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Title

THE HOME ECONOMIST IN THE BUSINESS FIELD

A Term Paper

Presented to

Mrs. Hobgood

Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Course

Honors Program Special Study

by

Mary Moyers

May 1970

#285

Business firms have two main purposes in hiring home economists: home economics women interpret the needs and desires of homemakers to the company and they increase consumer demand for their company's product. Trained home economists hold a wide variety of positions in business, including work with foods, equipment, clothing, textiles, and home furnishings. In carrying out their work they use such media as magazines and newspapers, radio, television, advertising, home service, and public relations. Business is a relatively new but expanding field in which graduate home economists are employed.

The business field has such a variety of positions that persons with different characteristics and interests can find happiness and success. Many home economists come in contact with people a great deal. They must really like people and be able to meet them easily. Poise, a pleasant speaking voice, and a nice appearance are important qualities for home economists whose work brings them in contact with the public. Imagination, a promotional type of mind, and ability to sell ideas or products are essential characteristics for most phases of business.

Opportunities are available in test kitchens and research laboratories for home economists who have the technical knowledge and personal traits for conducting studies carefully.

Patience, accuracy, and sincere devotion to the work contribute to success. Contacts with the general public can be either limited or extensive and one needs to be able to get along well with co-workers.¹

Home Service Representative

A home service representative is employed by gas or electric companies, most of which are public utilities. Public utilities are a special type of business enterprise. They include not only the companies which provide power for light, heat, and refrigeration; but also those which provide water for domestic, commercial, and industrial purposes, and for fire protection, those which provide the facilities for sanitation, such as sewage services, and garbage disposal plants; the communication services--postal, telephone, telegraph, and cable services and radio and television stations; and the transportation services--namely, railways, airlines, motor transports, and waterway services.

It became apparent that the public welfare would be served best by controlling competition in these fields and by imposing government regulation on the companies providing these services. In the case of the power companies, for example, it was judged that there is a limit to the space available along the streets for power poles and under the streets for gas mains. It was

¹Olive a Hall, Home Economics Careers and Homemaking, John Wiley and Sons: New York 1958 p. 35.

not reasonable for three adjacent houses to be served by three different power companies. Also, the cost of the equipment necessary to generate, transmit and distribute electricity and artificial gas and to transmit and distribute natural gas is very high. Therefore the rates a company charges customers served were restricted by competition.

The major function of the home economist working for a power company is to increase sales of the source of power (gas or electricity) by helping consumers learn to use their electric and gas equipment or appliances effectively so that they will use them often or by encouraging them to want additional equipment.

The home service representative educates the consumer by:

1. giving the demonstration of equipment,
2. making home calls to help consumers learn to use their equipment,
3. serving as a consultant for homemakers who are building or remodeling homes and want advice on lighting or space management.

How much time she spends on each of these activities varies with the community and with the success of the home service department in making homemakers aware of the services it can provide. Historically, however, demonstrating has been most characteristic of the home service representative.²

²Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963 p. 87.

Homemakers constitute the largest group of people served. Since a utility company provides service to anyone who wants it, the home service representative meets customers from all parts of the community and with all kinds of backgrounds.

In addition to giving demonstrations for homemakers, the home service representative frequently gives demonstrations for the high school homemaking teacher's classes on freezing, canning, or some other process.

In retail stores, it is frequently men who sell such items as washing machines and freezers. Their employers may ask the home economist at the utility company to conduct a training school for their salesman to indicate the outstanding features of the equipment.

Girl Scouts may attend demonstrations to complete requirements for merit badges in areas related to cooking. Other young peoples' groups may ask for similar aid.

Home service representatives may be asked to talk to groups such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, or Lions Clubs about adequate home wiring for home work shops, out-door cooking, or garden and patio lighting.

In the words of one home service representative, "A demonstration is designed to show, tell, and sell." The demonstrations are usually hour-long programs planned to entertain and instruct the audience, but the demonstration is

a "show" more that it is a classroom situation. The equipment is the thing being demonstrated. Therefore, when the home economist demonstrates ranges and refrigerator-freezers, the food she prepares is chosen with the purpose of showing particular features of the equipment, however, comments she makes as she carries on the demonstration do include information about nutrition and management. In a typical demonstration the home economist shows the audience how to prepare the food and actually cooks or bakes it as the demonstration progresses. At the end of the demonstration she displays each of the products she has prepared, and frequently gives them to members of the audience as door prizes. If a dish she is preparing normally takes more than an hour to cook, she begins to prepare the food before the demonstration hour, timing it so that she can take a finished product from the range during the demonstration.³

A good demonstration requires a great deal of careful planning and practice so that the demonstrator knows exactly what she needs to have on hand as well as the points she wants to make and is sure that she will have a good-looking, well-executed product when she finishes.

Her choice of items for a demonstration is influenced by the special features of the equipment she is using. For

³Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 90.

example, to show the audience the advantages of an electronically-controlled burner on a range, she may choose doughnuts. Homemakers usually have trouble in making doughnuts because the fat gets too cool or too hot. With the electronically controlled unit the temperature remains the same.

The home economist must also select attractive utensils and display dishes for her demonstration from among those the company has on hand or purchase new ones. This provides an opportunity to practice good buymanship of small equipment.

Shopping for food or fabrics to be used in the demonstration is also necessary. The home service representative buys the items she needs and has these billed to her company.

One home economist said that she has eight forty-five minute presentations which may be modified or adapted to suit the group to which she will be speaking. Since they are repeated during the year, only the initial preparation of the demonstration is particularly time consuming.⁴

The home service representative may also demonstrate laundry equipment and give homemakers information about detergents or about wearability and washability of fabrics, fiber blends, and new finishes on natural fiber fabrics. She may also compare the effects of cornice and valence lighting, remote control switching, dimming systems, or outdoor lighting, and demonstrate the proper use of sun lamps.

⁴Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 94.

The home service representatives give their demonstrations in many different places. The utility company office building may include an auditorium equipped with the latest models of equipment, and groups may be invited to come there. Frequently the representative is asked to give a demonstration in a church kitchen or in any other large assembly hall. In these cases, the utility company takes to the site the range, refrigerator, and other equipment she will need. She may give demonstrations in a dealer's store to feature some new piece of equipment or in a private home to a group of women invited by the woman who recently purchased the equipment.

In many communities, when a dealer installs gas or electrically-operated equipment or appliances or sells a new appliance to a customer, he sends the name and address of the purchaser to the home service department of the utility company. One of their staff of home economists visits with the purchaser and offers to show her how to use her equipment most effectively and how to take care of it properly. It is a friendly offer; it makes the homemaker feel good and it is apt to result in increased business for the dealer if the homemaker enjoys her new purchase and considers buying other gas or electrically powered items. The utility company benefits if the homemaker enjoys using the new article and uses it frequently,

thus consuming more gas or electrical power.⁵

Sometimes a home call is initiated by a customer's having reported to the dealer or to the utility company that her equipment isn't working properly. For example, if she complains that her oven does not heat evenly a home service representative may visit her home and make a cake right there to test the oven's heating pattern. The home service representative determines whether the equipment is faulty or whether the homemaker is not using it properly. If the equipment is faulty, she notifies a serviceman to make the repair; otherwise, she teaches the homemaker how to use it.

The home service representatives quickly become known to many people in the community; consequently, they are often called for help in answering questions related to many home problems. One home service department in a city of 324,000 reported answering 17,000 telephone inquiries in one year. Some of the most frequently asked questions were about dieting.⁶

Paper work for the home service representative includes making out a report for each demonstration, covering such topics as audience reaction, special interests, questions asked, and sizes of audience.

Paper work also includes submitting a weekly report to

⁵Velma Phillips, Home Economics Careers for You, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957, p. 47.

⁶Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 94.

the sales manager showing what each home service girl did that week, the sizes of audiences involved, and the number of pieces of literature distributed.

Beginning salaries are comparable to those offered for other business jobs; often they are a little lower than beginning teaching positions. Increases depend upon the person's length of service and upon her demonstrated popularity with the public she contacts.

Journalism, Radio, or Television

One of the newer intriguing occupations in which home economists are employed is that of preparing and presenting materials for homemakers through newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Such forms of mass communication have opened channels for the rapid spread of facts related to homemaking and have become powerful means of influencing public opinion.

In addition to the graduate home economists who are employed full-time in these fields, a number of others spend much of their time preparing materials for publicity or advertising. Home economists in most other fields at some time in their professional lives are called upon to write a newspaper or magazine article or to appear on a radio or television program.

Home economists use various techniques of communication.

Those who work for newspapers, magazines, and in the script writing or advertising phases of radio and television depend heavily upon the written word to convey their ideas. Visual means of communication are used by home economists who do the photographic work for newspapers and magazines and those who appear on television programs. Home economists on radio and television programs convey ideas through audio means.⁷

Magazines

Several types of opportunities exist for home economists in magazine journalism. The purposes of home magazines planned for women are to help the homemaker manage her home more efficiently, attain increased satisfaction from her work as a homemaker, and become familiar with new ways of doing home tasks. Opportunities are available for persons who have combined journalism courses with a specialization in food and nutrition, home management, household equipment, home furnishings, or child development and family relations.

In the fashion field, consumer magazines give stories of trends, silhouettes, fabrics, and color to entice consumers to buy merchandise. On the other hand, a trade magazine covers the same topics but with the purpose of guiding the retail store in selecting its merchandise and planning promotions. The potential number of jobs is small and qualifications are high. Retail selling experience and a thorough knowledge of

the fashion industry are important. The work is highly specialized and previous experience in advertising or publicity is an asset. An editor for a trade magazine has a highly responsible position, for she influences retail stores in the type of merchandise to stock and ways to promote its sale.⁸

Creative uses of appliances and foods are stressed by home economists who work with foods and nutrition or household equipment. Product testing is an extensive part of some programs. Other home economists test appliances and recipes in their own daily living rather than in a special laboratory, or they employ services of other laboratories or test kitchens.

Home economics positions on magazine staffs are highly competitive, especially the few top editorial positions. Publication of the leading magazines is centered in a few large cities, generally in the East, although a few opportunities exist in the Midwest. Several of the leading magazines whose offices are in the East have a Western editor.

Newspapers

A home economist on a newspaper staff aims to explain how to do something by catching the reader's interest and then giving accurate, simple directions. Foods and fashion

⁷Olive A. Hall, Home Economics Careers and Homemaking, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958, p. 68.

⁸Ibid.

editors are employed by many local newspapers, but women's sections afford opportunities for helping homemakers with other home problems such as shopping, child care, and home management. A qualified home economist may write for a group of newspapers and have her column syndicated.

A test kitchen with an auditorium in which cooking schools are held is featured by certain city newspapers. Others carry on extensive product promotion by appearing in places such as food markets where they can talk with homemakers about new food ideas and give them recipes for the featured dishes.⁹

Radio

Radio is a limited field for home economists and may offer even fewer opportunities as homemakers grow in their realization of the values of seeing as well as hearing about recent advances that affect the home. However, the high cost of television, competition with other daytime shows, and the amount of time consumed preparing for the programs are keeping radio shows for the homemaker in operation.

Television

Television offers limitless possibilities, but it is very demanding. The expense of production, the close focusing of the camera on the demonstration, and the personal qualities of the home economist are but a few of the factors that demand

⁹Olive A. Hall, Home Economics Careers and Homemaking, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958, p. 70.

high qualifications of anyone who aspires to be a "television star." Not all television work is in front of the camera. For example, a home economist may prepare food behind the scenes for filmed commercials.

Experience with a radio station or with a small local television station is highly desirable before seeking a place on a metropolitan or network station. Ability to talk over a radio or television station as if one were talking to friends in a small group at home contributes greatly to success.

Home economics programs on television may be carried out by a free lance home economist who is supported by several sponsors of short commercials. A television station may hire a home economist to prepare programs in which certain products will be mentioned. These programs are financed by the companies who use this means of advertising. Home service representatives of large manufacturing companies may devote a major part of their time to the preparation of materials for radio and television broadcasts.¹⁰

Test Kitchen Research

The home economist in the test kitchen has two major functions. She must contribute to creating products which will satisfy the customers of the company and she must help

¹⁰Olive A. Hall, Home Economics Careers and Homemaking, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958, p. 74.

her company meet the competition of other organizations who are also trying to satisfy the same customer's food needs.¹¹

Customers of a food manufacturer include homemakers who purchase food for their families and food administrators and dietitians who purchase food for institutions.

Food companies engaged in creating products or in processing natural foods in some way are the major organizations employing home economists for test kitchen research.

As a profit-making organization, the company's goal is to sell as many units of its products as possible and to deliver them to distributors on the agreed-upon date at the prices quoted.

The home economists may travel about giving talks to women's groups about the company's products and learning the homemakers' problems in return. Another source of information is the letters from consumers asking for help.

The home economist may hear from the sales department at a staff meeting, for instance, that a competitor is doing a great business with a spaghetti sauce mix. The question is raised about adding one to the company's line. This leads to other questions: Is it feasible for us to produce? Will the packaging equipment in the factory be able to handle it? Is the potential sale of the mix worth the money it will cost to produce it? What ingredients would it require? What are its possible uses?

¹¹Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 142.

She hears from the factory manager that an irate customer has returned a package of the new modified rice complaining that it is tougher than the rice she was getting before. The factory wants a test kitchen check on it to see if it is the recipe or the rice itself that is at fault.

A salesman reports that a competitor is doing a lot better in fruit drink sales and he thinks (having seen the two products displayed side by side in stores) that the company is losing sales because of the package design. What more effective package might they develop? What recipes should be used on it?

The company purchasing agent reports they can no longer get an ingredient for one of their products. What adjustments can be made to maintain the quality of the product? These are the kinds of questions the home economist is trying to help answer.¹²

The food company meets these needs by creating new products, suggesting new ways to serve familiar foods, preparing booklets for homemakers with meal-planning suggestions, preparing pieces about nutrition, and by advertising in magazines and newspapers as well as on radio and television.

The XYZ Corporation creation of chiffon pie mix illustrates the home economists contribution in developing a new product.

¹²Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 157.

Early in 1953 a home economist from the test kitchen, several men responsible for advertising and selling the company's gelatin line, and a number of chemists from the research laboratory met together to discuss ideas for a new dessert product. As a result of this particular meeting it was decided that the company would try to prepare a lemon chiffon pie mix using a flavored gelatin as the basic ingredient. The mix had to produce a pie which resembled as nearly as possible one that the homemaker might have made if she had prepared the food from the basic ingredients.

The first job for the test kitchen was to make lemon chiffon pies from standard cookbook recipes to get a model pie with which to compare pies made from the proposed mix. This recipe is called a "target."

After the pies are made from various recipes, the test kitchen home economists compare each in flavor, color, texture, and consistency and suggest improvements. They may bake many pies and make many taste tests before they arrive at the combination of ingredients which they feel produces the best pie. When they do achieve a satisfactory result, one of the home economists writes up a report and attaches a copy of the recipe that was used.

Meantime, in the research laboratory, chemists have made up samples of the proposed lemon gelatin chiffon pie filling

mix. The test kitchen home economists then make up pies, using the various samples proposed for the mix. These together with pies made from the target recipe and recipes in several other cookbooks, are evaluated by the product managers in the sales division and the laboratory research staff to determine which of the samples of the new mix produced the pie most like that made from the target recipe. As a result of this groups' judgment, one of the laboratory samples is selected.

Now that the formula for the mix has been decided upon, the home economists make more pies--both from the selected mix and from some other recipe--and invite company secretaries or any other personnel not engaged in test kitchen work to serve on the taste panel. Most often there is a trained group for tasting. These testers indicate their preference and the reason for it. These opinions help the home economist to make other important changes and refinements. When the product is near perfection, it is sampled by the company executives and other personnel directly concerned with selling it. Not until the product is as good as the kitchen can make it will it be produced and marketed.

Once the basic recipe is agreed upon, the home economist experiments with the directions for using the mix. She varies the method of combining the ingredients, method of heating, time of heating, the type and size of pie shell, and storage

time. These factors are tested just as carefully as the target recipe.

Homemakers frequently do not follow the directions given in a recipe. Knowing this, the food company wants both the product and the recipe to be able to give satisfactory results under a variety of conditions. Therefore, test kitchen workers experiment with overheating and underheating, overmeasurement and undermeasurement of ingredients, different types of liquids, and different types of beaters. This research is called "tolerance testing"--how much deviation can the basic recipe and method of preparation "tolerate" and still be good?

Before the product is considered ready for sale, it is compared with competitive products already on the market. XYZ Company wants to be sure that their product is equal to or better than those of their competitors. They may also be able to identify distinctive characteristics of their products which can be called to the attention of the consumer.

When the home economists are sure that the recipe and directions are satisfactory, they send the directions to the editorial staff to be put into final form. The editorial staff is frequently composed of home economics journalists. In a smaller company the test kitchen home economist also writes the final draft of package directions, thus performing both a testing and editorial function.

The sample packages of the new mix are distributed to a selected group of homemakers for a consumer test. These women make the product in their homes and serve it to their families. They evaluate the product for its appeal, method of preparation, clarity of package directions. Before a new product is put on sale, it may have undergone as many as eighty separate tests.¹³

A food company that distributes its product throughout the nation and advertises in magazines, large-city Sunday papers, and radio and television, usually uses an advertising agency to plan and execute its advertising program. Home economists in the test kitchen may prepare the food to be photographed, and they may suggest features of the product or the recipe to be emphasized in the ads.

The scriptwriter on the television commercial works with the home economist, who may suggest shots for the commercial. The home economist is responsible for the preparation of the food to be filmed and works with the television director to produce the commercial.

No single commercial may take more than three minutes and no more than six minutes of a half-hour program may be devoted to commercials. Each live commercial is rehearsed twice before the show goes on. Because the heat from the lights

¹³Theresa R. Humphreyville, Futures for Home Economists, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 243.

used causes food to melt, a "stand-in" or substitute is used for the practice runs; the actual product is placed where it should be just before the "on-camera" signal. Sometimes the food has to be prepared in special ways. Marshmallows may be added to frostings to prevent their melting under the lights. Yellow coloring may be added to vanilla pudding because of the glare reflected from anything white.

In addition to developing recipes to promote the sale of a new product of the company, the home economist is frequently busy ~~thinking~~ of ways to increase consumer use of an established product. She works out ideas for booklets of recipes featuring one or more of the company's products. These booklets are distributed to schools or clubs free of charge upon request. The home economist also prepares wall charts for use in the classroom.¹⁴

Most food companies open their test kitchens to the public. They want visitors to see their efforts to improve the products. The kitchens of some companies have large glass windows on the inside walls through which visitors may look on without actually going into the kitchen itself. This means that the home economist must be able to work while people are watching her.

¹⁴Velma Phillips, Home Economics Careers for You, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957, p. 139.

The home economist also works on packaging ideas. A package is not just a container--it protects the product, stores it, describes it, and gives directions for its successful use.

A package must be colorful and attractive, but it must also help sell the product and promote its use. The package must convince the shopper that X brand is the best brand.

Photographs are usually more appealing than a drawing. A picture showing the prepared food ready to eat is more appealing than a picture of the food growing in the field. The directions on a package may mean the difference between a product that sells and one that does not. If recipes are suggested, the shopper is more apt to buy that brand. The recipe should be in quantity for the average family. If space permits, variations of the basic recipe should be included.

The shorter the recipes; the more likely is the homemaker to read them. The color of the ink used must be considered in relation to the package color: if the printed instructions stand out clearly from the background, they will be more likely to be read.

The home economist often makes routine tests of the quality of products on the market. Periodically a package of the product is selected at random from the factory and sent to the test kitchen for a quality check. If it does not

perform satisfactorily an investigation is made immediately.

The test kitchens of food companies are usually located in large cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Minneapolis, consequently, there is a geographic limitation of employment also.

Many food companies like to have home economists from different parts of the country because food habits and flavor preferences vary from section to section. From time to time they have even had home economists from different parts of the world.

Conclusion

There is a wide variety of opportunities for the home economist in the business field. There are even jobs offered to home economists in advertising and public relations and many fashion related jobs. Anyone interested in a home economics career should consider the business field and the opportunities it offers.

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