

September 30, 1999

PAM GIBERT  
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL

SUBJECT: Review of the Revamped Sales and Services  
Associate Training Program (RG-MA-99-006)

In March 1999 the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated a review of the Revamped Sales and Services Associate Training Program (99RR008RG000). This report represents a proactive review of the ongoing program at the request of the Vice President of Retail. This program was initiated in October 1996 and piloted in five districts, beginning in May 1999. The program is scheduled for national rollout in January 2000. The following sections provide specific information on our review of the program and highlight our observations and suggestions for improvement.

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## **Results in Brief**

The Retail and Corporate Employee Development staff have made substantial progress in successfully implementing this pilot program. Our review of the revamped program identified five conditions that warrant the continued attention of the Retail Workforce Strategies Team. The conditions are in the areas of consistency and completeness of:

- Training Presentations,
- Reference Materials,
- Image to the Public,
- Instructors' Knowledge of United States Postal Service (USPS) Products and Services, and
- Overall Management and Control of Training.

This report provides observations, along with the details of our review, and 18 suggestions to improve and strengthen the Revamped Sales and Services Associate Training Program. Implementation of these suggestions will help

ensure that effective internal controls are in place and enforced before future training courses or a national rollout of the revamped program occurs.

Management's actions planned or taken satisfy the intent of 17 of the 18 suggestions in the report. We agreed with management that one suggestion was outside of the scope of the training program. We will consider the area covered by the suggestion in future audit plans.

The Vice President, Retail, stated that the proactive nature of this review was helpful in giving Retail another "set of eyes and ears" during actual training sessions with the pilot. She found OIG findings to be consistent with the observations of Retail, Corporate Employee Development, and the American Postal Workers Union. Additionally, she stated that this review validates her reason for requesting an objective analysis and recommendation by the OIG.

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## Background

The USPS made investments in improving locations; providing positive and friendly work atmospheres; improving the quality and variety of products and services; and deploying Point-of-Service ONE equipment to post offices. Additionally, the effort to revise the training program focuses on one of the Retail's most important assets, its people. Training clerks in this new retail environment helps the USPS realize a greater return on these investments and look forward to increased success in its competitive market.

In October 1996 the Retail staff began their efforts to revamp the outdated retail clerk training program. In these efforts, the Retail staff reviewed selection techniques, indicators for success, job descriptions, and training methods and materials. Additionally, the staff benchmarked with major retail companies and included advice from the American Postal Workers Union, which represents the retail clerks. The staff also sought advice from the National Retail Federation in developing qualification standards for the program.

Each day, over 7 million customers visit Postal Service retail locations and generate approximately \$16 billion annually in walk-in sales, accounting for about 25 percent of all Postal Service revenue. To better serve customers, the Retail and

Corporate Employee Development staffs have developed a new pilot program, which is a revision of the training program used since 1988. The revamped program was primarily designed to enable retail clerks to better serve Postal Service customers and ensure consistent customer service nationwide. Another objective of the program was to change the retail clerks' perception of their role from that of an "order taker" to that of a "service provider."

Training pilots are underway in the Atlanta, New York, Northland, Oklahoma City, and Portland Districts. Management is presently on schedule to finalize the overall program and initiate national training rollout in January 2000.

Selections for a retail clerk position were previously based on seniority, a technical test score, and a subjective assessment by a supervisor. Many clerk positions were filled by mail processing staff, who supported operations and possessed an average of 15 years of experience. The selection process did not focus on or require previous retail experience, sales skills, or interpersonal skills. Also, financial compliance and operations generally received a greater emphasis than helpful, timely customer service. Most retail clerks and supervisors also have mail processing responsibilities that often take precedence over retail unit operations and management.

The revamped method for selecting retail clerks is designed to include rating applicants using an interpersonal skills test. The test is based on previous validation studies that show predictors of performance. It is currently being validated for its effectiveness and use in this program. Efforts to change the perceived role of retail clerks include changing the position title to Sales and Services Associate. The training course is now designed for new hires, part-time/flexible employees, and employees working in non-retail positions within the Postal Service.

A known weakness of the previous training approach was that clerks received too much information in the classroom to retain. Clerks received two weeks of classroom training that covered every main function of the position, followed by one week of unstructured on-the-job training. The new program consists of one week of classroom training and

another week of structured on-the-job training. The structured on-the-job training is a key component of the new training approach that focuses on product information and sales. The new classroom training also includes an emphasis on customer relations and projecting a courteous, professional image. With the changing role of the retail clerks in the Postal Service, clerks are now required to offer more effective customer service to include offering and selling additional products and services.

To facilitate retail operations, a new Point-of-Service ONE system, currently under deployment, was developed to provide customers and retail employees with vastly improved and more timely information about available USPS services. The equipment is designed to encourage selling by prompting clerks to offer the customer choices and best-value services, provide standardization of processes, and allow immediate access to all postal options and costs, thus enabling quick, informed decisions. The equipment also features on-line verification and authorization of debit or credit cards, and improved inventory management. Point-of-Service ONE training was to be included in the retail clerks' classroom training in districts where Point-of-Service ONE has been deployed. However, if deployment occurs in the district at a later date, the clerks were to be trained on Integrated Retail Terminals, the equipment currently used in most post offices.

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**Scope, Objectives,  
And Methodology**

The scope of our review covered the ongoing efforts to revise the Sales and Services Associate Training Program. We focused on whether the revamped training program achieves the goals of Retail. Some of these goals include: mirroring successful business practices such as “upselling” and consistent branding; changing the perceived role of retail clerks from that of an “order-taker” to a “service provider”; improving product knowledge of retail clerks; enhancing customer service; and implementing consistent retail clerk training nationwide in order to improve the ability of the USPS to compete. The OIG also reviewed the coordination of this program with the Point-of-Service ONE training program.

Because the Sales and Services Associate Training Program is currently in the developmental stage, we reported the results of our review as observations and are

making suggestions to Retail to strengthen program processes and management controls. Our independent review was performed as a proactive effort to assist Retail management in their efforts to refine the revamped training program for future Postal Service retail clerks. We did not review the cost-benefit or overall effectiveness of the revamped training program.

The pilot was initiated in May 1999 in the New York, Northland, Oklahoma City, and Portland Districts. In June 1999, the pilot began in the Atlanta District. Initiation followed a two and a half-year research and planning effort that culminated in the revision of the classroom course, the qualifying examination, and the development of a structured on-the-job training segment.

We visited four of the five pilot sites. We observed classroom training at two locations and structured on-the-job training at three locations. We also examined the Sales and Services Associate Training Program Strategic Plan. Our examination of training materials included reviewing employee manuals, training manuals, structured on-the-job training lessons, and reference tools. We interviewed Headquarters and field Postal Service staff responsible for administering the classroom and structured on-the-job training pilots. During the training, we also met with Union representatives, Postmasters, Station and Finance Managers, and trainees. Additionally, we observed the Job Instructor Training Program for this pilot and reviewed the printed version of the new Retail Supervisor Training Program designed to assist supervisors in communicating with clerks, creating the steps needed to set expectations for clerks. This training is currently being designed to reinforce other retail training efforts and is anticipated to be available in the year 2000.

This review was conducted from March 1999 through August 1999, in accordance with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, Quality Standards for Inspections. We discussed our observations and suggestions with appropriate management officials during the course of our review and have included their comments where appropriate.

**Observations and Suggestions**

Our review identified five conditions that warrant the continued review and emphasis of Retail and Corporate Employee Development. The conditions are in the areas of the consistency and completeness of:

1. Training Presentations,
2. Reference Materials,
3. Image to the Public,
4. Instructors' Knowledge of USPS Products and Services, and
5. Overall Management and Control of Training.

In general, all four locations observed achieved some success, particularly in the areas of uniform image, knowledge of Postal Service programs, and management and control of the training program. The following chart summarizes the areas in which improvements can be made.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT				
Conditions	Locations			
	A	B	C	D
1	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	
4		X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X

**Training Presentations**

Training presentations varied in terms of structured on-the-job course approach and content, which affects the quality of information, provided to the clerks and impacts their ability to effectively serve customers.

At three of the four pilot training locations visited, the OIG reviewed the revamped on-the-job training course approach for consistency, and found significant variations. At *Location D*, we found that the structured on-the-job instruction generally adhered to the design of the training. However, at *Locations A* and *C*, the structured on-the-job instruction provided closely resembled the previous method of training. The OIG did not observe structured on-the-job instruction at *Location B*.

The previous method of training consisted of experienced retail clerks working beside a trainee, with the trainee asking questions as needed. The new method of training is more

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The previous method of training consisted of experienced retail clerks working beside a trainee, with the trainee asking questions as needed. The new method of training is more structured, in that, it consists of 80 structured lessons, 32 on which clerks must be certified. The instructor is supposed to demonstrate and explain how to perform a transaction. The trainee then performs the process for the instructor in order to exhibit understanding. This approach then requires the trainee to wait on customers and provide customer service. If the trainee is not able to perform the lesson tasks by waiting on customers, the instructor administers the lessons by role-playing with the trainee.

At *Location C*, instead of waiting on customers, a trainee worked beside experienced clerks and asked questions only when needed. At *Location A*, neither instructor used the pilot program method of conducting structured on-the-job instruction and both used outdated trainee certification forms for training sessions. At *Location D*, classroom instructors emphasized that while the information outlined in the training modules was correct, they explained that they used different procedures in their district.

Implementing consistent training ensures that clerks receive accurate information, which enables them to offer products and services to the public that best serve customer needs.

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**Suggestion**

The Vice President, Retail, should:

1. Require instructors to adhere to guidelines in the new pilot program method of conducting structured on-the-job training, and use the revised evaluation forms.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion, and officials have conducted midpoint briefings with District Managers and

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Managers of Human Resources, Marketing, Retail, Training, and post office operations to review pilot results and feedback. The Retail Workforce Strategies Team learned that in many cases instructors were not encouraged or permitted to adhere to guidelines. During these briefings adherence to design was emphasized and suggestions were solicited for solutions concerning valid operational constraints. Where these suggestions were appropriate, they have been incorporated into the program's design. Additionally, the Retail Workforce Strategies Team has:

- documented and instituted a comprehensive management instruction that outlines policies, procedures, and responsibilities for the administration of this program; and
- developed an Administrator's Guide that provides more detailed instructions.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

The implemented actions by the Retail Workforce Strategies Team satisfied the intent of the OIG suggestion.



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## Training Length And Schedules

Modifications of training length and schedules caused confusion among trainees and incomplete coverage of program information.

At the four locations where training was observed, the instructors modified the training schedule, which deviated from Retail's objective of training consistency and caused the trainees to receive incomplete product and service information.

At *Location A*, instructors modified the training structure by having trainees spend their first two days of structured on-the-job instruction role-playing the first 32 critical lessons in the classroom, instead of at their Postal stations. Trainees at this location also spent their third day of structured on-the-job training observing the instructors' work at the window, instead of serving customers and implementing lessons.

At *Location C*, an on-the-job instructor did not complete the required 32 critical processes within the week provided for the structured on-the-job instruction. This resulted in the trainee requiring additional training time to complete the required processes.

At the same location, both trainees observed by the OIG trained at stations other than their own. At *Location A*, only one of the two trainees observed was required to perform structured on-the-job training at a location other than her own post office. Additionally, at *Location D*, students were required to perform structured on-the-job training at other locations, some travelling extensive distances. Two essential reasons for clerks to receive training in their own locations are to ensure clerks are familiar with the unique services and products offered in their stations, and to ensure clerks are familiar with their station's design and station-related procedures.

At *Locations B* and *D*, course schedules were either not designed or not followed by classroom instructors. At *Location D*, classroom instructors seemed confused about suggested timeframes for modules. In several instances, they followed timeframes precisely, while in other instances, they completed modules in half as much or much longer

than the suggested time. At this same location, the instructors skipped some exercises, yet at other times seemed very concerned and anxious about “following the script.” This resulted in deviations from the suggested timeframes, creating confusion among the students and a lack of consistency in training from district to district.

At *Locations A and D*, the on-the-job instructors observed had prior teaching experience, and seemed more comfortable with the training. At *Location C*, a first-time instructor appeared unprepared for and was unsure about conducting structured on-the-job training. The instructor indicated she would have liked to role-play during her own training, in order to receive feedback on how to perform role-playing and grade the trainees. As a result, the instructor did not use the Integrated Retail Terminal and allowed the trainee to refer to the training manual while role-playing.

At *Location C*, the instructor and trainees offered several potential ideas for improving the program. The on-the-job instructor stated that timelines for the structured on-the-job training modules should be created. Also, both trainees stated they would like to have had more practice using the Integrated Retail Terminal prior to structured on-the-job training, in order to feel more comfortable working at the window.

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**Suggestions**

The Vice President, Retail, should:

2. Monitor future training to ensure that the length and content of the new training course is followed and that classroom and on-the-job instructors understand the importance of adhering to timelines.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion. The establishment of validated timelines has been implemented and will be included in certification training for all classroom and on-the-job instructors. Retail management also agrees that ongoing monitoring of adherence to the entire administration of this program is important and has incorporated a continuous review of training evaluation data into the process of training development.

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3. Require structured on-the-job training be performed at the new clerk's post office if an instructor is available at that location.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion and informed OIG that they have included it in the Management Instruction and the Administrator's Guide for the course.

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4. Include more role-playing activities in training for on-the-job instructors to ensure greater use of this technique.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion. As a result of a conference in Norman, Oklahoma that brought together key members of the program, adjustments and enhancements were made to the classroom and on-the-job segments to better meet the needs of future students and instructors. Also, additional role-playing scenarios have been incorporated into the classroom segment.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

The implemented actions by management satisfy the intent of these OIG suggestions. The creation of the Management Instruction and Administrator's Guide further enhances the implementation of these suggestions.

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## Reference Materials

Reference materials provided at the four pilot training locations were inconsistent, causing confusion among students and the receipt of incomplete and incorrect information.

When the Point-of-Service ONE system is fully deployed, it will provide improved and timely information about available services and immediate access to all Postal options and costs. However, until Point-of-Service ONE is implemented nationwide, the Postal Service must make extra efforts to ensure that staff is provided with the most current information as quickly as possible. Listed below are situations in which reference materials are available within the Postal Service but not distributed or shared.

At *Locations B, C, and D*, the OIG observed that trainees did not receive keyboard diagram reference cards for the keyboards used with the Integrated Retail Terminals. At *Location B*, to compensate for the omission of this reference material, an instructor unsuccessfully attempted to photograph the keyboard; *Location C* used a photocopy of a keyboard diagram that contained little explanatory information; and *Location D* took approximately 45 minutes of classroom time to explain the function of each key. However, through our review, we discovered that a UNISYS guidebook at *Location C* contains several keyboard diagrams and explanations for the functions of the keys, which could be made available program wide.

Additional examples where information was omitted are as follows. *Location B* did not have the video required for Module 6 of classroom training. Also, during our visits to *Locations B, C, and D*, trainees did not receive phone card quick-reference cards. The reference cards outline the procedures for selling the phone card, the current rates available, and customer service information. Additionally, clerks were not provided a listing of area bulk mail center locations to use as a reference when working at the window.

Several locations had outdated reference materials. *Locations A and C* had outdated forms and *Locations A and D* had outdated manuals, some of which were two previous issues old. At *Location C*, an on-the-job instructor said that it was not always easy to keep up with the updates

provided in the Postal Bulletin. The Postal Bulletin is published biweekly and is the key venue the Postal Service uses to inform USPS employees on Postal issues and manual updates.

In comparing the old training manual to the new, we noted that it contains additional examples of USPS forms, products, and services. At *Location C*, because detailed reference materials were excluded from the revised training manuals, the instructors who taught the on-the-job instructors needed to use class time to find essential training materials. For example, the new manual, PO-130 Postal Products and Services, which was distributed in October 1998 was not provided to all trainees of the pilot training program. This manual is an effective reference tool that clerks can use at the window, in conjunction with the revised training manual, to improve customer service.

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**Management's  
Corrective Action**

In June 1999 classroom and on-the-job instructors at four locations, Retail and Corporate Employee Development representatives, and a union representative gathered in Norman, Oklahoma to discuss their impressions and concerns and proposed revisions to improve the training program. Participants reviewed and assessed all the reference materials used at the pilot locations and agreed on materials that would be consistently distributed to all locations in the future.

Representatives from *Location D* did not attend, nor submit comments concerning their assessment of the new pilot. Management at this location thought that because the instructors had limited experience implementing the revamped training program, the instructors would not be able to provide an effective assessment of the program.

In addition to the revisions discussed above, the Vice President, Retail:

- recommended that the Retail Workforce Strategies Team create and distribute a template that lists area bulk mail centers to new retail clerks;
- directed the team to work with the Postal Bulletin staff to redesign the Retail section to facilitate identification and location of updated retail reference information by clerks; and

- advised that her staff is trying to get the USPS web page address for retail listed on each page of the training materials, for the retail clerks to be able to obtain reference materials updates on-line.

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<b>Trainee Suggestions</b>	One trainee at <i>Location C</i> suggested several informal ideas that Retail management should evaluate. These suggestions include: providing each on-the-job instructor with a trainee badge to issue to their trainee for the week of structured on-the-job training, issuing a flowchart of services that can and cannot be combined, revising the reference sheet of the most frequently used account identifier codes and corresponding definitions, developing a list of 10-15 of the most frequently used form numbers with an accompanying explanation of what forms are used for, and providing this information before the trainees attend classroom training.
<b>Suggestions</b>	The Vice President, Retail, should:  5. Provide each training location with the approved training materials and distribute keyboard diagrams with explanations of functions.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management agreed with the suggestion and informed OIG that the revised Administrator's Guide lists the training aids needed to successfully conduct the classroom sessions. The guide also lists instructions for ordering training aids.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	Actions implemented by Retail management satisfy the intent of the suggestion.
	6. Incorporate some of the helpful forms, products, and services found in the pre-revised training materials into the revised training manual or the PO-130.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management agreed with the suggestion and informed OIG that a list of useful learning aids was compiled, including the PO-130 and stated these are specifically referenced in course materials.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

Actions implemented by Retail management satisfy the intent of the suggestion.

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7. Obtain comments from structured on-the-job and classroom training representatives at *Location D* for a more thorough assessment of the variations within the program.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion and stated that this was accomplished during the conference in Norman, Oklahoma.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

Actions implemented and underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the suggestion.

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**Uniform and  
Professional Image**

The Postal Service's ability to establish a consistent branding with the public is limited by the lack of a uniform, professional image at three of the four locations visited.

During our review, we examined professionalism and uniformity because personal experiences in Postal lobbies are a major influence on public perception of the value and effectiveness of the Postal Service. Marketing management emphasized the importance of presenting a professional, uniform image for the USPS to remain competitive.

Trainees were generally friendly with customers at all structured on-the-job training sites visited. At *Location D*, classroom instructors, on-the-job instructors, and trainees were dressed in the current Postal uniforms, as were the on-the-job instructors at *Location A*. At *Location A*, the trainees were not in Postal uniform for structured on-the-job training, however, they wore professional attire.

In contrast, the instructor at *Location B* who stressed the importance of wearing the current Postal uniform was not in uniform himself. Similarly, one on-the-job instructor at *Location C* was not in uniform. Another on-the-job instructor was in uniform one day, but wore a shirt that bore the old USPS logo on another day. At *Location C*, the trainees were not in uniform and not in appropriate attire for working at the window. Also, at *Locations A* and *C*, buildings and materials displayed the old Postal Service logo.

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**Suggestions**

The Vice President, Retail, should:

8. Improve efforts to ensure that instructors have a clear understanding of the importance of presenting a professional image to trainees at all times and that all instructors and retail clerk trainees wear the current Postal uniforms.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion and stated that as a result of this suggestion, master instructors from every district will receive focused training on image at national training in October.



<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	Efforts underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the OIG suggestion.
	9. Continue efforts to remodel outdated post offices to ensure a consistent branding of the USPS.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management stated that the suggestion is outside the scope of this training program and beyond the responsibility of this program's intended audience.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	While this is suggestion outside the scope of the training program, we believe, retail clerks should be aware of how the conditions of a postal facility may impact customer service and loyalty. However, we will consider this area in future audit plans.
	10. Implement professional attire requirements for all sales and service associates.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management informed OIG that currently, revisions to the Employee Labor Manual that are in the process of being adapted will identify the standards for non-uniformed employees. Additionally, they informed OIG that specific requirements are documented in an employee uniform brochure and Postal Bulletin.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	Management's comments satisfy the intent of the suggestion that was revised as a result of the exit briefing with Retail management on September 14, 1999.
	11. Include position descriptions for retail clerks in the front of the classroom training manuals to reinforce position and attire requirements.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management stated that position descriptions for Sales and Services Associates have been included in the classroom training materials.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	The implemented action by Retail management satisfies the intent of the OIG suggestion.

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**Knowledge of USPS  
Products And  
Services**

The knowledge of USPS products and services demonstrated by training instructors at three locations was at times incomplete or incorrect, resulting in students receiving some misinformation.

We observed that experienced clerks who conducted the training were not knowledgeable in some areas, as illustrated in the following examples. At *Location B*, Delivery Confirmation was inaccurately described as a tracking system that enables the Postal Service to track the location of packages when in transit. Students were inaccurately told that the Postal Service finally has the same service as the competition. Furthermore, instructors did not explain the discounts or costs of Delivery Confirmation and did not distribute written guidance.

At *Location B*, when a student asked if statistics comparing Express Mail to competing services were available, the instructors stated that they did not have the statistics readily accessible. At this same location, in response to a trainee's inquiry, an instructor stated that the USPS could not advertise its acceptance of credit cards. However, recent commercials and other advertisements promote this feature. Also at *Location B*, an instructor responded to a trainee's question concerning the usage rates of credit and debit cards by Postal Service customers by stating that there are statistics somewhere, but he had no idea where. The instructors made no effort to obtain the information. At *Location D*, students and instructors were confused about activating phone cards with purchase amounts. The instructors made no effort to research correct information in order to provide an explanation. At *Location C*, clerks were unaware of discounts for three or more certificates of mailing because the Domestic Mail Manual did not contain this information.

In contrast, at *Location B*, instructors effectively explained the advantages of Express Mail when compared to products and services of USPS competitors. At *Locations A, B, and D*, on-the-job instructors emphasized the importance of asking if customers want to pay using a credit or debit card. Credit or debit card usage reduces transaction costs and increases customer convenience.

Also, USPS market research indicates that customers do not fully understand USPS products and services. For example, a recent study illustrates that only 20 percent of customers know the difference between certified and registered mail. Additionally, insight gained by Retail management through benchmarking against the private sector revealed that continuous education for clerks through refresher courses is beneficial.

It is essential that clerks have a clear and current understanding of products and services available, in order to better inform customers. Having this understanding will enable clerks to suggest products and services that best satisfy customer needs.

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**Suggestions**

The Vice President, Retail, should:

12. Provide instructors with statistical information about customers' limited knowledge of Postal products and services, such as registered versus certified mail, and encourage instructors to share with trainees.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management informed OIG of the complexity of Postal Service products and services and the confusion it causes customers. Management also stated that rather than rely on whether or not instructors believe customers have limited knowledge that management addressed the issue through course design. They stated classroom and on-the-job segments stress the expectation for associates to inquire about customers mailing needs and to suggest products or services that best meet those needs.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

Actions implemented and underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the suggestion.

OIG fully understands management's efforts to address this issue through course design. However, the purpose of this suggestion was to ensure that instructors and trainees are provided with market research, which was provided to OIG, that illustrates customers' lack of understanding of Postal Service products and services. Without an understanding of the extent of the public's limited knowledge of those products and services, sales and services associates may not be fully aware of the importance of explaining suggested products or services to customers.

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	13. Design a supplemental training course, an overview of basic required knowledge for Postal retail clerks, to be used as a follow-up for continuous education.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management stated that because the course is designed to be flexible and is conducive as a refresher training course, lesson plans can be delivered to any clerk as needed and without modification. However, management additionally informed OIG that they believe that ongoing training for clerks is critical to improving proficiency and is identified in their five year retail training plan. Management also stated that there are currently a number of initiatives under development and review that will provide refresher information, updates, and continuous education.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	Actions implemented and underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the suggestion.
	14. clarify to instructors and retail clerks that Delivery Confirmation provides proof of delivery but does not yet track the location of packages in transit.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management agreed with the suggestion and stated that although they do not believe that this misunderstanding is widespread, they will reinforce this feature during the national master instructor training.
<b>Evaluation of Management's Comments</b>	Efforts underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the OIG suggestion.
	15. Coordinate with Tactical Marketing to create informational tools that compare Postal Service products such as Priority, Express, and Global Priority Mail to the competition, enabling retail clerks to better educate themselves and customers.
<b>Management's Comments</b>	Management agreed with the suggestion and stated that they have adapted the suggestion by incorporating this type of information in the classroom Facilitator's Guide.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

Efforts underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of the OIG suggestion

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## Management and Control of Training

The overall management and control of training at all locations was not always effective, resulting in trainees acquiring insufficient knowledge about how to perform their duties.

The Postal Service has made a substantial investment in significantly changing the retail environment, in order to mirror successful business practices and improve its ability to compete. To assist retail clerks in satisfying customer needs, the Postal Service developed the customer service initiative GIST, which consists of *greeting* (G) each customer, *inquiring* (I) as to the customer's needs, *suggesting* (S) items or services that best satisfy those needs, then *thanking* (T) the customer after completing the sale. The objective of suggestive selling and satisfaction selling of Postal Service products and services is to improve customer satisfaction and increase revenue generated per employee. Teaching and implementing this selling technique must be consistent to ensure that clerks are proficient in determining customer needs and offering products and services that best satisfy those needs.

The instructors observed by the OIG attained varying levels of success in communicating the importance of GIST, implementing it, and explaining procedures of suggestive selling and satisfaction selling. At *Location B*, the instructors successfully integrated the GIST concept throughout the classroom training. At *Location A*, an on-the-job instructor successfully intermingled the concept by explaining to a trainee the techniques for suggesting other products and upgrading a sale. At *Location D*, the on-the-job instructor assisted the trainee with suggesting alternate products to customers, then explaining the suggestions to the trainee after customers had left. At *Locations A, B, and D*, the instructors stressed providing friendly, helpful customer service consistent with the service technique GIST.

By listening to their customers, instructors emphasized that the trainees could then use this knowledge to serve other customers more effectively. These examples clearly demonstrate the effective accomplishment of some of the goals of the revamped training program.

However, several instructors and trainees achieved less success in teaching and implementing GIST. At *Location C*, an instructor stated she was uncomfortable with “upselling” because customers often want to use the least expensive method for sending packages. Her trainee did not attempt to upgrade the mailing of an international package by offering services such as Global Priority or International Express. At the same location, another instructor and trainee did not consistently ask customers if they wanted to pay electronically because they stated they were uncomfortable doing so. Additionally, at *Location B*, the instructors advised the trainees to overestimate delivery times for packages just to be safe, which may create the misperception that competitors deliver packages more expediently than the Postal Service.

The Facilitators Guide for Revised Job Instructor Training defines what constitutes constructive feedback and stresses that the importance of this feedback cannot be overemphasized. At *Locations A* and *D*, the instructors carefully walked trainees through transactions they had not previously performed. Instructors at *Location A* transitioned from helping the trainees to perform transactions to allowing them to work independently. These instructors also asked thought-provoking questions and provided helpful suggestions to trainees for loss prevention. At *Locations A and C*, the instructors reviewed many transactions after customers left, providing reinforcement training to the trainees. Also, at *Location C*, the instructor provided constructive feedback by correcting a trainee when he made an insensitive statement about determining the value of a customer’s package. During the training process, trainees at three pilot locations were encouraged to and asked questions.

Conversely, instructors also missed opportunities to offer constructive feedback and provide a comfortable training environment. At *Locations A, C, and D*, the on-the-job instructors did not correct the trainees when they did not ask customers the required questions for determining customer needs. At *Location D*, a trainee was extremely rude to instructors and other classmates. The instructors neglected

to address this behavior. At *Location C*, a trainee gave a guarantee on the delivery of a Priority Mail package, and the on-the-job instructor was not present to provide guidance and correct the trainee.

A constructive learning environment includes providing trainees with clear, concise instruction. At *Locations B*, instructors emphasized the importance of measuring and weighing packages correctly; an area of revenue loss when clerks charge incorrect amounts. At *Location A*, on-the-job instructors provided explanations for the procedures to verify debit and credit sales for the day.

However, instructors failed to provide clear, concise instruction on several occasions. At *Locations B* and *D*, the classroom instructors frequently used acronyms that were not defined in the class or in the training manuals and did not refer to the handbooks for reference purposes, confusing students who were not familiar with the Postal Service. At the same locations, these instructors selectively used the module exercises, providing incomplete training. Additionally, at *Location B*, the instructors failed to explain the roles of mystery shoppers and close-out persons, assuming that students knew this information.

Classroom instructors working as a team facilitate presenting program information to trainees. At *Location B*, the classroom instructors created a synergy that made for a more enriching experience by assisting one another with current Postal regulations and providing real-life stories that reinforced the lessons taught. In contrast, at *Location D*, the classroom instructors failed to work together when instructing a large class of trainees. At this location, only one instructor was present in the classroom during instruction.

One of the objectives of the training program is to ensure that students are comfortable interacting with their instructors. At *Location B*, the classroom instructors displayed mannerisms that trainees may interpret as intimidating by responding to trainees' questions sarcastically. Such behavior may cause trainees to refrain from participating in discussions and asking questions.



The conduct of the instructors will influence the perception trainees have of acceptable behavior in the Postal Service. At *Location B*, instructors spoke positively of the retail clerk position by describing it as a rewarding opportunity. However, at the same location, the instructors engaged in some irreverent and condescending behavior. At *Location C*, one of the instructors arrived late and left early, resulting in the trainee's inability to complete the training modules. Furthermore, some of the experienced clerks and an on-the-job instructor ate at the window while other clerks served customers.

Instructors held several perceptions and misperceptions that influenced the quality of training and customer service. Specifically, at *Location A*, an on-the-job instructor perceived that the training course designers lacked knowledge about the retail clerk position. At *Location C*, one of the on-the-job instructors stated that she would feel silly implementing role-playing. A trainee at this location only sporadically asked all the required questions because asking the questions made her feel uncomfortable.

We observed that Point-of-Service ONE training was not incorporated into classroom and structured on-the-job instruction in districts where Point-of-Service ONE has been deployed. At *Location A*, trainees who would not be using Point-of-Service ONE for some time were trained on the Integrated Retail Terminal. In contrast, at *Location C*, a trainee who would soon be using Point-of-Service ONE was trained for the Integrated Retail Terminal at two different stations. Some trainees at *Locations C* and *D* and half of the class at *Location B* were trained on the Integrated Retail Terminals when they would be using Point-of-Service ONE systems at their stations. By instructing the trainee on the Integrated Retail Terminal, the trainee could not perform the structured on-the-job training lessons that pertain to Point-of-Service ONE.

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## Suggestions

The Vice President, Retail, should:

16. Accentuate that instructors understand the importance of how to perform satisfaction selling of products and services; provide accurate estimates of delivery times and packages; provide constructive feedback and clear, concise instruction to trainees; work as a team to

create a comfortable learning environment; and  
conduct themselves in a professional manner and  
model the desired behaviors for window clerks.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion, stating that a significant change in this revised course is the requirement that all instructors be certified. Management also stated that these courses have been tailored for this program to include many retail performance issues, including those listed in the suggestion.

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17. Summarize the history and expertise behind the course development in the front section of the classroom manual.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion. As a result of the exit briefing on September 14, 1999, and confirmed in their management comments, Retail management will include in the preface of the classroom course credit given to sales and services associates, trainers, and Postmasters for developing the material. Management also stated that they embrace the value of trainees knowing that this quality training was produced by their peers.

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18. Incorporate Point-of-Service ONE training into the classroom and structured on-the-job instruction for trainees who will use Point-of-Service ONE at their stations.

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**Management's  
Comments**

Management agreed with the suggestion and will continue to monitor this instructional design feature.

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**Evaluation of  
Management's  
Comments**

The efforts underway by Retail management satisfy the intent of these suggestions.

We appreciated the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff during the review. If you have any questions, please contact me at (703) 248-2300.

Sylvia L. Owens  
Assistant Inspector General  
for Revenue and Cost Containment

cc: Allen R. Kane  
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PATRICIA M. GIBERT  
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL



September 29, 1999

SYLVIA L. OWENS  
ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL  
FOR REVENUE/COST CONTAINMENT

This is a response to the draft management advisory report of the new Sales and Services Associate Training Program for Retail Clerks (Report Number RG-MA-99-Draft). We have reviewed the report and met with the IG team to discuss the findings and clarify discrepancies.

Following is our response to the suggestions made by the IG team.

*Suggestion 1. Require instructors to adhere to guidelines in the new pilot program method of conducting on-the-job training, and use the revised evaluation forms.*

We concur. Retail Workforce Strategies conducted mid-pilot briefings with district managers and managers of human resources, marketing, retail, training, and post office operations. These briefings covered pilot results and feedback. We learned from early pilot results that in many cases instructors were not encouraged or permitted to adhere to guidelines. Field managers have responsibility for enforcement of nationally designed programs for training, and their input is important. During these briefings the importance of adherence to design was emphasized and suggestions for solutions to valid operational constraints were solicited. Where appropriate, they have been incorporated into the design of the program.

Based on results and feedback from the pilots, we have documented and instituted a comprehensive Management Instruction that outlines policy, procedure, and responsibilities for the administration of this program. We have also developed an Administrator's Guide that furnishes more detailed instructions.

*Suggestion 2. Monitor future training to ensure that the length and content of the new training course is followed and that the classroom and on-the-job instructors understand the importance of adhering to timelines.*

We concur. One of the objectives for piloting this program was to finalize realistic timelines. The standard process in developing training courses is to suggest timelines that can only be validated during live sessions with students. These have been established and will be included in the certification training for all classroom and on-the-job instructors.

We agree that on-going monitoring of adherence to the entire administration of this program is important. We have incorporated into our process of training development continuous review of training evaluation data.

*Suggestion 3. Require on-the-job training be performed at the new clerk's post office if an instructor is available at the new location.*

We concur. This requirement is identified in the Management Instruction and the Administrators Guide for this course.

*Suggestion 4. Include more role-playing activities for the on-the-job instructors to ensure greater use of this technique.*

We concur. Prior to the mid-pilot field manager briefings in July/August, we brought together in Norman, OK a classroom and on-the-job instructor from each of the five pilot districts. This group spent a week sharing experiences, providing feedback, and reviewing all course materials. This proved to be a very valuable activity. Adjustments and enhancements were made to both the classroom and on-the-job portions that will better meet the needs of future students and instructors. Additional role-playing scenarios were discussed and included in the classroom portion of the course at this time.

*Suggestion 5. Provide each training location with the approved training materials and distribute keyboard diagram explanations of functions.*

We concur. The administrator's guide lists all the training aides needed to successfully conduct the classroom

sessions. The guide also lists instructions for ordering. Training materials will be distributed to all locations with the national implementation of this program. Additional copies will be made available using the same process all other course materials are supplied.

*Suggestion 6. Incorporate some of the helpful forms, products, and services found in the pre-revised training materials into the revised training manual or the PO-130.*

We concur. During the meeting with pilot classroom and on-the-job instructors in Norman, OK, a list of useful learning aids was compiled, including the PO 130. These are specifically referenced in course materials.

*Suggestion 7. Obtain comments from on-the-job and classroom representatives at Location D for a more thorough assessment of the variations within the program.*

We concur. This was accomplished during the meeting in Norman, OK.

*Suggestion 8. Improve efforts to ensure that instructors have a clear understanding of the importance of presenting a professional image to trainees at all times and that all instructors and retail clerk trainees wear the current postal uniforms.*

We concur. The revised Facilitators' Guide and Administrator's Guide specifically require instructors wear the retail uniform during training. Trainees do not qualify for uniform allowance, and cannot be required to wear uniforms if they are not in the uniform allowance program.

National training will be conducted in October where master instructors from every district will be certified to return to their districts and train instructors for this program. They will receive focused training on professional image as a result of this suggestion. We also plan to videotape the segment and provide it to all district training centers.

*Suggestion 9. Continue efforts to remodel outdated post offices to ensure a consistent branding of the USPS.*

This suggestion is outside the scope of this training program. Additionally, it is beyond the responsibility of the intended audience for this program.

*Suggestion 10. Incorporate the attire requirements in the position descriptions that are currently being drafted for the Sales and Service Associate (PS-5), and the Lead Sales and Services Associate (PS-6), and the Sales and Services and Distribution Associate (PS-5).*

Uniform program requirements historically have never been included in position descriptions. Inclusion of the requirements could be confusing since not all employees automatically qualify for uniform allowance.

Specific requirements are documented in an employee uniform brochure and postal bulletin. Revisions to the Employee Labor Manual (ELM) are in process of being adapted that will identify standards for non-uniformed employees.

*Suggestion 11. Include position descriptions for retail clerks in the front of the classroom training materials to reinforce position and attire requirements.*

We concur. The position description for sales and services associates has been included in the classroom training material now that our contractual obligations have been met. Attire will not be incorporated in the position descriptions, but is addressed in the course.

*Suggestion 12. Provide instructors with statistical information about customers' limited knowledge of postal products and services, such as registered versus certified mail, and encourage instructors to share with trainees.*

Our products and services are very complex and thus confusing to our customers. Rather than relying on whether or not instructors believe that customers have limited knowledge we have addressed this issue through course design. Both the classroom and on-the-job portions stress the expectation for associates to inquire about customer's mailing needs and to suggest products or services that best meet that need. Each structured on-the-job transaction-based process repeats those steps. This method has proven most successful for adult learning of new behaviors.

*Suggestion 13. Design a supplemental training course, an overview of basic required knowledge for postal retail clerks, to be used as a follow up for continuous education.*

This course is designed in such a way that it is flexible and conducive for refresher training on the basics. The structured on-the-job transaction-based lesson plans can be delivered to any clerk as needed. No additional modification to the course is required for this purpose.

We believe on-going training for all clerks is critical to improving proficiency and as such, is identified as a tactic in our 5 year retail training plan. We currently have a number of initiatives under development and review that will provide refresher information, updates and continuous education.

*Suggestion 14. Clarify to instructors and retail clerks that Delivery Confirmation provides proof of delivery but does not yet track the location of packages in transit.*

We concur. We do not believe that the misunderstanding concerning delivery confirmation is widespread, however, we will reinforce this feature during the national master instructor training.

*Suggestion 15. Coordinate with the Tactical Marketing Office to create informational tools that compare postal service products such as Priority, Express, and Global Priority Mail to the competition, enabling retail clerks to better educate themselves and customers.*

We concur and have adapted this suggestion by incorporating the type of information referenced in the classroom Facilitator's Guide.

*Suggestion 16. Accentuate that instructors understand the importance of how to "upsell" products and services; provide accurate estimates of delivery times and packages; provide constructive feedback and clear, concise instruction to trainees; work as a team to create a comfortable learning environment; and conduct themselves in a professional manner and model the desired behaviors for window clerks.*

We concur. A significant change in the way this course is to be delivered versus the old course is the requirement that all



instructors be certified. Corporate Education and Development sponsors certification courses for both classroom and on-the-job instructors. This process provides the knowledge and skills necessary for being a successful instructor.

Furthermore, these courses have been tailored for this program to include many retail performance issues, including those listed in this suggestion.

*Suggestion 17. Summarize the history and expertise behind the course development in the front section of the classroom manual.*

We concur. In the preface of the classroom course, credit is given to window clerks, trainers, and postmasters for developing the material. We embrace the value of trainees knowing that this quality training is a product of their peers.

*Suggestion 18. Incorporate Point of Service training into the classroom and on-the-job instruction for trainees who will use Point of Service at their stations.*

We concur. The design of this course is intentionally equipment neutral. POS ONE will continue to evolve and the task of keeping classroom materials up-to-date is daunting and costly. The scenarios now rely on the expertise of the trainer to lead the associates' equipment usage. We will continue to monitor this instructional design feature and adjust if necessary.

The proactive nature of this review was helpful in giving us another "set of eyes and ears" during actual training sessions in the pilots. The findings are consistent with our own observations, along with our partners, Corporate Education and Development and the APWU. This review validates my reasons for requesting the IG's objective analysis and recommendations. We believe we have addressed all the suggestions listed in this report with process and course improvements. The quality of execution will be continuously monitored in the future.



Patricia M. Gibert

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**Major Contributors to  
This Report**

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