**Cases for Small Group Exercises**

## Case 7-1. Claim Refusal Letter

You are sales manager for a furniture manufacturer and have just received a strongly worded claim letter from Hyram Blalock, who owns a large hotel in a nearby city. Mr. Blalock has been refurbishing his hotel and had placed a special order with you for 115 headboards to fit specifications he sent.

He ordered headboards an inch and a half narrower than conventional double-bed size. He also specified a finish different from that normally used in this grade of headboard. Finally, he wanted his hotel’s logo imprinted on each headboard. You completed this order and shipped it to him about a week ago.

He ordered the mattresses directly from a manufacturer that has since gone out of business. They did, however, deliver his mattresses before going bankrupt, just a week before your headboards arrived. The problem is that all of these mattresses were manufactured in the conventional dimensions, rather than the narrower ones for which the headboards were designed.

Blalock is asking you to take back the current shipment and either change the dimensions to fit the conventional mattresses or to send a different set (which would, of course, have the finish he specified and his hotel’s logo on them).

Obviously, you cannot comply with his request. Write an appropriate strategic claim refusal. Of course, the facts are on your side—he ordered the headboards in the size and finish that he received. However, the challenge is to tell him so without lecturing or using negatives. If you do choose to alter the headboards in the original order, feel free to do so—but be sure to charge him.

**Case 7-1 Answer:**

*Answers will vary. This case tempts the writer to respond to Blalock with the same kind of letter he sent. Those using the appropriate indirect negative response will avoid lecturing to the reader as they remind him of his role in the problem. The suggested option (remodeling the headboards) is one strategy, but it should not be presented as if the writer feels guilty. If the letter suggests guilt, then the writer can expect more problems.*

## Case 7-2. Inquiry Letter

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You are the assistant human resource manager for a small insurance company whose territory includes your state and three surrounding states. Your company has recently revamped its retirement and employment benefits packages, and you have been assigned the task of communicating these changes to all employees.

Since some of the changes are complex, you will be traveling to four sites in your region to meet with the company’s agents and their personnel. You need to arrange hotel accommodations for the personnel at each of the sites, and you will need a meeting room with a screen and equipment for projecting your PowerPoint slideshow.

Since the company has had a very good year, management wants the employees to enjoy their stay at the hotels. So, you also need to inquire into the recreational facilities available.

Write a letter of inquiry to the Hotel Beacon in a major city in one of your surrounding states. The letter should elicit the information you will need to decide whether the hotel is the right one for your meeting. Make it clear that you will be looking at other hotels, seeking the best rate for services required.

**Case 7-2 Answer:**

*Answers will vary. The most common pitfall in this case will be the lack of clarity. The letter is actually more complex than it seems. The temptation for some will be to write a brief letter, which the hotel owners will be unable to answer in proper detail. In addition to being thorough, the letter should also build goodwill; the writer may be interested in doing more business in the future with the reader.*

## Case 7-3. Request Refusal Letter

You are the administrative assistant to R. D. Spenser, president of Flo-Sheen Fabrics. Flo-Sheen employs over 300 people in its mill and corporate offices. Each year, these employees contribute generously to the city’s annual fund-raising drive. Spenser also has developed a volunteer program that allows some employees to work on charitable projects on company time.

On your desk today you found a letter that was sent to Mr. Spenser from a statewide youth organization requesting permission to conduct a fund-raising drive in your plant for a new project it is developing. The organization wants to establish a scholarship fund for its brightest members.

Mr. Spenser jotted a note at the bottom of the letter asking you to deny the request. Do so, but build up goodwill. Be positive, yet assertive; do not leave the organization wondering whether the request is denied.

**Case 7-3 Answer:**

*Answers will vary. Since the letter must build goodwill, the writer must use tact in denying the request. One option would be holding out the possibility of putting the youth organization on next year’s list. The final comment about leaving the organization wondering is relevant. Many request denials are so polite that they leave the writer feeling another letter might get the results that the first one missed. The letter also needs to explain tactfully why the president of the company is not responding.*

**Exercise 7-1. Revise the Poorly Written Memo**

*Answers will vary. The following is an example of a clear, concise, well-organized direct request that complies with the principles of good writing.*

MEMORANDUM

DATE : January 21, 2015

TO : Purchasing Department Staff

FROM : Sonja Morgan, Purchasing Manager

SUBJECT : Please Submit Schedules

This is a reminder to submit two types of schedules as explained below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Schedule Type** | **Receiver** | **Format** | **Deadline** |
| Weekly | Buffi Costas | Email | Noon each Monday |
| Vacation | Sonja Morgan | Email | EOB Friday, Jan. 25 |

Please call me at X27 if you have questions. Thank you.

**Bonus Case and Case Questions**

*(The following case and questions do not appear in the textbook. They were composed by Dr. Robert Stretcher, Professor of Finance, Sam Houston State University, and are published with his permission. We gratefully acknowledge his contribution.)*

Rachel was very irritated as she entered the premises of Gant Publishing Company. She was one of their more successful authors of romance novels, a series that, although far from best sellers, had benefitted Gant Publishing consistently in the past. She had gotten into a groove, able to crank out a relatively finished product every few months. She had received a rejection letter on her most recent novel, but the letter was very different than any correspondence she had received in the past. First of all, it was an e-mail, not formal mail correspondence, and second, it was cold and impersonal. It was also a rejection, which Rachel didn’t mind—that was always an opportunity to revise and resubmit a manuscript.

The e-mail read as follows:

**From:** McMinn, Donna [<mailto:mcminn@gantpublishing.com>]   
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 25, 2014 5:26 PM  
**To:** Rachel Todd  
**Subject:** Manuscript 698725345-976864-9739-3

Dear Todd, Rachel 38898:

We regret to inform you that your manuscript, Manuscript 698725345-976864-9739-3 has been reviewed and does not fit our publication needs at this time. Thank you for your interest in Gant Publishing Company.

Sincerely,

Donna McMinn

Acquisitions Clerk

Rachel made her way through the maze of administrative offices and knocked on the door of Ralph Wade, the editor that she had always worked with previously. She slid the letter across his desk. “What’s this?” she asked. Ralph looked at the brief message.

“Well, it’s a rejection,” he said.

“I can see that. Since when does the company call me “Todd, Rachel 38898” and convert the title of my novel into “Manuscript 698725345-976864-9739-3”?

“Oh. We hired a new person to handle all of our correspondence and to convert as much as possible to electronic format,” Ralph replied.

“Well, I don’t appreciate it,” Rachel said. “One reason I chose Gant was because I dealt directly with a cooperative editor, and there was mutual respect. If that is still there, this message wouldn’t indicate it! And WHAT does time have to do with anything…do novels not sell at this time?”

“I’m sorry you feel that way, Rachel . . . I think. . . . .”

“Oh, REALLY?” Rachel exclaimed, and stormed out of the office and out of the building.

1. *List the communication problems at Gant Publishing, given the exchange above.*

As stated in the case, the rejection was an e-mail, not formal mail correspondence, and second, it was cold and impersonal. The author, Rachel, was surprised by both the format and the tone, but not the content of the message. As a veteran, respected author, the company should have given more attention to both format and tone of the bad news message. This is a classic example of a communicator’s failure to conduct audience analysis and adaptation.

1. *What could have been done to more effectively communicate, and what should be done now, after the communication resulted in hurt feelings?*

First, all authors should have been forewarned about the new electronic procedures for communicating with them. Second, since Rachel expected personal interaction with her editor, Ralph, he needs to reach out to her, invite her to lunch or breakfast, and spend personal time mending the relationship. Once he regains her trust, she is more likely to accept the changes.