

TEACHING NOTES

Gerry Gorham: Bay Area Container

Appropriate Grade Levels: 6 – 12 (This lesson can be used as the start of a larger research project and career exploration for students in grades 9 – 12)

Implementation Time:

One class period (45 minutes to one hour) required for basic exercise.

Materials Needed:

Teaching notes for “Gerry Gorham” case study

Student copies of “Gerry Gorham”

Career Pathway: Engineering, Industry & Science

Subject Area: Communications

Learner Outcome(s): What will happen for learners as a result of this lesson?

Students will explore a career opportunity related to international trade. They will explore the need for clear communications, quick response, and careful data organization in a career situation. They will then practice communicating this information for a career application.

How will students learn?

Communication: Students will evaluate the need for a clear communication system in a business application.

They will demonstrate listening and observation skills to gain understanding and will practice communicating ideas clearly and effectively. They will demonstrate communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others; and will analyze how communication is used in career settings.

- Writing: Students will produce a technical document for a career audience.

TEACHING NOTES

Gerry Gorham: Bay Area Container

Procedure:

This lesson is designed to be taught in one session, though an additional classroom session may be desired if the teacher wishes to introduce students to the concepts of database design or database software as a way of organizing and presenting information.

1. *Distribute the students' version of the "Gerry Gorham" case study to your class. Divide the students into groups of three to five.*
2. *Read aloud to them or let them read one section of the case study at a time. Don't let them read ahead. After each section, ask each group of students to discuss what they think Gerry should do next. Use the questions in the teachers' version of the case study to guide them through their discussion.*
3. *Finish by reviewing with students the basic information Gerry and his dispatchers will need to convey to the truck drivers. Discuss as well the types of information Gerry might wish to collect from the truck drivers and how he might want to organize it. Then ask them to work in small groups to practice sharing information with each other.*

Closure/Assessment:

In small groups or as a whole group, have students review the steps they should follow when they need to share a great deal of information. Ask them to share personal experiences of having to communicate complicated information. What did they do? How did they use the information they gathered? What did they do right or wrong? What would they do if they were confronted with the same problem today?

How will this lesson plan prepare students to be assessed? *This lesson plan will help prepare students for reading and listening assessment exams. The in-class communications exercise will permit students to demonstrate their ability to use and interpret information they have read. .*

Gerry Gorham: Bay Area Container

Part One - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Gerry Gorham heard the news with a start. The APL container ship he had been expecting that afternoon had made good time and was about to dock at APL's Middle Harbor Terminal in Oakland – six hours earlier than expected. Gerry would need to move quickly to meet the new schedule.

Gerry Gorham was the owner of Bay Area Container, a transportation company he had founded in 1984. His company hauled cargo containers throughout Northern California with a fleet of trucks. Gerry worked with companies in the Oakland area helping them move their products. But he spent most of his time working with shipping company APL Limited.

Bay Area Container was APL's Oakland “house trucker.” That meant that Gerry's company was the first called when APL needed cargo containers moved... so he had to be ready to respond. In a typical month, Gerry's company hauled 3,000 containers for APL and about 500 for other companies.

When an APL ship came in to port, Gerry could expect to be busy. As cargo containers were unloaded from the ship by crane, trucks had to be ready to take those containers either to the rail yards – where they would be loaded onto stacktrains to continue their journey by rail – or to warehouses or stores in Oakland and San Francisco. Once a ship came in, every minute counted.

To handle APL's trucking needs smoothly, Gerry had a staff of six people who helped him track paperwork and make sure the trucks were at the right place at the right time. He also contracted with 40 “owner-operators,” people who owned their own trucks and were paid by the container to move cargo for Gerry.

Gerry kept careful track of the ship schedules to make sure he had enough trucks in place when they were needed. But today's ship was early, and Gerry needed to get 15 trucks down to the container terminal right away.

STOP

Gerry Gorham: Teaching Notes for Part One

Communicating clearly is an important skill no matter what your job. During this part of the case study, you and your students will investigate how, why, and when people communicate in the workplace.

First, make sure students understand what Gerry does and what his challenge is.

Then, ask them what they think Gerry should do:

- *He could stick with the original schedule he agreed on with APL that will get trucks to the ship by the middle of the afternoon. Ask students to discuss the pros and cons of this approach. It would certainly be easiest for Gerry and the truck drivers to stick with their original schedule... but how might APL react?*
- *Or, Gerry can attempt to reach the truck drivers and get them to change their plans and get to the terminal immediately. How easy do students think that will be? How do they think Gerry will reach the truck drivers? Do they think Gerry should go to all that work?*

Before moving on, you might want to lead students in a discussion of customer service. Gerry has a customer (APL) who needs extraordinary service. To get 15 trucks to the terminal six hours early, Gerry will have to work hard. Is this fair for APL to expect? Or is this just part of doing business?

Part Two - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Because Gerry knew that he often had to get information to the truckers who worked with him quickly, he had set up a number of systems within his company to make communicating as easy as possible.

First, his company had not one but two dispatchers. Dispatchers communicated with the truck drivers, telling them where and when they were needed. Because of the amount of work his company did for APL, Gerry had one “outside” dispatcher, who worked closely with APL staff to handle all their trucking needs. And he had one “inside” dispatcher, who handled all the other trucking requests his company received. The two dispatchers could help each other when they needed to.

Second, to make sure the dispatchers could reach the truck drivers quickly, Gerry had made equipped all the truck drivers with Nextel radio/cell phones. With this technology, the drivers and dispatchers could reach each other quickly and easily.

And third, Gerry made sure that at least one of his company’s dispatchers was bilingual, and could speak both English and Spanish. Having a bilingual dispatcher made it much easier to communicate with truck drivers and customers who spoke Spanish.

Today, all of Gerry’s communications systems would be put to the test. Because he and his dispatchers had to respond six hours earlier than they had expected to the arrival of an APL ship.

STOP

Gerry Gorham: Teaching Notes for Part Two

Talk with students about the communications systems Gerry has developed to communicate with the truck drivers. Ask them why they think he put each of these things in place.

Then ask students what else they think Gerry will need to do in addition to telling the truck drivers where they are needed.

Lead students through a discussion of Gerry's need to keep careful records – both for the customers who use his company as well as for the truck drivers who are paid by the ton-mile.

Ask students to brainstorm a list of the types of information Gerry needs to keep about every container load hauled by the truckers from his company. Students might say that Gerry might want to keep information about:

- *The name of the customer*
- *The contents of the cargo container*
- *The weight of the cargo container*
- *The time the cargo container was picked up*
- *The time the cargo container was dropped off*
- *The place the cargo container was picked up*
- *The place the cargo container was dropped off*
- *The total miles traveled with the cargo container*
- *Any other special instructions*
- *Some verification from the truck driver and customer (perhaps their initials) that this load was really carried*

Ask students WHY they think tracking this information might be important. Make sure they understand that Gerry has no way to bill his customers – or pay the truck drivers – unless he knows exactly how much was hauled and how far it was hauled. (PLEASE NOTE: This is a hypothetical exercise to give students practice creating a database.)

Part Three - *Read to the bottom of the next page.*

Gerry and his dispatchers quickly talked with the truck drivers and arranged to get 15 trucks to drive immediately over to the Middle Harbor Terminal to meet the APL ship. Once more, having a good communication system had paid off.

Gerry Gorham: Teaching Notes for In-Class Communications Exercise

To keep his business running, Gerry must **carefully organize and communicate information about each and every load his truck drivers haul.** With 3,500 loads a month, that's a lot of information. And Gerry can't afford to have his truck drivers miss an important load because they didn't have the right information.

Students have talked about the kinds of information Gerry and the customers, truck drivers, and dispatchers might need to exchange with each other. Now they will practice exchanging that information to explore both how to communicate clearly as well as how to supplement verbal communication with written information.

The communications exercise will be a modified game of "telephone."

- *Divide students into groups of five. In each group, assign one student to play Gerry's role, one student to play the role of a dispatcher, and three students to play the role of truckers.*
- *Ask the Gerry character in each group to write down some information about where and when trucks are needed to move containers. The Gerry character should include details such as what time to report, who the driver should report to, etc. (Note: This information will be all made up. The challenge for students will be in how carefully they can pass it along.)*
- *Next, ask the Gerry character to share the information verbally with the dispatcher. Remember, he is not in the same building as the dispatcher, so he is communicating this information by phone or radio. Ask the dispatcher to take notes about the information.*
- *Then, ask the dispatcher in each group to communicate this information one at a time with each of the three truck drivers in the group. Again, students should not share written information, but should pretend they are talking on the phone or a radio.*
- *Finally, ask the truck drivers to compare the information they now have with the information Gerry started out with. Is it the same? If not, why not? Can they understand how carefully they would need to communicate if their business depended on it?*
- *Ask each group to write a 1-page assessment of their performance on the exercise. How would they do in a job that depended on them to communicate a great deal of information accurately and quickly?*

Additional Assignments for Gerry Gorham

- 1. Ask students to write a one-page note from Gerry to the truck drivers, explaining the types of information they need to collect from customers and why this information is needed. Use information from the case study and student discussion to create this list.*
- 2. Transport companies haul everything from valuable packages to household furniture. Ask students to select a transport company of their choice (Bay Area Container, UPS or Fedex, for example) and use the library or Internet to research what the company moves, how it moves its goods, and how it tracks shipments. Ask students to write a 2-page paper summarizing what they have learned.*