

Basics and Beyond

NCGA expands training programs and resources

BY KAREN ZIMBELMAN

In 2009, in response to member interest and needs, the National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) launched two new training programs, one geared towards co-op general managers and one geared towards all co-op staff. Now, after one year of experience, we are repeating and building on both.

The first, called Consumer Cooperative Management Intensive (CCMI), is designed specifically for co-op general managers. The curriculum focuses on areas unique to the management of a consumer-owned cooperative—co-op structure and governance, finance, marketing, and leadership—areas where professionals without prior co-op general management experience would be unlikely to have experience or depth of understanding. CCMI is designed to run approximately six months, via a mix of online session as well as two in-person sessions.

During that training time, participants are also assigned to a small working group to engage with and support one another as they work on in-store projects for the program. Each participant presents the results of his/her project at our closing session—an opportunity for all to discuss and provide input on next steps and the “cultural” elements in managing change in co-ops.

In 2009, a total of 12 participants completed the program. One year later, nine are working as co-op general managers. In 2010, the program enrolled 18 individuals, 11 of whom are currently serving as general managers (or will be within months of “graduation”).

A unique aspect of CCMI is that it draws on the skills, expertise, and experience of as many “faculty” members as participants it engages. Craig

Fleck of Demeter Matrix Alliance serves as our lead trainer. In 2010, he was joined by 13 other general managers and industry experts, who were involved in various presentations as peer trainers or as “peer coaches.” These contributions ensure that the program is grounded in the day-to-day reality of a co-op general manager, and they add a level of richness to the content that is unparalleled in most executive training programs.

Our second program is called Retail Basics and is a three-part program designed to cover the “basics” of retail management. It’s oriented to department managers and those without formal retail training and involves four online workshops as well as a two-day, in-person session with lots of in-store time. We launched the series in fall 2009 with 39 participants in Retail Basics 101, Merchandising and Store Conditioning. We’re in the process of running a second Retail Basics 101 session this fall (2010) with another 36 participants.

The series continued in early 2010 with Retail Basics 102, Managing Key Indicators. This workshop was delivered entirely online in seven sessions and focused on the key indicators that measure and benchmark effective retail operations at the departmental level: sales growth, margin, labor, and inventory turns. We explored ways to manage each with tools and specific guidelines, ending the workshop with a specialized CoCoGap training to complete the picture. We provided 54 participants from co-ops all over the country with certificates of participation to RB 102.

The pilot series concluded with 36 people enrolled in Retail Basics 103, Supervision and Team Building, held in the spring of 2010. This workshop

started with four online sessions to cover key concepts related to building effective HR systems to supervise staff: hiring, training, evaluations, feedback and corrective action, and teamwork. It then concluded with a two-day, in-person session to help practice and reinforce those skills.

Along with the Retail Basics workshops, we’ve developed complementary workbooks for self-study and ongoing reference related to the three topic areas covered in the Retail Basics series. The first workbook (Merchandising and Store Conditioning) and the third (Supervision and Team Building) are completed and available to all co-ops via the CGIN website. Find them for purchase at www.cgin.coop/toolbox. The second workbook in the series (Managing Key Indicators) will be ready before year’s end.

We hope these new programs help support the continued development and professional growth of all co-op staff! ■

New Design and Blog at www.cooperativegrocer.coop

Check out the new design and features at cooperativegrocer.coop. We’ve made it more attractive, improved links and navigation, and added resources. The latter include a new blog by the editor, Dave Gutknecht, providing current comments and links to other resources, beginning with such topics as “Creating Resilience,” “Core Values,” and “When the Egg Thing Broke.”

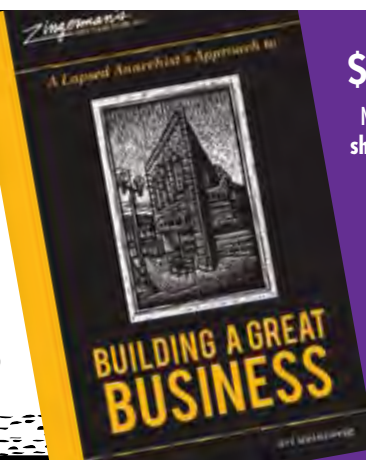
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