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Perceived Needs of Associates of Riding Lawn Equipment

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PERCEIVED TRAINING NEEDS OF ASSOCIATES OF RIDING LAWN
EQUIPMENT

A RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTED TO THE
GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
STEM EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
AT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE

By
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August, 2011

SIGNATURE PAGE

Kimberly A. Lucado prepared this research paper under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz as part of SEPS 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

APPROVED BY: _____ DATE: _____

Dr. John M. Ritz
Advisor and Graduate Program Director

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Kimberly A. Lucado

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The determination of the training needs of retail associates have often been relegated to managers, supervisors, or Human Resource personnel in an organization. In the past, resources such as employee records, the company business plan, performance reviews, and information contained in trade journals and publications have all been used to assess the training needs of employees (Finn, 1989). More recently, needs analyses have been developed in order to determine what the required training needs are of an organization's staff. The needs analysis is usually performed by a consultant, trainer, or Human Resource employee, who then uses the results to determine what skills or areas employees need further training (Hasan, 2007). The needs analysis should be comprehensive and combine a variety of methods in order to be most effective. These methods can include conducting task analyses, content analyses, organization analyses, developing job profiles, developing employee and management surveys or questionnaires, observing employee practices, and reviewing previously collected data in order to create training objectives (Buckley & Caple, 2009; Capps & Capps, 2005; Habib, 1970; Hasan, 2007; Nowack, 1991).

At times, organizations have been hesitant to actually use employee surveys when determining training needs. The main reason for this is that training wants often did not match training needs (Allen, 2009). The employees were often not aware of the actual organizational goals, business plans, new products, or changes that needed to be reflected in training. Due to this fact, training development cannot solely rely upon employee surveys or questionnaires (Allan, 2009). However, employee surveys can provide much

needed insight regarding what employees feel is important in regards to training for their specific job and provide them with a sense of empowerment pertaining to training decisions (Altman, 2009; Buckley & Caple, 2009). In essence, the employees can have a voice in the decision making process surrounding the training that will be provided (Altman, 2009). Donald Kirkpatrick (1977), often noted for his four levels of learning evaluation model, recommended a survey of needs in order to determine training requirements, particularly on the supervisory level.

A training needs survey given to employees may assist a trainer in determining just what factors the employees perceive are lacking in their training and provide a starting place for determining what to include or not to include in the actual training itself. This is particularly important to those trainers who have limited time in which to train, i.e., those who train associates of mass market retailers. Regarding mass-market retailers, time equates with money, and training is often rushed and the time given for training is very limited (Lee & Zemke, 1995). Trainers often have to make the training correspond to the time available, thus, leaving less time for questions from associates and keeping the focus of the training restricted. A training needs survey provided to associates can help provide at least some focus and can help the trainer predict questions that associates may have during the training, thus eliminating prolonged question and answer sessions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to determine the training needs as perceived by the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment.

RESEARCH GOALS

To provide a framework for this study, the following research questions were formulated:

Research Question 1: What are the perceived training needs of the associates?

Research Question 2: Are the perceived training needs of the associates realistic in regards to the training that is required by the mass-market retailers?

Research Question 3: Does determining the perceived training needs of the associates provide for a more effective training?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The researcher had often encountered trainers who expressed dissatisfaction due to a lack of time or lack of focus in regards to training the associates of mass-market retailers of lawn equipment. The trainers complained of a very strict time schedule applied during training, which led to a lack of time for answering questions or addressing the issues brought forth by the associates undergoing the training. Many of the associates that were participating in the training were full-time employees with specialized experience who often have valid concerns and questions. There existed disparity issues regarding skills that the associates feel they need to be trained and the actual skills that the trainer is providing. The associates are the individuals who are actually working in the areas in which they are being trained and may have added insight into those skills in which they and other associates are lacking. Each associate brought their own set of priorities, feelings, and training needs with them to each training event (Allen, 2009). An employee training needs survey can help address perceived needs in regards to training and assist in determining focus for future training events (Buckley & Caple, 2009).

Though hesitancy does exist among many managers and Human Resource personnel to use an employee training needs survey, due to possible disagreement between training wants and needs, many researchers, such as Donald Kirkpatrick, see no issue in asking employees what they perceive their training needs to be, as long as the survey is done properly (Allan, 2009; Finn, 1989; Kirkpatrick, 1977). Survey questions will need to be inclusive of each associate from whom a response is desired, the questions need to be identical and unbiased, and the survey must focus on the appropriate type of skill or technical training (Buckley & Caple, 2009; Habib, 1970; Hasan, 2007). The survey should also be combined with other methods of determining training needs before being utilized in creating future training requirements (Finn, 1989). In spite of the necessity that the survey be used with other methods, a training needs survey can become a starting point for a proactive route regarding training. This method of assessing needs can help advance corporate purposes by leading to an understanding in gaps of knowledge as perceived by mass market retailer associates and can also assist in gauging attitudes regarding job and training satisfaction (Buckley & Caple, 2009).

In regards to specific surveys involving associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment, the researcher has found a lack of information regarding this specific issue and researchers have not previously explored this particular avenue. However, there is research available to support the use of surveys as a method of gauging perceived training needs. A survey can include each person of whom input is required and can obtain a "big picture" from a large number of employees on an individual basis (Hasan, 2007). Individual input often helps the employees themselves to feel empowered and that their concerns are being addressed (Altman, 2009). Perceived employees needs

may also help in future company concerns regarding training, allowing for input in regards to future growth, needs, and changes (Buckley & Caple, 2009). Time is often of the essence in regards to training, particularly when the training involves mass market retail associates (Lee & Zemke, 1995). A perceived training needs survey can help attain, at the very least, valuable information to provide better focus for future trainings and can allow the trainer to know what skills and focuses are important to the associates that he or she is training, thus eliminating lengthy question and answer sessions and streamlining future trainings. A survey can also provide a window into whether or not the associates training expectations are realistic and in line with the corporate goals and procedures as outlined by the retailers or corporations.

This study was undertaken in order to discover the perceived training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment and to determine if the perceived needs are realistic and can provide more effective future training sessions. This survey can provide needed insight into the perceptions regarding training needs of mass market retail associates of riding lawn equipment. Other methods of needs analysis will be applied by various other members of the participating organizations, thereby forming a complete needs analysis in the future.

LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were recognized in this study:

- The population of the study was limited to the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the Central Alabama Marketing and Sales Area.
- The use of survey methodology that was developed by the researcher for the specific purpose of this study.

- The survey pertains to training that is only provided on an annual basis.
- The terms associate, mass-market retailer, and training are generalized terms and can pertain to many different fields.
- The associates may not have worked exclusively or for a great deal of time in the riding lawn equipment section of the mass-market retailer.

ASSUMPTIONS

The researcher made the following assumptions while undertaking this study:

- The training included both seasonal and permanent associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment.
- The associates had some knowledge or awareness of the skills they were lacking in regards to riding lawn equipment.
- The associates being trained included full-time and part-time associates including outdoor equipment specialists, zone managers, and department heads.

PROCEDURES

A survey developed by the researcher with assistance from a trainer was used to assess the perceived training needs of the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment. The survey will include questions specific to the skill and technical training being provided. The perceived training needs survey contained a total of ten questions that were logical and descriptive. The purpose of the survey was explained in advance and a cover sheet was provided as well, also explaining the survey purpose. The survey of perceived training needs was distributed during mass-market retailer visits conducted by the trainer. The data were collected, analyzed, compared, and any future implications in regards to riding lawn equipment training were noted. Survey participation was voluntary and the participants remained confidential.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are relevant to this study:

- *Associate*: individuals who are responsible for the care, sales, and distribution of riding lawn equipment, including outdoor equipment specialists, zone managers, and department heads.
- *Mass-Market Retailer*: retailers who appeal to and sell to large sectors of the American public (Peterson, 1992).
- *Riding Lawn Equipment*: riding lawn mowers with a maximum of 15 horsepower or below (Tucker, 2001). Any lawn equipment over 15 horsepower in Alabama is considered farm equipment, however for purposes of this research study, all riding lawn equipment sold at mass market retailers that is over 15 horsepower will still be referred to as riding lawn equipment.
- *Needs Analysis*: systematic process used to collect data in order to plan educational or training courses (Mouzakitis, 2009).
- *Training Needs Survey*: a survey used to determine the training requirements of employees not only for present training needs but for future training needs (Habib, 1970).

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter I of this study introduced the concept of a training needs survey in regards to a needs analysis and listed previously used resources for determining training needs. The chapter further investigated the hesitancy of organizations to use training needs surveys and the reasoning behind this hesitancy. It was stated that despite the hesitancy of some organizations to use them, a training needs survey may still be a useful source of information in regards to employee training and references were cited to support this fact. The various ways a training survey can be of assistance to a trainer

were explored and a statement of the problem was provided. The research goals were listed and provided a framework for the survey that was conducted. These included the questions: What are the perceived training needs of the associates; Are the perceived training needs of the associates realistic in regards to the training required by the mass-market retailers; and Does determining the perceived training needs of the associates provide a more effective training?

Background regarding training surveys was provided in order to acquaint the reader with the origin of the study and to link previous research regarding training surveys to the research problem, though no specific studies regarding mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment has been undertaken previously. The significance of using a training survey to determine the perceived training needs of associates who sell riding lawn equipment was then explained, citing the need for focus and existing time limitations as the reasons for the study being conducted. Also, the need and reasons for employee input were explored.

Chapter I then focused on the various limitations regarding the study, including the population surveyed, time constraints, methodology, terms, and associate limitations. The assumptions made by the researcher were then listed, including associate skill and type, and their general awareness of any gaps in knowledge or skills.

The procedures were then outlined which involves distributing a survey to associates which they are to fill out and return to the researcher. Chapter I then concluded with the definition of terms. The terms associate, mass-market retailer, training needs survey, riding lawn equipment, and needs analysis were defined.

Chapter II is a review of the literature regarding training needs surveys and training needs analysis. Research recommendations regarding training needs analysis and surveys are reviewed. The different types of training needs surveys will be explored and their significance in regards to training sales associates of riding lawn equipment will be examined. Chapter III focuses on the methods and procedures used during the research and data collection in regards to this research problem. The survey method used will be dissected in detail and a copy of the survey will be provided. Chapter IV contains the results and findings of the research study conducted. The results of the survey are analyzed and compared to determine any implications for future training needs. Chapter V presents a summary of the research findings and includes any conclusions, implications, or recommendations in regards to future training needs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II will examine prior research regarding needs analysis and training needs surveys. This chapter will also encompass an overview of the significance regarding the perceived training needs of sales associates, discussing the advantages and disadvantages in regards to obtaining this information. An overview of how a training needs analysis is conducted and the significance of a survey in this analysis will also be discussed. An exploration will be made of the purpose of determining training needs in regards to more effective training sessions and of the importance of realism in regards to training needs. An explanation of the specific training required to sell riding lawn equipment in regards to mass market retailers will be examined in this chapter. Finally, the significance of surveys and questionnaires regarding determining perceived training needs of associates regarding such equipment will be examined in this chapter.

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING NEEDS SURVEYS

Training, in general, often has begun with the process of identifying a training need and is often seen as an investment in the corporate sectors (Anderson, 1994; Mouzakitis, 2009). Prior to the 1980's, the way in which the particular training need was determined varied, depending on the methods preferred by a particular organization. There was often no systematic way of determining training needs (Kirkpatrick, 1977). Typically, training needs were determined by focusing on job performance or by simply providing upper management and supervisors with requested training (Anderson, 1994; Kirkpatrick, 1977). The basis for the systematic approach to training began during World War II when the American military was in desperate need of trained personnel. The

United States military developed ISD, or instructional systems development, to address this problem. This provided a method by which men and women could be efficiently trained to work (Rosset, 1987). Another basis for training was developed in 1949 by educationalist Ralph Tyler. His four-stage model of curriculum and instructional objectives provided a stepping point for a more structured, analytical approach to training (Anderson, 1994). In the 1960's and 1970's, Donald Kirkpatrick, who developed the four levels of training evaluation, proposed a structured, systematic approach to training, including the use of surveys and questionnaires (Kirkpatrick, 1977; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Florida State University devised the ADDIE model in 1975, in which analysis is the first step in the training model (Biech, 2009). This model, or some version of it, is still used frequently today (Biech, 2009).

In the 1980's, training became more important and training departments were a regular subsystem within corporations and businesses in general. Training departments gained a short-lived focus in the corporate world. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, economic variables shifted and, due to cost-cutting measures, training and training departments were some of the first areas to be eliminated. Training became dispensable and lacking proper justification for their existence; training departments were often sacrificed in the efforts of downsizing (Allen, 1994). Training programs had to become more cost-effective and streamlined in order to survive the downsizing trends, so more emphasis was once again placed on a more systematic approach to training. This approach took many forms, some companies looking at a more individualized approach to training, while others focused on providing only training that was absolutely required (Allen, 1994; Lee & Zemke, 1995).

In addition to economic variations, the world of work was changing rapidly during the 1990's and into the new millennium. New technology brought about new types of jobs, removed several existing jobs, and provided a need for new skill requirements in employees (Anderson, 1994). Training had become necessary again, but with noticeable differences. It became to be seen as more of a learning experience and did not focus on just current skill acquisition, but also aimed to equip employees with skills that would be needed in the future. Training had begun to take a more forward path, no longer concentrating on solving current problems or skill gaps, but also concentrated on future needed skills in order to accommodate emerging technology and probable job changes. Trainers not only needed to focus their training on skill acquisition, but also had to facilitate change (Anderson, 1994). Methods of training, which were very important in the 1970's and 1980's, were no longer as important as actual training needs (Allen, 1994; Gordon 1973). At the same time, constraints had become more of an issue, as time was money in regards to business. Training needed to be streamlined and compacted into more rigid scheduling and often with less budget available at the time (Lee & Zemke, 1995). Focus became one of the most important factors in regards to training employees as training needed to fit the time and budget allowed (Lee & Zemke, 1995). Training needs analysis evolved into a recommended cost-cutting and timesaving measure, and it has been noted to be particularly useful in the industrial, consumer, and agricultural sectors, although it was still underutilized (Mouzakitis, 2009).

A training needs analysis, or training analysis, was a ongoing process during which several activities are conducted in order to identify problems or training needs in a

workplace setting and is used to determine whether training is a viable solution to the identified need or problem (Brown, 2002; Hasan, 2007). The training analysis also determined who requires training, the training content, and what goals and objectives the training will serve (Gordon, 1973). At the same time, information regarding future training projections could be gleaned from performing a training needs analysis (Gordon, 1973). It is often considered by training theorists as one of the most important aspects of a properly designed and effective training program (Mouzakitis, 2009). The methods of performing a training needs analysis varied greatly, depending on which method was preferred, the particular training problem suspected, and amount and type of information required by the organization (Chiu & Thompson, 1999). The training needs analysis could have possibly included activities such as content analysis, job analysis, skills tests for employees, task analysis, cost analysis, and training needs surveys and questionnaires. The overall training needs analysis, though immensely useful, was possibly time-consuming and costly, depending upon its form and scope (Buckley & Caple, 2009). Focus was once again important in regards to training, as a trainer would not wish to undertake any of the more complex activities involved in a training needs analysis unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.

A good starting point to determine perceived training requirements was a training needs survey or questionnaire. This possibly determined what employees feel their training needs are in relation to their jobs (Buckley & Caple, 2009). These tools were commonly used in a systematic approach to training in order to identify training needs and involved collecting opinion data from a selected number of people (Gordon, 1973; McClelland, 1994). A survey could have been devised as both quantitative and

qualitative, collected data that is both subjective and objective, and usually listed questions that were based on company training goals or objectives (Allan, 2009; Anderson, 1994; Biech, 2009; Finn, 1989; Habib, 1970; McClelland, 1994). A survey or questionnaire was a sound, cost-effective way to gather data from large populations of individuals, particularly those who were located over different geographical locations. A great advantage to surveys or questionnaires is that input could have been obtained from every employee necessary (Allan, 2009; Hasan, 2007). They were also fairly non-intrusive and did not require a face-to-face meeting in order to be completed. Bias could have been minimized by the latter, due to the fact that the questions were written down and not in an interview format, thus the possible misinterpretation of the questions and responses was lessened and there was little intimidation involved, as there was no actual face-to-face contact (McClelland, 1994). The survey could have been created simply and in a straightforward manner and not required a significant amount of time to complete. As time is a large problem in regards to training, a properly constructed survey could be viewed as a good starting point for a proactive response to perceived training needs (Anderson, 1994).

As stated earlier, a survey could be as simplistic or complex as deemed necessary by the individuals creating and conducting the research. The survey was often custom designed by the researcher, trainer, or training department, the jobs of the latter two being to discover training needs and deliver the needed solutions in an appropriate time frame (Lee & Zemke, 1995; McClelland, 1994). Sometimes standardized training surveys were used, which are those that have been designed by experts and made available through training organizations or consultants (McClelland, 1994). A training survey, as part of a

training needs assessment, would assist in answering two questions: Who requires training? and What type of training is required? (Habib, 1970). The training required could be composed of new skills or skills that simply need to be enhanced. The skills gaps could include current skills needed or relate to future skills in response to organizational or product change (McClelland, 1994).

The first step in designing a training needs survey was to determine the group or groups of individuals who will receive and complete the survey and the scope of the survey. Several methods could have been used including job analysis, interviews, conducting job profiles, analyzing company or organizational goals, analyzing performance appraisals, or using some combination of the previously listed resources (Habib, 1970; McClelland, 1994; Nowak 1991). Research is then conducted or a short interview undertaken in which possible training issues are determined (McClelland, 1994). Managers, supervisors, and trainers were possibly good sources of information, as well as company objectives and goals (Habib, 1970; McClelland, 1994). Any groups interviewed should have been small (McClelland, 1994). Job profiles, a determination of the tasks and behaviors in relation to a specific job, could have also been conducted. This would help define jobs in regards to behavioral aspects and assist in the development of possible survey questions. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) or trainers could have also assisted with developing job profiles. All of the information gathered through these methods would determine the scope, which is comprised of the groups and job functions that are to be included in the training needs survey (Habib, 1970). Once the scope was determined, possible training issues that have been defined could have been broken into categories regarding communication, motivation, or technical skills. These categories

then could have been further divided into questions that contain key words or phrases in regards to generalized training issues (McClelland, 1994). These questions were generally taken from the research, but may also have been comprised of issues that are already known or suspected (Anderson, 1994).

Once general training questions were formulated, the response format should have been chosen. These response formats included close-ended questions, open-ended questions, or a combination of open and close-ended questions (McClelland, 1994). Close-ended questions were forced choice and were comprised of the respondent choosing from a selection of possible answers. These answers could have included multiple-choice, ranking, or rating responses. Open-ended questions allowed the respondent to answer the questions in a short-answer format using their own words (McClelland, 1994).

After the response format had been chosen, the general questions previously generated could have been used as a basis for even more specific questions that are formulated using the chosen format (McClelland, 1994). A draft format of the questions should have been created. The questions should have been clear, concise, logical, and capable of generating needed data (Anderson, 1994; Habib, 1970; McClelland, 1994). The questions and possible answers should also have been in regards to possible “trainable areas” and each employee should have responded to identical questions (Bellman, 1975; Hasan, 2007). The questions must have been of a number that facilitated a response, as lengthy, time-consuming questions could hinder the response rate. In addition, the researcher or trainer involved runs the risk of the training needs themselves changing before the survey analysis was completed (Anderson, 1994). The survey should

have then been pre-tested, if possible, in order to reveal any possible errors or misleading statements as well as providing a framework in order to begin to establish validity and reliability (McClelland, 1994). After the pre-testing was completed, a determination should have been made in regards to possible incomplete or inappropriate responses. Instructions should have been clearly written and included a cover letter providing all pertinent information in regards to the survey. Employees should be more responsive if they knew the specific reason for the survey and the questions were specific enough not to have been time-consuming (Anderson, 1994; Habib 1970). The method of return in regards to the survey should have been provided and should have facilitated the return as much as possible for the respondents. Once all possible survey responses were returned, the results were then tabulated, analyzed, and conclusions were made (McClelland, 1994). Analysis should have revealed possible training needs, but may also have revealed non-training needs not previously considered (Anderson, 1994).

Though time and cost issues must be considered, a training needs survey can be a good starting point for an overall training needs analysis (HR-Guide, 1999; Gordon, 1973; McClelland, 1994). It can provide much needed focus and reveal not only training needs, but possible non-training issues (Anderson, 1994; McClelland, 1994). A survey is an excellent way to obtain input from various employees in an organization and obtain the “big picture” of what employees feel their training needs are in regards to their specific job regardless of their particular location (Gordon, 1973; Hasan, 2007). The non-intrusive nature and guarantee of anonymity, along with properly constructed questions and cover letter, would allow for greater cooperation and less bias; thereby allowing for greater accuracy in responses (McClelland, 1994). This proactive method of

determining perceived training needs, as part of a training needs assessment, would provide a basis for designing an effective training program, not only for current training needs, but also for possible future training implications (Anderson, 1994; Mouzakitis, 2009). In summation, a training needs survey would provide “a fit between what individuals require and what we are delivering...” (Rossett, 2010, p. 67).

REALISM IN REGARDS TO TRAINING NEEDS

Although a survey or questionnaire is a useful means of determining the perceived training needs of employees of a particular organization, care should be taken to maintain a realistic attitude in regards to training. As stated earlier, surveys and questionnaires should be aligned along company or organizational goals and objectives and may reveal non-training needs (Allan, 2009; Anderson, 1994; Finn, 1989). The employees surveyed may have only conveyed training desires and not actual realistic training needs (Allan, 2009; Finn, 1989; Talbot, Tang, & Van Eerde, 2008). A trainer or researcher should differentiate between training needs and training wants (Allan, 2009; Finn, 1989). A decision to ask employees what they desire in regards to training should be an informed decision, taking into account that employees may not be aware of organizational goals and objectives, and may use the survey as a means of relaying personal dissatisfaction (Allan, 2009; Finn, 1989). Researchers and authors often recommended using the survey only as the beginning of a training needs assessment and in conjunction with other methods in order to avoid confusing training needs with training desires. In order to avoid this pitfall, researchers and authors advised the use of testing or job performance reviews, project plans, operational plans, audits, and task analysis, along with surveys

and questionnaires (Allan, 2009; Brown, 2002; Finn, 1989; Tang, Talbot, & Van Eerde, 2008).

In addition, the results of surveys were sometimes related in broad or vague terms. Employees may have stated a wish to become better communicators, but did not convey any more relevant information such as in which areas of communications were the employees lacking. Therefore, the survey must have been carefully designed to allow for as specific responses as possible and the possibility of further questioning at a later date must have been addressed (Habib, 1970; Hobbs, 1990). The quality and administration of the survey designed will affect the validity and accuracy of the data collected, so care should be taken in developing and conducting survey research (Gordon, 1973). In summation, designing an entire training program should not rely solely on a training needs survey or questionnaire and the tool used must have been very carefully designed in order to be effective.

Budget and time allocations should have also been considered when a researcher or trainer wishes to design and administer a survey or questionnaire. A properly constructed survey should have taken time to design and create, as well as time to administer (Brown, 2002). Though a survey is often the easiest and most cost-effective methods included in a training needs analysis, time and budget must have allowed for careful design and research before the survey was administered (Brown, 2002; McClelland, 1994). Pre-testing should have been conducted if possible, and careful proof-reading and research in regards to survey questions should have been completed. After the survey is designed and administer, time for analysis must be allowed in order to draw valid conclusions (Anderson, 1994; McClelland, 1994).

A training survey or questionnaire properly designed and conducted, in addition to other training needs analysis methods, could provide significant data that can be used to determine perceived training needs and develop an appropriate training strategy. The survey must be adequate to determine training needs and to help differentiate between training wants. The trainer or researcher must be realistic in regards to training needs and ensure that the survey will help reflect realistic goals and objectives, while at the same time taking into account any non-training needs that could arise from survey responses.

SPECIFIC TRAINING REQUIRED

By the mid-2000's, many mass market retailers of home, garden, and building supplies had begun to sell lawn equipment from manufacturers who had previously only sold their equipment at local, independent dealerships located throughout the United States (Appliance Magazine.com, 2005; Deneen & Gross, 2006). The manufacturers and mass market retailers had followed market and consumer trends and entered into agreements and "marketing relationships" to sell more mid-priced merchandise to a vast array of consumers. The purpose of a mass market retailer is to reach as many consumers as possible over a vast array of economic stratus, so therefore the agreements usually proved beneficial to both the mass market retailer and the lawn equipment manufacturer (Appliance Magazine.com, 2005; Breene, Johnson, & Nunes 2004; Dennen & Gross, 2006). The subsequent relationship between the retailers and manufacturers was also beneficial to the consumer, allowing for a wider variety of equipment to choose from and cost comparison among retailers, as well as internet sales (Deneen & Gross, 2009). The southern United States was one of the largest markets of lawn and garden equipment, including riding lawn equipment, accounting for at least one-third of the market total

(Dennen & Gross, 2006). This makes the south, which includes Alabama, one of the largest sales and marketing targets in the United States. In order to keep sales at a maximum, proper training of sales associates of lawn and garden equipment had taken priority among territory sales and marketing managers in the southern United States.

Sales associates who sell riding lawn equipment for mass market retailers were required to demonstrate a variety of skills in order to complete a successful training program. Many of the skills were taught through a computer-based training program administered when the associates first began employment with the mass market retailer and more skills were acquired through on-the-job training. There was however, annual training, normally scheduled in the spring, January through April or May in central Alabama, in which employees were given a one day training session provided by the actual equipment manufacturers (P. Lucado, personal communication, March 16, 2011). The trainings were conducted at a centralized retailer or locations, as centralizing training of retail sales associates is deemed to be the most efficient method of conducting retail training (Salopek, 2006). The training consisted of department heads, zone managers, and full-time and part-time employees. Seasonal employees were also included in the training. Training of seasonal employees was significant as some of the employees may have returned from year to year or may have become permanent employees (Salopek, 2006). The training objectives included company history, sales persuasion, assisting the customer in choosing the appropriate model of riding lawn equipment, and the warranty registration process. Specific aspects surrounding the particular brand of riding lawn equipment were also included, such as ease of ownership, operation, and maintenance, durability, and quality. Frequently asked questions, misconceptions, and questions from

the associates were also addressed. At the end of the lecture session, the associates were given an opportunity to experience hands-on training in regards to the riding lawn equipment. The sales associates were instructed in how to operate and properly maneuver the machinery (P. Lucado, personal communication, March 16, 2011). This training allowed each and every employee access to the training objectives and the riding lawn equipment itself. However, due to time constraints, not all possible training needs and questions from the associates could have possibly been addressed. There may have existed training needs or questions that were overlooked during previous training sessions. The sales associates may have required further training in an area not covered or not focused upon enough during past training sessions. A training needs survey could possibly have assisted in uncovering possible future training needs or areas of focus required during training sessions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SURVEYS REGARDING PERCEIVED TRAINING NEEDS

Sales associates of riding lawn equipment in central Alabama were a part of a large retail marketing and sales territory in the United States. As stated previously, the southern United States accounted for at least one-third of the market total in regards to lawn and garden equipment and sales are forecasted to increase (Deneen & Gross, 2006). Therefore, sales associates played a large role in the sales of riding lawn equipment and as they had the first access to the consumer, proper training to obtain sales and equipment knowledge were essential. As time constraints were often imposed on training sessions, and organizations perceived time as money, focus in regards to training was important (Lee & Zemke, 1995). The researcher had often overheard the complaint from trainers of sales associates that the time allotted for training was inadequate, not leaving a great deal

of time for questions or further equipment training. The trainers were often left without any information regarding which areas the associates perceived they needed further training or what questions they had after the training was completed. A training needs survey could have assisted in alleviating some of the strain of having to anticipate within which areas further training was required and some of the questions associates may have after the training had transpired. The training needs survey could also reveal future training needs, non-training needs, and what current training programs appear to lack (Brown, 2002; Hobbs, 1990; McClelland, 1994; Rosset, 2010). A large sample of employees could be polled cost-efficiently, and as in the case of trainers of mass-market retail sales associates, the surveys could be distributed during regular site visits (Gordon, 1973; McClelland, 1994). The store locations in central Alabama were spread amongst several areas, therefore a training needs survey distributed in this manner would provide information without becoming cost-prohibitive. A training needs survey would provide insight into the perceived training needs of the sales associates of mass market retailers. Training could then be streamlined and brought into focus, thus saving time in planning a training program, one of the most important aspects to keep in mind when developing a training program (Lee & Zemke, 1994).

Another, less emphasized feature, in regards to a training needs survey involved empowering the employees to assist in developing their own training programs. Each employee involved in the training is surveyed in order to obtain complete and accurate data (Gordon, 1973). Employees who are allowed input on an individual basis often feel empowered and that their needs and concerns are addressed (Altman, 2009). Also, as the surveys are completed on an individual basis without group input, employees may more

freely express their opinions and concerns, without the fear of reprisal. The surveys are non-intrusive and do not involve possibly intimidating face-to-face inquiries (Hobbs, 1990; McClelland, 1994).

In summation, a training needs survey could provide a adequate starting point for determining the perceived training needs of sales associates of riding lawn equipment. A survey that was properly designed, constructed, and administered would yield a great deal of information and insight into what employees feel that their training needs were in regards to their specific jobs. A total training needs analysis could be conducted if the survey was combined with other methods later, therefore providing a total overview of present and future training needs.

SUMMARY

Chapter II presented an overview of topics and research in regards to a training needs analysis, a training needs survey, specific riding lawn equipment training, and the significance of a survey in regards to perceived training needs. Realism in regards to training was also discussed. The various methods of performing a training needs analysis were touched upon in this chapter. Also, the possibility of non-training needs arising from a training needs survey being administered to employees was explained.

One method of conducting a training needs survey was described and the advantages and disadvantages of a survey were explored in this chapter. The importance of the differentiation between training needs and wants and a properly conducted survey that would help avoid this mistake were examined in Chapter II. The specific training needs of sales associates of riding lawn equipment, such as warranty registration and hands-on-training, were listed and described briefly. Finally, the significance of a survey

in regards to obtaining the perceived training needs, including empowering the employee, were discussed in detail.

Chapter III will discuss the methods and procedures used to design and conduct a training needs survey in regards to the perceived training needs of sales associates of riding lawn equipment. The methods use to determine and devise questioning will be explored in depth. A training needs survey will be created and administered in order to determine perceived training needs. An analysis of this process will be provided in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The conducted study was descriptive research to determine the training needs as perceived by the associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment. This chapter provides a description of the methods and procedures used to conduct the descriptive research. Chapter III discusses the population that was surveyed, the instrument that was designed to collect the data, and the method of data collection. The chapter also includes the statistical analysis used to analyze the data in addition to a summary of the content of Chapter III.

POPULATION

The population of this survey consisted of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the central region of Alabama. Central Alabama consisted of a rectangular area from Jasper, Alabama, to Prattville, Alabama, and from the Georgia/Alabama border to the Mississippi/Alabama border. There were 29 mass market retailers located in this region. Each retailer had approximately two to four associates who specifically sold or worked with riding lawn equipment. A total of 60 associates were surveyed for this study.

The associates consisted of sales associates, outdoor equipment specialists, zone managers, and department heads. The associates were a mixture of full-time, part-time, permanent, and seasonal workers. The years of experience consisted of new employees with less than one year experience to experienced employees with more than five years experience.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The instrument used to collect the data was a survey distributed to the associates located at 29 mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment. The survey was devised by the researcher with the assistance and approval of a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer (one individual) of associates who sell, care for, and distribute riding lawn equipment. The survey was written based on job descriptions and organizational goals and consisted of 10 questions. The questions related to the associate's possible perceived training needs. Eight questions were closed-ended questions that were devised using a five-point Likert scale. Two questions were open-ended and allowed the associates to elaborate on the previous eight questions. The survey also provided information regarding the associate's position within the retail organization and their years of experience. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The research study was based on the perceived training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment. The study and survey were approved by a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer of the mass market retail associates in order to assist in providing focus for further training sessions. The survey, along with a cover letter, was distributed during the SME and trainer's routine mass market retail visits, on which the researcher was allowed to participate. See Appendix B for a copy of the cover letter provided to the associates. The associates were assured that their answers would remain confidential. The surveys were completed by the associates during the routine visit if possible, and an addressed and stamped envelope was provided as a means of return if the survey could not be completed during that time frame. A subsequent visit

was made after a two week time-frame if the surveys had not been returned during that time-frame. A follow-up letter and an additional copy of the survey were provided to the associates during the subsequent visit. See Appendix C for a copy of the follow-up letter provided to the associates.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Once the survey data were collected, the results were tabulated. Questions one through eight consisted of a five-point Likert scale. Questions 1 through 8 were analyzed using numbers, percentages, and mean of response. The results were further tabulated and analyzed by position in the retail organization and years of experience.

Questions 9 and 10 were open-ended questions which allowed the associates to elaborate on Questions one through eight. The responses to these questions were categorized by the type of response and added together to report the number of responses by category provided on the survey. This information was tabulated and analyzed by number and frequency of response.

SUMMARY

Chapter III provided information regarding the methods and procedures used to conduct the research. The chapter described the population in central Alabama that was used to provide the research data. Then, a description of the survey that was developed to collect the data was provided. The survey was developed with the assistance and approval of a Subject Matter Expert and trainer of mass market retail associates and consisted of eight closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The surveys were distributed by the researcher during normal retail visits made by the Subject Matter Expert and trainer. Follow-up visits were made in order to collect any outstanding

surveys. The survey results were tabulated and in the case of the open-ended questions, categorized. The results were analyzed by number, frequency, and mean of response.

The findings of the surveys were documented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine the perceived training needs of associates of riding lawn equipment. Based on the research conducted through the Review of Literature, organizational goals, job descriptions, and the recommendations of the Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer, survey questions were developed and provided to 60 associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment. Each retailer was visited in person by the researcher and the Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer. The purpose of the study was provided to each associate and each associate was asked to voluntarily complete the survey. Once the surveys were completed, the data were collected and recorded to determine the associate's perceived training needs. Chapter IV will consist of a description of the population's response rate, an analysis of the data collected from each survey question, and a summary of the chapter.

POPULATION RESPONSE

Sixty surveys were presented in person by the researcher during retail visits by the Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer to 29 mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the central region of Alabama. Twenty-eight of the 29 retailers chose to participate in the study. All sixty surveys were voluntarily completed with a 100% response rate, due to the fact that many retailers had several associates, approximately two to four who were employed to sell riding lawn equipment. Therefore, 60 associates were available in the 28 participating mass market retailers to complete all 60 of the surveys.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey consisted of ten questions regarding the training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment as well as information regarding position, status, and years of experience in their position. There were 35 sales associates, eight outdoor equipment specialists, one zone manager, and 13 department heads. One associate did not indicate their position in the organization and two associates listed themselves as both sales associates and outdoor equipment specialists. Forty-one associates listed themselves as full-time employees and 15 listed themselves as part-time employees. Four employees did not list themselves as full or part-time, but as seasonal or permanent employees only. Only 13 associates indicated whether they were permanent or seasonal employees. Six employees indicated that they were permanent employees and seven indicated they were seasonal employees. Five employees indicated they had worked in their position less than three months and 18 indicated that they had worked in their position from three months to one year. There were 23 employees who had worked in their positions one to five years and 14 associates had worked in their positions for five or more years. Two of the five associates who had worked in their position less than three months indicated that they had prior work experience with riding lawn equipment and three of the five associates indicated that they had no prior work experience with riding lawn equipment. The positions are presented in Table 1 and the years of experience for each associates position is presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Position

Position	Number of Employees
Sales Associate	35
Outdoor Equipment Specialist	8
Zone Manager	1
Department Head	13
Both Sales Associate and Outdoor Equipment Specialist	2
Did not Indicate	1
Total	60

Table 2

Years of Experience

Amount of Time in Current Position	Number of Employees
Less than 3 months with previous riding lawn equipment experience	2
Less than 3 months without previous riding lawn equipment experience	3
3 months to 1 year	18
1 year to 5 years	23
5 or more years	14
Total	60

LIKERT-SCALE QUESTIONS

The survey was composed of 10 questions. Questions 1 through 8 were Likert Scale questions consisting of answers in a range consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). There was a 100% response rate from all subjects regarding Questions 1 through 8. The results were analyzed by number, percentage, and mean of response. In order to calculate the mean of response for each question, a value of 5 was assigned to strongly agree, 4 was assigned to agree, 3 was assigned to undecided, 2 was assigned to disagree, and a value of 1 was

assigned to strongly disagree. The responses of those associates who indicated that their position was both sales associate and outdoor equipment specialists were included under sales associates as recommended by the Subject Matter Expert (SME) as this is their primary position, function, and title.

Question 1 addressed additional training regarding assisting customers in finding the proper equipment for their needs. Overall, 30 of 60 or 50% of associates strongly agreed, 23 of 60 or 38% agreed, four of 40 or 7% were undecided, three of 60 or 5% disagreed, and no associates strongly disagreed. A mean of 4.33 was indicated by the associate's responses. For Question 1, there were 37 sales associates and 17 sales associates strongly agreed with this question, 15 agreed, three indicated they were undecided, and two disagreed. A mean of 4.27 was indicated regarding the responses of the sales associates. There were eight outdoor equipment specialists and two strongly agreed with Question 1, five agreed, and one was undecided. A mean score of 4.13 was calculated based on the outdoor equipment specialist results. One zone manager completed the survey and strongly agreed with Question 1 for a mean of 5.00. The associate who did not indicate their position also strongly agreed with Question 1 for a mean of 5.0 for each associate. There were 13 department heads, nine of which strongly agreed with this question, three who agreed and one who disagreed, indicating a mean of 4.54. There were five associates who had worked in their positions for 0-3 months and four strongly agreed with Question 1 and one associate agreed, indicating a mean of 4.80. There were 18 associates who had worked in their positions for three months to one year and eight strongly agreed with this question, seven agreed, two were undecided, and one disagreed. A mean of 4.22 was calculated for those who had worked three months to one

year in their position. Twenty-three associates had worked in their current position for one to five years. Of those 23, 13 strongly agreed with Question 1, seven agreed, one was undecided, and two disagreed for a mean of 4.35. For those 14 employees who had worked 5+ years in their positions, five strongly agreed, eight agreed and one was undecided for question 1, with a mean score of 4.29.

Question 2 regarded training in successfully explaining product warranty to the customer. Thirty of 60 or 50% of associates strongly agreed that more training was needed in this area, 25 of 60 or 42% agreed, two or 3% were undecided, and three or 5% disagreed for an overall mean response of 4.37. Seventeen of the 37 sales associates strongly agreed with Question 2, 17 agreed, two were undecided, and one disagreed, indicating a mean of 4.35. Three outdoor power equipment specialists strongly agreed, four agreed, and one disagreed for a mean response of 4.13. Seven department heads strongly agreed with Question 2, five agreed, and one disagreed indicating a mean response of 4.38. Both the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each individual. Two associates who had worked in their positions for 0-3 months strongly agreed with Question 2, and three agreed for a mean of 4.40. Nine of those who worked three months to one year strongly agreed, seven agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed for a mean of 4.33. Those associates who worked one to five years in their position responded that 13 strongly agreed, eight agreed, and two disagreed with a mean of 4.39. Five of those who worked 5+ years strongly agreed with Question 2, eight agreed, and one was undecided for a mean response of 4.29.

Question 3 asked the associated if they believed they needed more training regarding competitive lawn equipment. Thirty-two associates or 53% strongly agreed with this question, 25 or 42% agreed, one or 2% was undecided, and two or 3% disagreed for a mean of 4.45. Seventeen of 37 sales associates strongly agreed with Question 3, 18 agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed for a mean of 4.39. Four of the eight outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed with this question and four agreed for a mean of 4.5. Nine of the 13 department heads strongly agreed, three agreed and one disagreed for a mean of 4.54. Both the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each position. Three of five employees who had worked in their position for 0-3 months strongly agreed with Question 3, and two disagreed for a mean of 4.60. The employees who worked three months to one year indicated that eight strongly agreed, nine agreed, and one disagreed for a mean of 4.33. Thirteen of those who have worked in their position for 1-5 years strongly agreed with Question 3 and nine agreed, with one employee indicating they disagreed for a mean of 4.48. Eight employees who worked for 5+ years indicated that they strongly agreed with Question 3, five agreed, and one was undecided indicating a mean of 4.5.

Question 4 addressed additional training in regards to the process of selling extended warranty plans. Twenty-three of 60 or 38% of associates indicated they strongly agreed with this question, 25 or 42% disagree, five or 8% were undecided, six or 10% disagreed, and one or 2% strongly disagreed. The overall mean of response was 4.05. Twelve of the 37 sales associates strongly agreed with Question 4, 18 agreed, four were undecided and three disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.05. Two of the eight

outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed with this question, three agreed, one was undecided, one disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. The mean of response for outdoor equipment specialists was 3.50. Seven of the thirteen department heads strongly agreed with this question, four agreed, and two disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.23. Both the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each position. Of those who worked 0-3 months in their position, two indicated that they strongly agreed with Question 4, two agreed, and one disagreed resulting in a mean of 4. Eight of the 18 employees who worked 3 months-1 year responded that they strongly agree with Question 4, nine agreed and one disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.33. The results according to those 23 who have worked 1-5 years in their position were that nine strongly agreed, nine agreed, one was undecided, three disagreed and one strongly disagreed. The mean of response for these associates was 3.96. Six of the 14 that have worked 5 or more years indicated that they strongly agreed, six agreed, one was undecided, one disagreed and the mean of response was 4.21.

Question 5 asked the associates if they would like to receive additional training regarding the explaining how to operate of riding lawn equipment to the customer. Twenty-four of 60 or 40% indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement, 22 or 37% agreed, six or 10% were undecided, seven or 12% disagreed, and one or 2% strongly disagreed. The overall mean of response was 4.02. Twelve sales associates strongly agreed with Question 5, 17 agreed, three were undecided, and five disagreed with a resulting mean of 3.97. Three outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed, one agreed, two were undecided, one disagreed, and one strongly disagreed for a mean of 3.50. Both

the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each. Six department heads strongly agreed with this statement, five agreed, one was undecided, one disagreed and the mean was 4.23. Those who worked 0-3 months indicated that two of them strongly agreed with Question 5, and three agreed resulting in a mean of 4.40. Seven of those working 3 months-1 year strongly agreed, nine agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed for a mean response of 4.22. Nine of those who have worked in their position 1-5 years strongly agreed with this question, six agreed, two were undecided, five disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. The mean of response for this group was 3.74. Six of the employees who have worked more than five years strongly agreed with Question 5, four agreed, three were undecided, and one disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.07.

Question 6 referred to additional training regarding the benefits of riding lawn equipment. Twenty-eight of 60 or 47% strongly agreed with this question, 25 of 60 or 42% agreed, four of 60 or 7% were undecided, and three of 60 or 5% disagreed resulting in an overall mean of 4.30. Twelve of the thirty-seven sales associates survey indicated they strongly agreed with Question 6, 17 agreed, three were undecided, and five disagreed with a mean of 3.97. Three of the eight outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed with this statement, one agreed, two were undecided, one disagreed and one strongly disagreed. The mean of response was 3.50. Six of the thirteen department heads surveyed indicated they strongly agreed with Question 6, five agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.23. Both the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each. Only one of five associates who had worked in their position for 0-3

months strongly agreed with Question 6, and four agreed for a mean of 4.20. Eight of the 18 employees in the 3 months-1 year category strongly agreed, eight agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed. The mean of response for this group was 4.28. Ten of the 23 employees in the 1-5 year category strongly agreed with this question, nine agreed, two were undecided, two disagreed and the resulting mean was 4.17. The 14 associates in the five or more year category indicated that nine of them strongly agreed with Question 6, four agreed, and one was undecided. This resulted in a mean of 4.57.

Question 7 asked the associates to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with receiving more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment. Overall, 27 of 60 or 45% strongly agreed with this statement, 28 of 60 or 47% agreed, three of 60 or 5% were undecided, and two of 60 or 3% disagreed resulting in an overall mean of 4.33. Thirteen sales associates strongly agreed with Question 7, 20 agreed, three were undecided and one disagreed. The resulting mean was 4.22 for this category. Three outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed, and five agreed for a resulting mean of 4.38. Nine department heads indicated that they strongly agreed with Question 7, three agreed, and one disagreed. The mean of response for this category was 4.53. Both the zone Manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each. Two of the associates who indicated that they worked in their position for 0-3 months strongly agreed with Question 7, and three agreed for a mean of 4.40. Nine of those employees in the 3 month-1 year category strongly agreed with this statement, seven agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.33. Nine in the 1-5 year category indicated that they strongly agreed with Question 7, 12 agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed. The mean of

response was 4.26. Seven of those that worked in their positions for five or more years strongly agreed with this question, six agreed, and one was undecided for a resulting mean of 4.43.

Question 8, the final Likert Scale question, asked the employees how strongly they felt about additional training in the way to properly demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor. Twenty-three of 60 or 38% of associates strongly agreed with Question 8, 28 or 47% agreed, four or 7% were undecided, four or 7% disagreed, and one or 2% strongly disagreed. This resulted in an overall mean of response of 4.13. Thirteen of the 37 sales associates surveyed strongly agreed with Question 8, 17 agreed, four were undecided, and three disagreed resulting in a mean of 4.08. Three of the eight outdoor equipment specialists strongly agreed with this question, four agreed, and one strongly disagreed resulting in a mean of 3.88 for this category. Six of the 13 department heads strongly agreed with Question 8, six also agreed, and one disagreed. This resulted in a mean of 4.31. Both the zone manager and the associate who did not indicate their position strongly agreed with this question for a mean response of 5.00 for each. Regarding the length of time in position categories, one of five strongly agreed with Question 8 in the 0-3 month category, and four agreed with a mean of 4.20. Eight of the 18 in the 3 month-1 year category strongly agreed, eight agreed, one was undecided, and one disagreed. The mean for this category was 4.28. Nine of those who have worked in their position for 1-5 years strongly agreed with Question 8, nine agreed, two were undecided, two disagreed, and one strongly disagreed resulting in a mean of response of 4.0. Six of the associates who have worked in the position for 5+ years strongly agreed with this statement, six agreed, one was undecided and one disagreed. The resulting

mean for this category was 4.21. The results for Questions 1-8 were presented in Tables 3-7.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Questions 9 and 10 were open-ended questions allowing the associates to elaborate on Questions 1-8 and to list any additional training not covered by the survey. Question 9 asked the associates to list any specific areas of additional training that they would like to see in regards to Questions 1-8. Twenty-six of the 60 associates surveyed made no response to this question. Thirty-four of the 60 associates responded to this question with at least one additional specific area of training in regards to Questions 1-8. The most frequent area of training requested was training in regards to warranties, with 12 associates indicating that they would like more training in these areas. The next most frequent area of training requested was operation of equipment, with 11 associates indicating they would like more training in this area. Five associates wished for more training regarding attachments, four requested additional training in sales techniques, three associates wanted more training in regards to maintenance, and three wanted more hands-on training. Two associates wanted more training in regards to demonstrations and one wanted training in regards to the benefits of riding lawn equipment. One associate requested no additional training, and three wanted training in regards to all areas concerning Questions 1-8. One associate requested more interaction with the company representative. The results for Question 9 are tabulated in Table 8.

Table 3

Total Responses for Each Question

Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1. I would like to receive additional training regarding assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs.	30	50	23	38	4	7	3	5	0	0	4.33
2. I would like to receive additional training regarding successfully explaining product warranty to the customer.	30	50	25	42	2	2	3	5	0	0	4.37
3. I would like to receive additional training regarding differences in competitive riding lawn equipment.	32	53	25	42	1	8	2	3	0	0	4.45
4. I would like to receive additional training regarding the process of selling extended warranty plans.	23	38	25	42	5	10	6	10	1	2	4.05
5. I would like to receive additional training regarding explaining how to operate the riding lawn equipment to the customer.	24	40	22	37	6	7	7	12	1	2	4.02
6. I would like to receive additional training regarding the benefits of riding lawn equipment attachments.	28	47	25	42	4	5	3	5	0	0	4.30
7. I would like to receive more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment.	27	45	28	47	3	7	2	3	0	0	4.33
8. I would like to receive additional training in the proper way to demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor.	23	38	28	47	4	7	4	7	1	2	4.13

Table 5

Responses by Position Questions 5-8

Question	Position	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
5. I would like to receive additional training regarding explaining how to operate the riding lawn equipment to the customer.	Sales Associate	12	17	3	5		3.97
	Outdoor Equipment Specialist	3	1	2	1	1	3.50
	Zone Manager	1					5.00
	Department Head	6	5	1	1		4.23
	Not Indicated	1					5.00
6. I would like to receive additional training regarding the benefits of riding lawn equipment attachments.	Sales Associate	14	19	2	2		4.22
	Outdoor Equipment Specialist	3	4	1			4.25
	Zone Manager	1					5.00
	Department Head	9	2	1	1		4.46
	Not Indicated	1					5.00
7. I would like to receive more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment.	Sales Associate	13	20	3	1		4.22
	Outdoor Equipment Specialist	3	5				4.38
	Zone Manager	1					5.00
	Department Head	9	3		1		4.54
	Not Indicated	1					5.00
8. I would like to receive additional training in the proper way to demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor.	Sales Associate	13	17	4	3		4.08
	Outdoor Equipment Specialist	3	4			1	3.88
	Zone Manager	1					5.00
	Department Head	6	6		1		4.31
	Not Indicated	1					5.00

Table 6

Responses by Years of Experience Questions 1-4

Question	Time in Position	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1. I would like to receive additional training regarding assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs.	0-3 months	4	1				4.80
	3 months-1 year	8	7	2	1		4.22
	1-5 years	13	7	1	2		4.35
	5+ years	5	8	1			4.29
2. I would like to receive additional training regarding successfully explaining product warranty to the customer.	0-3 months	2	3				4.40
	3 months-1 year	9	7	1	1		4.33
	1-5 years	13	8		2		4.39
	5+ years	5	8	1			4.29
3. I would like to receive additional training regarding differences in competitive riding lawn equipment.	0-3 months	3	2				4.60
	3 months-1 year	8	9		1		4.33
	1-5 years	13	9		1		4.48
	5+ years	8	5	1			4.50
4. I would like to receive additional training regarding the process of selling extended warranty plans.	0-3 months	2	2		1		4.00
	3 months-1 year	8	9		1		4.33
	1-5 years	9	9	1	3	1	3.96
	5+ years	6	6	1	1		4.21

Table 7

Responses by Years of Experience Questions 5-8

Question	Time in Position	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
5. I would like to receive additional training regarding explaining how to operate the riding lawn equipment to the customer.	0-3 months	2	3				4.40
	3 months-1 year	7	9	1	1		4.22
	1-5 years	9	6	2	5	1	3.74
	5+ years	6	4	3	1		4.07
6. I would like to receive additional training regarding the benefits of riding lawn equipment attachments.	0-3 months	1	4				4.20
	3 months-1 year	8	8	1	1		4.28
	1-5 years	10	9	2	2		4.17
	5+ years	9	4	1			4.57
7. I would like to receive more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment.	0-3 months	2	3				4.40
	3 months-1 year	9	7	1	1		4.33
	1-5 years	9	12	1	1		4.26
	5+ years	7	6	1			4.43
8. I would like to receive additional training in the proper way to demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor.	0-3 months	1	4				4.20
	3 months-1 year	8	8	1	1		4.28
	1-5 years	9	9	2	2	1	4.00
	5+ years	6	6	1	1		4.21

Table 8

Question 9

Response	Number Indicated
No Response	26
Warranty	12
Operation of Equipment	11
Sales Techniques	4
Attachments	5
Maintenance	3
Hands-On Training	3
All Areas Regarding Questions 1-8	3
Demonstration	2
More Interaction With Company Representative	1
Benefits of Equipment	1
No Additional Training	1

Question 10 asked the associates what other training in regards to riding lawn equipment would they like to see provided. Twenty-five associates did not respond to this question.

Eight associates requested more information regarding the operation of equipment. Four associates wished to receive additional training in sales techniques. Four associates also desired computer and video training, hands-on training, and more in-depth training. Two associates indicated that they did not know what additional training they required, and two employees requested more company information. Two associates indicated that they required no additional training. One employee each requested training in commercial equipment, demonstration, attachments, warranty, safety, storage, and new models. The results of Question 10 are demonstrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Question 10

Response	Number Indicated
No Response	25
Operation of Equipment	8
Sales Techniques	4
In-Depth Training	4
Computer and Video Training	4
Hands-On Training	4
Maintenance	4
Did Not Know	2
Company Information	2
No Additional Training	2
Commercial Equipment	1
Demonstration	1
Attachments	1
Warranty	1
Safety	1
Storage	1
New Models	1

SUMMARY

Chapter IV provided the results of the survey that was administered to sixty associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment as well as a population response for the survey. The results of the surveys were collected, tabulated, analyzed and reported from each of the ten questions in order to help provide information regarding training needs and focus for future training. Questions 1-8 were tabulated and analyzed by percentage and mean, as well as categorized by position and length of time in each position. Questions 9 and 10 were open-ended categorized and listed by frequency of response. Tables as well as a narrative were provided to display the survey results.

Chapter V will provide a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. Conclusions will be drawn from the data collected and analyzed from the surveys. Future implications and research will be examined as well in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V will provide a summary of this research study, including the problem statement, research goals, populations, and data collection and analysis procedures. Conclusions regarding the data collected will be provided in order to answer the research goals. Finally, recommendations regarding implementation of the findings of this research and for future study will be suggested.

SUMMARY

The problem statement of this study was to determine the training needs as perceived by the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment. Three research questions were presented in this study:

Research Question 1: What are the perceived training needs of the associates?

Research Question 2: Are the perceived training needs of the associates realistic in regards to the training that is required by the mass-market retailers?

Research Question 3: Does determining the perceived training needs of the associates provide for a more effective training?

Those individuals who train the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment are often dissatisfied with the training they present due to lack of time or focus in regards to training. The trainers often complained of strict scheduling limitations which often led to rushed training with no time to answer questions or focus on additional training areas the associates may require. Therefore, the concerns and needs of the associates are often not addressed properly during rigidly scheduled training sessions. As the associates are the individuals actually working in the areas in which they are being trained, they are the ones who will often have knowledge and insight in regards to the

type of training that they require. A training needs survey can help gain access into the knowledge and insight the associates themselves have revolving around training requirements. Any knowledge of the type of training that is required will help to better focus training and may eliminate the need for a long question and answer session. A training needs survey could help provide a better, more streamlined training session that works within strict time constraints.

The following limitations were considered during this study:

- The population of the study was limited to the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the Central Alabama Marketing and Sales Area.
- The use of survey methodology that was developed by the researcher for the specific purpose of this study.
- The survey pertains to training that is only provided on an annual basis.
- The terms associate, mass-market retailer, and training are generalized terms and can pertain to many different fields.
- The associates may not have worked exclusively or for a great deal of time in the riding lawn equipment section of the mass-market retailer.

The following assumptions were also made while conducting this research study:

- The training included both seasonal and permanent associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment.
- The associates had some knowledge or awareness of the skills they were lacking in regards to riding lawn equipment.
- The associates being trained included full-time and part-time associates including outdoor equipment specialists, zone managers, and department heads.

The population of this survey consisted of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the central region of Alabama, encompassing a rectangular region from Jasper, Alabama, to Prattville, Alabama, and from the Georgia/Alabama border to the Mississippi/Alabama border. This region contained 29 mass market retailers who sold riding lawn equipment with approximately two to four associates who worked in the riding lawn equipment area at each location. The associates included Sales Associates, Zone Managers, Outdoor Equipment Specialists, and Department Heads with years of experience ranging from 0-3 months to more than five years.

A survey consisting of ten questions was used in order to collect data for this research study. The survey was designed by the researcher with assistance from a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and trainer. The survey consisted of eight Likert Scale questions and two open-ended questions. The survey also obtained data regarding the associate's position in the retailer and years of experience. The survey and cover letter were distributed during the Subject Matter Expert's (SME) routine mass market retail visits. The survey was completed during the visit or a stamped and addressed envelope was provided as a means of return for the survey.

Once the survey data were collected, the responses were tabulated. Questions 1-8 were analyzed using numbers, percentages, and mean of response. The results were further tabulated and analyzed by position and years of experience. Questions 9 and 10 were categorized by the type of response and added together to report the number of responses by category. The information was then tabulated and analyzed by number and frequency of response.

CONCLUSIONS

Three research questions were used in order to address the training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment. The first research goal that was used in this research study was:

Research Question 1: What are the perceived training needs of the associates?

The results of the survey indicated that overall, for Likert Scale Questions 1-8, the vast majority of associates felt that they needed training in each area addressed in each question. The overall means for Questions 1-8 ranged from 4.02 on Question 5 regarding explaining the operation of riding lawn equipment to the customer to 4.45 on Question 3 regarding the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment. None of the mean scores for Questions 1-8 fell below a 4.0 mean, indicating that overall, the majority of associates agree or strongly agree that additional training is needed in all of the areas addressed in Questions 1-8. Fifty-three percent strongly agreed with Question 3 regarding the differences in competitive lawn equipment, and 50% strongly agreed with Question 1 regarding assisting the customer in finding the right product, and Question 2, regarding successfully explaining product warranty. Therefore, as a group, the associates believed that training was required in product selection, product warranty, competitive riding lawn equipment, extended warranty plans, explaining operation of riding lawn equipment, the benefits of riding lawn equipment attachments, in-depth technical knowledge, and the demonstration of lawn equipment on the floor. Associates overall seem to place more emphasis on additional training in assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs, the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment, and explaining product warranty to the customer.

These results were further analyzed by position and years of experience. Only one zone manager was surveyed and this associate scored the highest mean of 5.00 on each area on Questions 1-8. Therefore, this zone manager strongly agrees that training is needed in all areas of Questions 1-8. One associate who did not indicate his position also strongly agreed with each area on Questions 1-8, also providing a mean of 5.00.

Department heads, who supervise sales associates and outdoor equipment specialists, consistently obtained the next highest means on Questions 1-8. The means of response for department heads ranged from 4.23 on Question 4 regarding selling extended warranty plans and Question 5, regarding how to explain the operation of the equipment to the customer, to 4.54 on Question 1, which addressed additional training in assisting the customer in finding the right product, Question 3, which involves the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment, and Question 7, which involves receiving more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment. The results indicate that the outdoor equipment specialists believed that additional training is required in all areas regarding Questions 1-8, with special emphasis placed upon assisting the customer in finding the right product, the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment, and additional in-depth technical knowledge being required.

Sales associates as a group indicated that they believed they required the most training regarding the differences in competitive lawn equipment with a mean of response of 4.39, which was the highest mean of response for this position. This group also scored 4.08 mean or higher for all other questions with the exception of Question 5 which involved explaining how to operate the riding lawn equipment to the customer. The mean of response for Sales Associates for this question was 3.97, indicated that though most

agreed that training was required, many did not see this area of training as important as other areas of training. The most important areas of training in regards to Sales Associates as indicated by the survey are the differences among competitive riding lawn equipment, and the area requiring the least amount of training according to this group would be explaining the operation of the riding lawn equipment to the customer. The other areas of additional training rank higher, but are considered less necessary than information regarding competitive equipment.

Outdoor equipment specialists, according to this survey, considered additional training in the area of the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment, Question 3 to be the most important additional training required. The mean score for this group regarding Question 3 was 4.50. This indicated that most of the outdoor equipment specialists agreed or strongly agreed with this question. The questions receiving the lowest mean of response for this group were Question 5, regarding explaining the operation of the riding lawn equipment to the customer, and Question 4, which asked if the associate would like additional training regarding the process of selling extended warranty plans. Question 8, which addressed additional training in the proper way to demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor, also received a lower mean of response for this group, which was a mean of 3.88. Again, this group of associates also found that additional training regarding the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment to be the most important additional training required.

Among the groups of associates categorized by years of experience in their current position, there were only five surveyed who had been in their current position from 0-3 months. This group indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they

would like to receive additional training in all areas incorporated by Questions 1-8. The highest mean of response was for Question 1, with a mean of 4.80. Question 1 asked the associate to agree or disagree if they would like to see additional training regarding assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs. Training in this area was highly favored by this group who had worked 3 months or less in their position. Question 4, involving the process of selling extended warranty plans, received the lowest mean of response, with a mean of 4.00 calculated for this group. Overall, this group requested additional training in all eight areas indicated in the survey.

Those associates who had worked in their positions from 3 months-1 year expressed an interest in training in all additional training areas as well. The range of mean scores was very narrow for this group, varying very little from a mean of 4.33 to 4.22. Question 7, regarding receiving more in-depth technical knowledge, Question 2, regarding explaining product warranty, and Question 3, the differences in competitive riding lawn equipment all received a mean of response of 4.33, which was the highest for this category. Question 5, which address explaining the equipment operation to the customer, and Question 1, assisting the customer in finding the right equipment, both received means of 4.22, the lowest mean of response. While the majority of the 3 months-1 year group agreed or strongly agreed to Questions 1-8, the differences in competitive lawn equipment once again was indicated to be the most needed area of training, along with in-depth technical knowledge and product warranty.

The category of associates who indicated they had worked in their position from 1-5 years also mostly agreed that additional training was necessary for them in each of the eight question areas. This group demonstrated a slightly wider range in mean of

response than the other groups, indicating that less training was desired in certain areas than in others. Knowledge of competitive lawn equipment, Question 3, once again was calculated to be the highest mean of response at 4.48. The question with the lowest mean of response, 3.74 was Question 5, explaining the operation of the equipment to the customer.

The mean of response for the category of associates who had worked in their positions for five or more years ranged from 4.57, Question 6, to 4.07 on Question 5. Question 6 involves additional training regarding attachments. This varied from the other groups, in which the majority regarded Question 3 as the most desired area of training, followed by Questions 1, 2, and 7. Years of experience may be a factor for this difference, as these associates may not require training in the competitive lawn equipment due to already acquired experience in this area. Question 5, addressing the issue of explaining the operation of the equipment scored the lowest for this group and that is consistent with the other groups for which Question 5 did not receive the highest mean of response. Overall years of experience may influence the results of this group and less training may be required in certain areas. The other categories of associates have less years of experience and this may account for the desired training in areas other than those indicated by the associates who have five or more years of experience.

Questions 9 and 10 were open-ended questions. Question 9 allowed the associates to list in specific training they would like to receive in regards to Questions 1-8. Thirty-four associates chose to answer Question 9. Warranty information was the most common response to Question 9 in regards to training, with 12 responses. Operation of equipment was the next most common training requested, with 11 responses

provided. Sales techniques, attachments, maintenance, hands-on training, training in all areas, demonstration, increased interaction with the company representative, and benefits of equipment were all areas that were listed as specific areas of training desired, with five to three responses given for these areas. Of these, maintenance, hands-on training, and increased interaction with the company representative were not specific to Questions 1-8, but do reveal further training requests. Only one associate listed the response that they did not need additional training in regards to Questions 1-8. These responses revealed that the associates do wish for additional training in warranty issues and the operation of equipment and these have some priority in regards to their training needs.

Question 10 asked the associates to list any other training they would wish to see provided other than those areas listed in Questions 1-8. Thirty-five associates responded to this question. Operation of equipment was again listed, signifying its importance, though it often scored a low mean of response on the survey. However, this is not really an addition to Questions 1-8, as this is the basis for Question 5. Sales techniques, in-depth training, computer and video training, hands-on training, and maintenance all received four responses. Two associates responded that they did not know, but there was one response each for commercial equipment training, demonstration, attachments, warranty, safety, storage, and new models. Demonstration, attachments, and warranty are all included in Questions, 1-8; however, safety, storage, and new models are not. Therefore, Question 10 revealed several possible future training needs for the associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment.

The second research goal used in this study was:

Research Question 2: Are the perceived training needs of the associates realistic in regards to the training that is required by the mass-market retailers?

The survey itself was devised with the assistance of a trainer of associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment and was constructed with organizational goals in mind. The associates mostly agreed, or often strongly agreed, with the questions devised along organizational and training goals. Therefore, in regards to Questions 1-8, those training needs are completely in line with training that will be or can be provided in the future. Questions 9 and 10 revealed other training needs not covered by Questions 1-8, and are not necessarily in line with organizational goals. Computer and video training, storage, and increased interaction with the company representative are not necessarily goals that can be realistically reached within the limited time-frames provided for training. Other methods may be devised to provide these types of training. Safety and hands-on training is already part of the training program; however the scope of these areas in training is limited, so they may require additional training focus. Maintenance is not currently a part of the annual training program, and is usually left to individual dealerships. However, as associates are often asked maintenance questions and express a desire for training in this area, so additional training times or methods may be necessary to address this issue. New model training is already a part of the annual training. Therefore, the perceived training needs of associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment are overall realistic in regards to training with the exception of representative interaction, computer and video training, and storage of the equipment.

The third and final research goal used in this study was:

Research Question 3: Does determining the perceived training needs of the associates provide for a more effective training?

As the associates answered most of the questions in a realistic manner and most of the training they requested can be provided, then the conclusion to this research question would be yes, that determining the perceived training needs of the associates does provide for a more effective training. As the associates each provided the proper feedback, the trainer of the mass-market retail associates will now know what areas to focus on in training and which areas are strongest for each category of employees. Areas of focus would be in competitive riding lawn equipment, explaining operation of the equipment, warranty procedures, the benefits of attachments, and in-depth technical knowledge. The trainer can now streamline training, focus on those areas in which the greatest need was expressed and eliminate the need for prolonged question and answer sessions. Implications for future training are provided by the open-ended questions, and now other areas of training can be included if possible. Therefore, a more realistic, compact, and effective training can be realized by determining the training needs of associates of mass-market retailers of riding lawn equipment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was undertaken to determine the perceived training needs of mass-market retail associates of riding lawn equipment. It was determined that many associates felt that they needed training in all areas of annual training listed in the first eight survey questions. Most associates felt that they particularly needed more training regarding competitive riding lawn equipment, product warranty, explaining operation of the equipment, the benefits of attachments, and more in-depth technical knowledge.

Questions 9 and 10 revealed other perceived training needs such as maintenance, safety, and additional hand-on training. Operation and warranty issues were also listed frequently under Questions 9 and 10. Therefore the following recommendations have been made:

1. Further emphasis should be provided during training in regards to explaining the operation of equipment to the customer, explaining product warranty, the benefits of attachments, assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs, and particularly further information should be provided regarding competitive riding lawn equipment.
2. Maintenance questions and issues should be addressed with some form of training or training material.
3. Further training materials should be provided to address any realistic training areas that are not addressed fully during annual training, e.g. safety.
4. Further training need research could be conducted in order to determine the training needs as perceived by members of the corporate managerial or training staff in order to further streamline training and further bring together the training needs of the associates with the perceived needs and goals of the managers and trainers in the field.
5. A follow-up study should be done after the implementation of the revised training program to see if the training better met the needs of the associates. The researcher will use the same survey in order to determine if there are any differences in regards to the perceived training needs of the associates.

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APPENDIX A

TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to determine the perceived training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment.

Survey Directions: Please indicate the appropriate response to each of the following questions.

Please indicate which of the following positions you hold within the company by placing a check mark () on the line provided:

Sales Associate

Outdoor Equipment Specialist

Zone Manager

Department Head

Please indicate which status applies to your position. Check () all that apply to you.

Full-time

Part-time

Permanent

Seasonal

Please indicate by placing a check mark () on the line provided how long you have worked in your current position:

less than 3 months

3 months -1 year

1- 5 years

5+ years

If you have worked at this retailer **less than three months**, have you had any **prior** work related experience with riding lawn equipment? Check () Yes or No.

Yes

No

Please clearly indicate how much you agree or disagree to each of the following statements by **circling one** of the choices provided beneath the statement. Each statement refers only to riding lawn equipment.

SA = Strongly Agree

U = Undecided

D = Disagree

A = Agree

SD = Strongly Disagree

1) I would like to receive additional training regarding assisting the customer in finding the right product for their needs.

SA A U D SD

2) I would like to receive additional training regarding successfully explaining product warranty to the customer.

SA A U D SD

3) I would like to receive additional training regarding differences in competitive riding lawn equipment.

SA A U D SD

4) I would like to receive additional training regarding the process of selling extended warranty plans.

SA A U D SD

5) I would like to receive additional training regarding explaining how to operate the riding lawn equipment to the customer.

SA A U D SD

6) I would like to receive additional training regarding the benefits of riding lawn equipment attachments.

SA A U D SD

7) I would like to receive more in-depth technical knowledge of riding lawn equipment.

SA A U D SD

8) I would like to receive additional training in the proper way to demonstrate riding lawn equipment on the floor.

SA A U D SD

Please answer the following questions.

9) Please list any specific areas of additional training you would like to receive **regarding Questions 1 - 8.**

10) What other training in regards to riding lawn equipment would you like to see provided?

APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER

Training Needs Survey for Associates of Mass Market Retailers of Riding Lawn
Equipment

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kimberly Lucado and I am a graduate student attending Old Dominion University in pursuit of a Master of Science Degree in Occupational and Technical Studies, Business and Industry Training. In partial fulfillment of my curriculum requirements, I am conducting a research study on the perceived training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the Central Alabama Sales and Marketing Region. This study is being conducted with the assistance of a territory manager, Patrick Lucado, whose territory encompasses the Central Alabama Sales and Marketing Region and who has previously conducted training at your retailer. I would appreciate a few minutes of your time to fill out a brief survey. Your participation in this survey is purely voluntary and your names are not required. All results will remain confidential. This survey is to assist in providing focus for future trainings regarding riding lawn equipment at your retailer. By completing the survey, you give us permission to use your survey in our study. All answers will be completed as a collective whole, and we will not be able to identify your individual responses. This study will give you, the associate, a chance to assist in determining what material is presented in regards to future training sessions. No further study beyond this one is intended at this time. Once you have completed the survey, you may return the survey to me or the territory manager, Patrick Lucado, at this time. We would like the survey to be filled out during our visit, but if it cannot be completed during this time, an addressed and stamped envelope will be provide for mailing the survey to us.

Old Dominion University has been notified of and supports this research study. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and I thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Lucado
Od Dominion University,
Graduate Student

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kimberly Lucado and I am a graduate student attending Old Dominion University in pursuit of a Master of Science Degree in Occupational and Technical Studies, Business and Industry Training. In partial fulfillment of my curriculum requirements, I am conducting a research study on the perceived training needs of associates of mass market retailers of riding lawn equipment in the Central Alabama Sales and Marketing Region. This study is being conducted with the assistance of a territory manager, Patrick Lucado, whose territory encompasses the Central Alabama Sales and Marketing Region and who has previously conducted training at your retailer. I would appreciate a few minutes of your time to fill out a brief survey. Your participation in this survey is purely voluntary and your names are not required. All results will remain confidential. By completing the survey, you give us permission to use your survey in our study. All answers will be completed as a collective whole, and we will not be able to identify your individual responses. This survey is to assist in providing focus for future trainings and no further study is intended at this time.

This research project is being undertaken in order to provide better focus for future training regarding riding lawn equipment at your retail location. This survey gives you, the associate, the opportunity to assist in determining in which areas you would like to receive training. I have received many completed surveys already, but in order to conduct a successful research project; I will require the completion and return of all surveys. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey and return it to me or to the territory manager, Patrick Lucado. Thank you again for your participation, your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Lucado
Old Dominion University
Graduate Student