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A PERSPECTIVE ON CAREER PREPARATION  
FOR TRAVEL AGENCIES AND TOUR COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Many questions are being raised about the competencies need for better development of the profession. This article examines some of these competencies and prioritizes them.

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FOR TRAVEL AGENCIES AND TOUR COMPANIES

Increased professionalism is and will continue to be a part of the travel agency and tour management businesses. Pressure for increased professionalism and a greater sophistication of operations is being provided by increased competition which has and will continue to be at least partially spurred by deregulation. The federal government has already deregulated tour operations and the nation's travel agencies nervously wait to see if the congress will overturn the decision in the Civil Aeronautics Board's Competitive Marketing Case.

The trend in travel agencies and tour companies is clearly towards increased professionalism and the building of lifelong careers. One program which is a significant indicator of this phenomena is the Certified Travel Counselor (CTC) program which is administered by the Institute of Certified Travel Agents (ICTA). This program has seen an increase in its graduates in recent years. There has also been an increase in training programs by trade associations, colleges and universities, and private consulting firms. The emphasis has been, however, on continuing education programs for existing personnel (the CTC program requires that you be a travel counselor for five years to become certified) rather than on pre-career training. Although the travel agency and tour operator segments of the tourism industry have recognized the need for training people once they are employed in the industry there has been a reluctance to readily accept the applicability of a combination of classroom and formal on the job training for entry level personnel prior to their being formally employed in these segments of the industry.

The low utilization of formal pre-career training in the travel agency and tour operators business is probably due to several different factors:

1. Existing industry personnel do not understand the value of pre-career training since many of these people had no formal pre-career training.
2. The lack of understanding of what skills are needed by and/or can be imparted to students who are interested in seeking careers in these businesses by both academics and practitioners.
3. The lack of formal training programs particularly on the two year and four year college levels which are particularly designed to train people to work in these businesses.
4. A somewhat tarnished image for formal pre-career training programs which has been brought about by many shodily and/or misrepresented "quick entry" programs which are frequently offered by continuing education programs and "fast buck" business skill (secretarial) schools. These programs frequently do prove valuable to the students who enroll in them but all too frequently this is not the case.

A program which combines a carefully selected classroom education with formal pre-employment on the job training can produce highly qualified candidates for the industry. The classroom program should include knowledge which is supportful of the skills required for employment in these industries as well as instruction in the skills or procedures which are germane to operations in these businesses. It is further recommended that students be offered a combined training program for at least travel agencies and tour operations since it is likely that a growing number of tourism companies will be involved in diversified segments of the tourism industry in the future.

Table One provides a list of suggested areas of knowledge and skills which are useful for the travel agency and tour businesses. This list has been developed by the author from the data collected in a study entitled, An Examination of the Marketing Environment and Operational Status of the Travel Agency Industry With an Emphasis on the Marketing of Recreational Travel Services. The study (in part) queried consumers, travel agents, and other tourism industry personnel regarding their opinions pertaining to what skills and knowledge a travel agent should possess.

Fully trained personnel are capable of excelling in the travel agency and tour business. These people can be some of the most creative people in an industry which will require greater creativity in a more competitive marketing environment in the future. The fully trained person is the right choice for tourism related companies which want to remain or gain success in the future.

TABLE 1

AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS USEFUL IN THE TRAVEL  
AGENCY AND TOUR BUSINESS\*

2/Psychology (Human Relations)  
1/Geography  
3/Foreign Language  
N.A./Sociology  
2/Marketing  
2/Recreational Programming (Tour Packaging)  
2/Computer Science  
2/Accounting and Finance  
N.A./Tour Operation Procedures  
1/Agency Operation Procedures

\*The numbers next to each skill/knowledge area indicate the relative level of importance as indicated by the study as follows:

1=Very Important

2=Average Importance

3=Somewhat Unimportant

N.A.=Not Available