

IDENTIFYING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S EXTENSION AUDIENCE: CONSUMERS

by

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The following is the author's condensed version of her presentation.

Each of you is a consumer communicator. You have a responsibility to reach out. Many times you feel you do not have the financial resources to do the job the way you see it. However, we may have to search out the resources needed. Let me give you an example of an idea that come to fruition. Consumers want to know what agencies they need to go to with a problem. Cooperative Extension Service did not feel they had the adequate funds to publish an agency directory. Does that mean, therefore, that we have no responsibility? No! In my mind, then we get the necessary resources to do the job to meet the needs of Extension.

The Hartford Courant, the oldest daily paper in the United States with a circulation of 300,000 has a Community Services Department. I approached the director and asked if they would print the directory if we would do the research. The Extension Service did all the research for over 260 agencies. When I asked Linda Sherman, the Community Services Director to publish this fifty page directory, she asked how many

copies. My answer was 35,000 to start with. She agreed and we now have 35,000 copies.

Another way we communicate with our audience is newspaper, television, and radio. We have a consumer column in the Hartford Courant every Friday and Sunday. We have thirteen weeks for a television course where people can ask questions at noontime for a solid hour. This is a way of reaching out to our three million citizens in our 169 communities. In addition to a person watching in his own home, we have over 30 viewing centers established. Community leaders have a two hour discussion period before the one hour television mike line. The discussion leaders are all volunteers ranging from community action personnel, home economists in business, home economists in home making as well as extension. Figure out how you want to reach your audience and use your creativity in getting the job done.

Another example of identifying and meeting needs of consumers. We have over 200,000 Spanish speaking consumers in Connecticut and 65% do not understand English. Spanish speaking community leaders asked extension service how did we plan to reach Spanish speaking people. We had a "rap" session with Spanish leaders to determine how we could meet their needs. We produced two television programs in soap opera format in Spanish with Spanish speaking people as actors and actresses. Once again, just because I don't speak Spanish was no excuse for not meeting their needs.

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