

PROJECT BUSINESS: A JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT EXPERIENCE FOR MIDDLE GRADES

by

**Lowell Tiedt
Eighth Grade Teacher
Taft Middle School
Cedar Rapids, Iowa**

**Charlene Zrudsky
Eighth Grade Teacher
Taft Middle School
Cedar Rapids, Iowa**

Project Business Overview

Project Business, developed by Junior Achievement, is an in-school, supplemental business and economics education program for the middle school student. Twelve to fifteen weekly lessons developed by Junior Achievement are presented by a volunteer business consultant, who provides a positive role model for the students and enriches the lessons with his or her own experiences. In the Cedar Rapids area, Diana Simeons, President and Christine Voss, Marketing Mahager for Junior Achievement, help to set up business consultant contacts with the area schools.

The goals of Project Business are to:

- * supplement the formal education of middle school youth with an economics and business curriculum that uses numerous "learning-by-doing" activities and exercises;
- * create opportunities for dialogue between local business leaders and students;
- * provide students with an understanding of the challenges and responsibilities facing business, workers, and citizens in a free enterprise economic system;
- * provide an opportunity for students to develop personal economic decision-making skills to explore their future career opportunities.

All Junior Achievement programs are field tested in classrooms and are updated annually in response to comments from teachers, students, and consult

ants. Every three years the program is evaluated by an independent research firm. The results of these evaluations are used to revise and improve the instructional materials.

In Project Business, the business consultant is an important role model for the students. The business consultant is a business expert, an experienced resource, a facilitator, a career motivator, and a liaison to business. The business consultant and the classroom teacher work to maintain open communications and to build a strong, positive working relationship. The teacher can help build success in the classroom by being a planning aid, helping with discipline, bridging communication between the consultant and the school, and preparing students for concepts and presentations.

Every fall Junior Achievement sponsors a training session for consultants and teachers. This allows these individuals the opportunity to meet each other, to experience some team activities, and to plan strategies for the coming year. The Junior Achievement materials allow the consultant the freedom and flexibility to cover the objectives through activities which incorporate their own business experience. Consultants are encouraged to complete at least one activity per unit to cover the basic objectives.

Program Activities

For the 1993-1994 school year George Ford (The Cedar Rapids Gazette), Chris Olt (General Mills), and Kevin Wagner (EDS) served as consultants in Lowell Tiedt's classroom. David Nordstrom, Lu Serbousek, and Kris Wilson (Handimart - Nordstrom Oil); David Fastenow (Rockwell International Corp.); and Ron Gardner (Rockwell International Corp.) served as business consultants in Charlene Zrudsky's classroom.

One of the first activities students participated in is creating a business card based on what they want to be when they enter the job market. The business card gives each student individual creativity while they include the requirements for a business card. This also is used as a get-to-know-you activity for the next class as students introduce themselves and share their cards. (See attached example.)

One consultant, Gary Martin, encouraged his students to collect business cards. Approximately 600 business cards were collected and displayed for student to enjoy. David Fastenow, Rockwell consultant, asked his students to work in teams and create a corporation business card including a company logo and their particular job in the corporation. David extended this activity into a

group project including creating their corporation from the bottom up. The business consultants show how important the business card is!

Another activity students enjoy is the taste test. Most consultants use cola brand pop to test the tasting skills of the students. Accuracy of the student's tasting abilities vary from class to class, but often the students find that they are unable to identify the pop brands correctly. This was especially true when one consultant challenged the students with six different kinds including diet and regular. A discussion results dealing with the costs of designing, printing, and advertising popular colas.

Many of the classroom consultants use the stock market to give a valuable lesson in economics. Every class has investors who make money and every class has investors who loose their shirt! To create an interest, prizes were given to the top individual(s) and to the top team. Most students learned not to put all their money into one basket!

Ron Gardner, Rockwell consultant, brought his job expertise into the program by having the students experience an activity where the management and labor negotiated a new contract. (Collective bargaining activity pages 30-31). The students experienced first hand what negotiations felt like. One group even ended with a dead lock. Mr. Gardner explained how negotiations were a part of his job at Rockwell. This was one of the students favorite activities.

George Ford, Gazette consultant, used his experiences from traveling to Japan. He and his wife taught the students how to write and speak some Japanese words. They also dressed in Japanese clothing and showed the students how to dress appropriately. Some food samples were also tried. Discussions about Japanese customs including how to meet with clients and how to work with clients added a global perspective to the world of business.

Chris Olt, General Mills consultant, brought several experts in their field from General Mills (personnel, advertising, and product making) to share about their jobs. Students saw the different stages (start to finish) that cereal goes through from grain to finished product. The class discussed what type of cereal appeals to the consumer. The activity culminated with creating the design for a box of cereal.

Many consultants find a way to take an activity listed in the materials and to change the activity so it fits their business. The Handimart consultants Dave Nordstrom, Kris Wilson, and Lu Serbousek did just that. They took the Burger Breakdown (pages 8-9) and made it reflect their fountain drink breakdown. The students were asked to figure the entire cost of a fountain drink and then figure a reasonable price to charge. This also involved pricing the competition before

final prices were set. The students also created a cup design that would attract a certain customer. One year the students actually convinced the Handimart consultant which cup design to use in their store.

Summary

The strengths of Project Business are:

- * well organized and easy to follow materials.
- * team or group activities.
- * applications of math and communication skills.
- * improved awareness of the world of business and economics.

Junior Achievement has given the classroom teacher another resource from the business world. The experienced consultants along with the classroom teacher need to adapt to each other's schedules. The key is flexibility from both sides. A cooperative effort from the consultant, the teacher and the students can create a successful Junior Achievement experience.

Bibliography

Junior Achievement Inc, (1992). Project Business Consultant Manual, Colorado Springs, Colorado.