

JOSEF MITTLEMANN

## A Case Study Assignment (part 1)

If experience is the best teacher, what better way to learn about the totality of case method instruction than by writing a teaching case? Many first-time case authors have, to their pleasant surprise, written wonderful teaching documents—sometimes classics. Beginners, therefore, take heart: however untested your writing abilities, you have a better chance of doing a good job than you may think. In this endeavor, neophytes have a somewhat paradoxical advantage over more experienced colleagues: they think more like readers than writers. ... The interview process gives the researcher unique access to “backstage” information about the story, which, by definition, embodies some principle or way of thinking worth studying. And who but the researcher gets to talk with the those who participated in the events, sense their personalities, hear the shadings in their voices, and come as close as anyone can, through conversation, to walking a mile in their moccasins? I compare the process of selecting case data to film editing; many wonderful scenes in case drafts end up, sacrificed to brevity or coherence of pattern, on the “cutting room floor,” but the researcher-writer sees them all.

— Louis B. Barnes<sup>1</sup>

### The Assignment

An important part of this course involves the preparation of a *Field-based case study (Field case)* - in other words, a study that includes contact with the individuals and companies involved. Historically, case studies have been created as discussion based teaching tools to support the application of concepts and learning to specific subject matter or situations. These cases will be no exception. At the same time, they provide a medley of opportunities for you:

- To learn how to distinguish and articulate a critical issue(s) in an organization. Each case study will concentrate on a specific issue critical to the organization you will be working with.
- To learn how to research this issue, including questioning of participating parties and developing conflicting analytical positions and alternatives. Case studies are meant to be mimetic of real situations.
- To deepen your knowledge and understanding of course concepts by applying principles you have learned while dealing with issues of newly emerging data.
- To develop the ability to exercise judgment and discretion as you manipulate the flow of information necessary to producing the best teaching product for potential future readers and users of your case study.

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching and the Case study Method pp 283-96. 1994 Harvard Business School Press Louis B. Barnes, C. Roland Christensen and Abby J. Hansen. Several non applicable examples and parts have been removed usually indicated by “...” Some words have been added to make sense and to give direction to the student reader.

- To work with and develop a relationship with a volunteer alumni protagonist within their existing company.

## Teams

Students will be assigned to teams of three or four, based, as best as possible, on their stated preferences for the type of case or area of study. For example students will indicate preferences for cases about: *strategic planning, marketing, operations, entrepreneurship, finance, human relations and culture or social enterprise*. **Three documents are due from you to fulfill this assignment.**

**1. The case:** In your teams, prepare a case study of no less than 7 pages, single spaced (font and size-Times New Roman 11) and no more than 11 pages. In addition to the body of the text, you should include relevant exhibits. They should not exceed 8 pages in length. There will be ample support for you in this project. Details to follow.

**2. The Teaching Notes:** In addition to the case study, which is group produced, you are expected to hand in, individually, your own teaching note of approximately 500-600 words. This will be explained in part 2 of the assignment.

**3. Takeaways:** Last, you are expected to hand in, individually, your takeaways. Takeaways (250-500 words) are what you have learned from doing this project. This will be explained in part 2 also.

## Grading

The three documents making up the case study represents 35% of your final grade. Details will follow.

## Key Dates

Date	Task to be completed
February 10	Submit area of case study interest form
February 12	Teams assigned
February 13-16	Sign up for team meetings with Hanna for week of February 25
February 18 &19	Special sessions on writing cases with Hanna-choose one
February 25-28	Teams meet with Hannah- Online sign up. Prepare questions and agendas for interviews
March 1-25	Conduct interviews and commence writing
April 6-21	Write case and teaching note drafts
April 25	Case, teaching note, and takeaways are due

**February 11-12 Special class sessions.** Hanna Rodriguez-Farrar '87, '90 AM who works for the Harvard Business School as a research associate and case writer will be an assistant instructor for this part of the class and will be presenting a *seminar on case writing for the class on the evenings of Wednesday February 11 and Thursday February 12. Participation on one evening is a required class commitment. If you are unable to attend the session for other than a Brown approved absence (ie. medical), please notify the instructor immediately. In addition, Hanna will be meeting individually with teams the week of February 17, 2004 per the online sign up schedule. This meeting is also required.*