

He Shoots! He Scores! Recommendations for Hockey Survival

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In Marketing Case Tutor, Volume 2, there is a case entitled, “*He Shoots! He Scores! But For How Long?*” The case sets out the details about the falling or lack of interest among the young in playing hockey, the sport that defines the national character of Canada. The Scarborough Hockey Association (SHA) is, to say the least, dying. A task force, in what was Scarborough, Ontario (now part of the eastern section of Toronto, Ontario), has analyzed the situation and is ready to make its recommendations to Toronto city council pertaining to ways to save the SHA. The 22-member task force included a representative from city council; the executive director of the Greater Toronto Hockey League; representatives from Hockey Canada, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, the Ontario Hockey Federation, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), and the Canadian Ball Hockey Association; as well as others committed to addressing, what is, to say the least, a cultural issue.

Toronto is being hit hardest on this issue than other areas of Canada, because it serves as a strong magnet in attracting newly-arrived immigrants, who bring the many positive ethnocentric benefits associated with immigration to the area. The mission undertaken by the task force was to find ways to reverse the declining enrollment in youth hockey leagues, hoping to address the concerns faced by the various minor hockey organizations located in Scarborough.

The recommendations of the task force are as follows:

1. Establish a Scarborough Sports Council (comprising volunteers) to promote participation in all sports, including hockey, in the area.
2. Develop children’s programs (e.g., learn to skate) to introduce and promote hockey.
3. Establish introductory hockey skills and coaching/staff training programs in Scarborough.
4. Establish a not-for-profit organization to look after a hockey equipment bank (new and used equipment made available to those lacking the economic means to acquire such equipment - nominal deposit or rental fees are being considered) and to address the issues of affordability and accessibility of such equipment for new participants who want to learn how to play hockey.
5. Have the task force work with the city of Toronto to develop a hockey communication strategy that would promote the benefits of participation, including educating others as to the language of the sport of hockey.
6. Work with the TDSB and the TCDSB to promote and to support existing ball- and ice-hockey programs.

7. Engage in outreach efforts to different ethno-cultural and under-represented groups by promoting the benefits and opportunities provided by participating in hockey.
8. Encourage involvement of representatives from the National Hockey League and the American Hockey League to engage in outreach and promotional efforts to encourage resident participation in hockey.
9. Encourage intergovernmental support for the efforts of the task force and the Scarborough Sports Council.
10. Have the Toronto Parks, Recreation, and Forestry staff (one such member is on the task force) report back to the task force on the status of the recommendations within about six months.

One of the concerns that has been identified is that, while there are learn-to-skate programs in the city, there is no program that links these programs to learning about and playing the sport of hockey. Without the latter programs, there is limited opportunity for kids to learn about the sport and for many parents and kids do not know how to get involved in the first place.

The task-force believes that one of the reasons for the decline in the number of participants in organized hockey is the increase in the visible minorities, particularly with respect to the growing number of immigrants from these groups moving to the Scarborough area. In 1981, census data indicates that about 14% of the residents in Scarborough were classified as visible minorities; in 2006, the percentage increased to about the 43% level. Over the past four years, the number of registered players in the SHA has declined by 12%. In the 1980s, there were about 10,000 children playing in the SHA and associated leagues; today, that number is down to less than 3,000, even though there has been a significant increase in the overall population in the area.

Immigrants to the area bring their own sport preferences with them, whether it is soccer, cricket, badminton, basketball, or some other sport. Broader television coverage allows them, and other Canadians, to view sports from distant locations. The availability of digital media (e.g., the Internet) has also gained the attention of Canada's youth. In addition, the cost, the limited facilities, and other demands on family life make it difficult to become involved in the sport of hockey.

To address the declining participation in ice hockey, the West Hill Minor Hockey Association (in the southeastern area of Toronto) formed a summer ball hockey program. Of the 219 participants, 60 had never played ice hockey. A learn-to-play hockey program is planned for the fall to help transition kids to the local ice hockey league.

The key seems to get the kids into the rink. The view is that the kids are there, the organizations with knowledgeable people are there, and the learn-to-skate programs are there. There needs to be more of the latter programs to give kids the opportunity to learn how to skate and how to play hockey. The traditional learn-on-your-own approach at local indoor and outdoor rinks and by playing road hockey, approaches used by Canadian kids who grew up with hockey all their lives, needs to be

supplemented in ways to help the new kids on the block. The trick is going to be getting first and second generation Canadians from cultures where hockey is not part of the normal lifestyle interested in the sport. This is going to be a very difficult and long, drawn-out task.

Focus: Target market, demographics, culture, enculturation, acculturation, lifestyle (AIOs: activities, interests, opinions), attitudes and attitude models, economic means, demand state (no demand, negative demand, full demand, unwholesome demand, faltering demand, latent demand, irregular demand, overfull demand).

Questions:

1. Define each of the concepts listed above. Explain how each concept relates to the issue under consideration, if it does.
2. Of the recommendations offered, which ones are tangible in nature? Which ones are intangible in nature? Which ones are more likely to be successful in encouraging greater participation?
3. Has the task force actually identified the problem facing the Scarborough Hockey Association (SHA) or do the recommendations address symptoms of the actual problem? Explain.
4. Which of the recommendations listed actually addresses the problem facing the SHA?
5. What is the nature of the target market being attracted by the SHA? What consumer characteristics of the consumer are relevant?
6. How successful do you think the SHA would be in attracting young females to play on gender-based hockey teams? How would the parents of the young girls feel about their daughter playing on such a team? What cultural/ethnic groups do you think are more likely to encourage female participation? Explain. What cultural/ethnic groups do you think are less likely to encourage female participation? Explain. Review the most recent census data for the Scarborough area in terms of age and ethnic background to get a better understanding of the population [Statistics Canada - 2006 census: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>]
7. Do you think the problem lies with the attitudes of the parents and/or the kids? If there is an attitude problem, how would you go about changing the attitudes to encourage greater participation? What attitude model would be most appropriate to investigate?
8. What do you think is the actual problem facing the SHA? What are the symptoms of this problem? Draw a diagram linking the problem to the symptoms. Explain the diagram.
9. What are the goals (qualitative statements) and objectives (quantitative statements) of the SHA?

10. Based on the actual problem facing the SHA, what alternative recommendations can you identify to address this problem? What are the advantages, disadvantages, and implications of selecting and implementing each your recommendations? Which recommendation(s) would you select as the solution to the problem facing the SHA? Explain how you would go about implementing your recommended solution(s) (i.e., plan of action). How would you measure the effectiveness of your recommended solution(s) and when?

Note. The facts presented in this case are primarily drawn from [1] the Report to Scarborough Community Council by the Task Force on the State of Hockey in Scarborough, June 22, 2010 (see <http://www.toronto.ca>), [2] Grant, K. (2010, June 22). New report aims to save hockey in Scarborough. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A15; [3] Kalchman, L. (2010, June 22). Scarborough takes aim at saving sport. *The Toronto Star*, p. S3.