
 - b. One Year
 - c. Indefinitely
- 4) How long is the in-store warranty for watches?
 - a. 30 days
 - b. One Year
 - c. No in-store warranty
- 5) Which of these Oakley sunglasses do NOT have interchangeable lenses?
 - a. Radar Pitch
 - b. Half Jacket
 - c. Flak Jacket
 - d. Straight Jacket
- 6) Which of these brands are NOT eligible for the \$20 discount coupon?
 - a. Maui Jim
 - b. Revo
 - c. Rayban
 - d. Arnette
- 7) How many times can a customer use the Evening Shades Replacement Discount?
 - a. Once
 - b. Unlimited times within the replacement period
 - c. As many times as they wish
- 8) Which of these is NOT a feature of Maui Jim sunglasses?
 - a. Polarized
 - b. Photochromatic
 - c. 100% UV Protectant
 - d. Bi-Gradient Tinting
- 9) Which of these is NOT a feature of titanium frames?
 - a. Flexible and have a memory
 - b. Hypo-allergenic
 - c. Lightweight
 - d. Malleable
- 10) Which of the following brands receive a full year warranty directly through us?
 - a. Bolle
 - b. Rayban
 - c. Chanel
 - d. Serengeti

Appendix B: Work Template

ASSIGNMENTS FOR _____ **ON** _____
NAME DATE

TASK ONE _____

Description: _____

TASK TWO _____

Description: _____

TASK THREE _____

Description: _____

TASK FOUR _____

Description: _____

ASSIGNED BY _____ **ON** _____
NAME DATE