

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter reports the results obtained from the interview which was divided into four parts based on the Interview questions.

4.1 GARMENT MERCHANDISERS' PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1.1 Garment Education Background and Year of Garment Experience

Among five merchandisers, three people had textile garment education. Two of them had got a Bachelor Degree from Rajamangala University of Technology, Klong Hok Campus, majoring in Textile Engineering. Years of garment experience were ten and five years. Another merchandiser who had textile garment education had got a Diploma from Rajamangala University of Technology - Udon Thani Campus, majoring in Garment Textiles. This subject had 20 years garment experience. The other two merchandisers had no textile garment education background. One had got a Bachelor Degree from Mahasarakam University, majoring in English and had six years experience in the garment business, while the other had got a Bachelor Degree from South East Asian University, majoring in accounting, and had three years experience in textile garments.

4.1.2 English Formal Training

Among the five merchandisers, there was only one merchandiser majored in English. The other four merchandisers had no English formal training but gained some English skills when studying in school or university, and from years of experience in garment business.

4.1.3 Age, Current Position, and Experience in Current Company

All merchandisers and the boss were female. The merchandisers' age was between 26-42 years. Three of them were merchandisers, one was assistant merchandiser, and another one was titled as senior merchandiser. The experience in the companies was ranging from 7 months to 11 years.

4.2 MERCHANDISERS' PROBLEMS FROM THE VIEW OF THE BOSS THAT LEAD TO MERCHANDISERS' NEEDS

4.2.1 Writing

The boss at William and Vision garment agreed that writing was the biggest problem in English communication because merchandisers lacked translation ability from Thai to English. Most merchandisers knew the content to write but they could write only simple sentences and found difficulty when the issues needed more explanation. Both bosses agreed that the merchandisers need more relevant words, vocabulary, expression and especially grammar to write e-mails. Regarding grammar knowledge, tense and verbs that related to textile export business were the most important to be taken care of; for example, a merchandiser always put '-ing' at the end of every verb; for example, using 'please reviewing' instead of 'please review'. One of the bosses added that the appropriate words or sentences should be copied and brought into use when the writer found a similar situation; for example, 'Please advise' should be used instead of 'Tell me' or 'Answer me'. Both of the bosses emphasized that grammar or word use might be inappropriate but the content must be correct and mean what the merchandisers wanted to convey.

One of the bosses complained that one of the merchandisers often wrote long e-mails without conclusions or specific requests. The boss mentioned that the content or meaning had to be comprehensible to the customers. Actually the customers tried to understand but it occurred several times that they misunderstood what the merchandisers tried to convey because they got confused with the long but inconclusive e-mails and they could not find the main idea. The same boss expected all merchandisers to work independently and come to see her only for serious issues in terms of garments rather than English skill problems. The other boss would let the merchandisers write only simple e-mails and she would take care of the difficult ones.

The above mentioned writing problems led to the conclusion that the bosses needed the merchandisers learn how to write concise, clear and full of information e-mails that customers understand right after they read them. Merchandisers should copy some expressions or sentences for their use when writing e-mail.

4.2.2 Reading

The boss at William and Vision garment agreed that sometimes after merchandisers' read an e-mail or BOM, they misunderstood and wrongly interpreted it. This could impact by passing wrong information and making wrong samples or production. The reason was merchandisers lacked words or vocabulary related to the job; for example, the merchandisers should know the difference between O.K. and nearly O.K. but actually some merchandisers did not know. It sometimes occurred that one of the merchandisers skipped a few words that they didn't know the meaning of, but actually they were important words; for example, 'please use Red I/O White', the merchandiser skipped the 'I/O' and went ahead with the 'White'.

One of the bosses noticed that some merchandisers understood only very simple words and simple sentences. For example, from the whole paragraph, the customers had three requests but one of the merchandisers realized only one request, or sometimes she had no idea what was the customers' requirement. This area should be improved urgently. The other boss did not complain because most customers wrote simple e-mails and if there were complicated ones, she would handle them.

The reading problems found above lead to the conclusion that the merchandisers should learn reading comprehension and learn how to interpret more complicated sentences to avoid misunderstanding and wrong interpretation.

4.2.3 Listening/Speaking

The two bosses had some different views. The boss from William Connor, the buying agent company, mainly requested merchandisers to work independently and perform listening/speaking very well, as sometimes she had to be away and when she was back there were always some issues that she had to solve; for example, defects, claims, or price issues that the merchandisers noted differently from the customers. The reason for these issues was the merchandisers' listening skill was poor, understanding only customers' slow speaking. Also the merchandisers' speaking skill was not good enough to communicate and understand the whole discussion, or they were not able to note down all the discussion correctly.

The boss at Vision garment thought that it was not necessary at the moment to have her merchandisers take a listening/speaking course because she was always with the customers during their visit.

It was concluded that merchandisers at the agent company should improve listening skills to get used to customers' stress and intonation, and need to learn in a listening/speaking course so that they could promptly reply to the customers, or discuss effectively when necessary.

4.3 MERCHANDISERS' PROBLEMS IN VIEW OF THE MERCHANDISERS THAT LEAD TO MERCHANDISERS' WANTS

4.3.1 Reading

The merchandisers agreed that they lack relevant vocabulary, especially regarding sewing procedure, that they took time in reading for information; for example, reading BOM which needed to consult the boss or a technician. There was once that a merchandiser misinterpreted the sewing details but it was saved by the sewing technician as production had not yet proceeded.

One of the merchandisers who majored in English emphasized that she wanted to know textile vocabulary about sewing which she thought was very important to perform correctly because it was the beginning of the sample development and orders. Another merchandiser who studied Textile Engineering in the university claimed that she wanted to know more English vocabulary about nouns, verbs, and adjectives to avoid misunderstanding or wrong interpretation like the 'I/O' issue.

One of the merchandisers disclosed that sometimes the customers' e-mails were too short so they could be interpreted in several meanings. She suspected that the reason was the customers' laziness or habits. For example, the packaging details were written too briefly and not clearly, and needed to be clarified with the customers.

To sum up, merchandisers wanted to know technical words relevant to the merchandising job, and wanted to have clear explanations from the customers to avoid wrong interpretation.

4.3.2 Writing

All the merchandisers had different views on writing skills. One of the merchandisers who studied Textile Engineering in the university confessed that she really did not know how to write an appropriate length e-mail clearly mentioning the

main idea. In some cases, she got a response from customers that they did not understand what she was trying to convey. The same merchandiser felt it was difficult to write a persuasive e-mail. For example, a garment price quoted to a customer was far too high. It was quite complicated for her to explain the reason of the high price and convince him to agree and accept that price.

The merchandiser who had got a Garment Diploma wanted to know grammar related to garment business especially tenses for writing e-mails for customers' understanding. For example, she informed customers that the fabric was under the cutting process on that day, but actually the fabric was already 100% finished cutting. (She used present continuous tense instead of past simple or present perfect tense.) Another merchandiser had problem in using double or triple verbs, for example, 'I am go order more sewing machines.' Though she had a problem on verb cluster, she could communicate the message that she wanted in her e-mails as the customers also tried to understand her idea.

The last merchandiser, who did not study textile garments in the university, nor major in English, found that writing is the most problematic aspect for her as she could not find appropriate words to write e-mails and also she wanted to know more textile vocabulary to speed up in reading BOM.

To sum up, there were different views of needs which were: how to write appropriate length of e-mail with main idea, basic grammar regarding tense and verb, and technical words to write e-mail.

4.3.3 Listening/Speaking

All merchandisers agreed that they were not good at speaking so when they came across questions or issues that they wanted to discuss, they could not think of the appropriate word, or put the right word order in the sentences in a short time or in the discussion situation.

The merchandisers who have to deal with customers upon their visit preferred to take a course of listening/speaking especially for American accents. They believed that if they got familiar with American speaking, they would imitate the pronunciation, stress, intonation, and improve their listening/speaking especially to understand right after the first speaking without any repeat. One merchandiser said in the discussion situation that fluent English speaking would help prompt response

when coming across customers' complaints, negotiation or general discussion. Also the merchandiser added that a fluent person looks more professional and more reliable than the less fluent one.

Some merchandisers agreed that if the customers used textile or technical vocabulary; for example, about knitting and spinning, that the merchandisers were not familiar with or had no background knowledge in, the difficulty would be double. Also Thai people in general had learnt some grammar rules and used them for written communication, but once put into real conversation they would get stuck and could not speak fluently. Sometimes the merchandisers lack vocabulary and technical words; therefore they need time to construct sentences to respond to the customers.

There were different views between two merchandisers which were: one of the merchandisers mentioned that upon face to face communication, the customers may come up with topics that she had not thought about it yet, or prepared in advance, so she might not understand the conversation. On the contrary, she could understand better in telephone conversation because she could concentrate on only the topic she prepared and had no need to concentrate on the facial expression. However, another merchandiser said face to face conversation was better than telephone conversation as there was gesture to help conveying the meaning.

A merchandiser had a different view that she could write e-mails but every time she had to talk to the customers she understood the customers' sentences but when she started to speak, she could not make correct word order though she knew the correct words to be used.

To sum up regarding merchandisers' wants on listening/speaking skills they wanted to get familiar with customers stress and intonation. They wanted technical words, vocabulary, basic grammar and expressions to respond to customers where necessary.

4.4 THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR MERCHANDISERS

4.4.1 From the View of the Boss

Both reading/writing e-mail and reading BOM was core to the export garment business. E-mail was daily communication to update both production and delivery information. BOM contained new development information including any

further request, for example, specification or color change. Time spent on e-mail was not much, but the comprehension on e-mails impacted a lot on the process and after merchandisers got a reply they had to respond to the e-mails. Also, e-mail was a very efficient communication when buying and producing functions were in different places, as it was cheaper and lasted longer than oral communication. Also, e-mail was black and white evidence if there were any issues occur. The e-mail should have key or meaningful words. Correct grammar or correct word order was important, but it is not as important as the main content or information provided.

Listening/Speaking skill was important for export companies that had to deal directly with foreign customers. Merchandisers had to be fluent in listening/speaking so that they can handle a customer's visit.

4.4.2 In View of the Merchandisers

Reading/Writing are equally the most important for all merchandisers at their workplace because e-mail was part of daily work and it was the only key of communication and makes customers know the production and delivery status when customers were away from Thailand. A merchandiser who had no textile background and did not major in English said reading was the most important skill for work as she had to understand the e-mails and translate all details of BOM before doing next steps. Writing was the second most important skill in her opinion.