**Recommendations**

**for the preparation** **of a case for class discussion**

1. Skim the case rather quickly to get an overview of the situation it presents. This quick overview should give you the general flavor of the situation and indicate the kinds of issues and problems that you will need to wrestle with. If your instructor has provided you with study questions for the case, now is the time to read them carefully.

2. Read the case thoroughly to digest the facts and circumstances. On this reading, try to gain full command of the situation presented in the case. Begin to develop some tentative answers to the study questions your instructor has provided or that are provided in the Case-TUTOR software package which you can download at the Web site for the text. If your instructor has elected not to give you assignment questions or has elected not to use Case-TUTOR, then start forming your own picture of the overall situation being described.

3. Carefully review all the information presented in the exhibits. Often, there is an important story in the numbers contained in the exhibits. Expect the information in the case exhibits to be crucial enough to materially affect your diagnosis of the situation.

4. Decide what the strategic issues are. Until you have identified the strategic issues and problems in the case, you don’t know what to analyze, which tools and analytical techniques are called for, or otherwise how to proceed. At times the strategic issues are clear—either being stated in the case or else obvious from reading the case. At other times you will have to dig them out from all the information given.

5. Start your analysis of the issues with some number crunching. A big majority of strategy cases call for some kind of number crunching—calculating assorted financial ratios to check out the company’s financial condition and recent performance, calculating growth rates of sales or profits or unit volume, checking out profit margins and the makeup of the cost structure, and understanding whatever revenue cost-profit relationships are present.

6. Apply the concepts and techniques of strategic analysis you have been studying. Strategic analysis is not just a collection of opinions; rather, it entails applying the concepts and analytical tools you know to cut beneath the surface and produce sharp insight and understanding. Every case assigned is strategy related and presents you with an opportunity to usefully apply what you have learned. Your instructor is looking for you to demonstrate that you know how and when to use the material presented in the text chapters.

7. Check out conflicting opinions and make some judgments about the validity of all the data and information provided. Many times cases report views and contradictory opinions (after all, people don’t always agree on things, and different people see the same things in different ways). Forcing you to evaluate the data and information presented in the case helps you develop your powers of inference and judgment. Asking you to resolve conflicting information “comes with the territory” because a great many managerial situations entail opposing points of view, conflicting trends, and sketchy information.

8. Support your diagnosis and opinions with reasons and evidence. The most important things to prepare for are your answers to the question “Why?” For instance, if after studying the case you are of the opinion that the company’s managers are doing a poor job, then it is your answer to “Why?” that establishes just how good your analysis of the situation is. If your instructor has provided you with specific study questions for the case or if you are attempting to complete any one of the case preparation exercises on Case-TUTOR, by all means prepare answers that include all the reasons and number-crunching evidence you can muster to support your diagnosis. Work through the case preparation exercises on Case-TUTOR conscientiously or, if you are using study questions provided by the instructor, generate at least two pages of notes!

9. Develop an appropriate action plan and set of recommendations. Diagnosis divorced from corrective action is sterile. The test of a manager is always to convert sound analysis into sound actions—actions that will produce the desired results. Hence, the final and most telling step in preparing a case is to develop an action agenda for management that lays out a set of specific recommendations on what to do. Bear in mind that proposing realistic, workable solutions is far preferable to casually tossing out off-the top-of-your-head suggestions. Be prepared to argue why your recommendations are more attractive than other courses of action that are open. You’ll find the case preparation exercises on Case-TUTOR helpful in performing this step, too.