

A Word from the Editor...

Cases that "Sing"

The Case Research Journal solicits cases that "sing" in the classroom—cases that leave instructors and students alike with resonating memories of the class discussion, even long after the fact. We want to publish the best, most exciting, most insightful, most memorable new cases written today—the classics of tomorrow.

What are the ingredients of cases that sing? How can writers build these ingredients into their research and work? I suggest the keys include problems, places, people, and possibilities—the "Four Ps of Case Writing," if we may borrow some Ps from our marketing friends.

Problems. Great cases in the classroom focus on great issues. A case that sings leaves no doubt what students will argue about—what will be the themes, the harmonies, the rhythms of the music. Writers might start their work by defining (for the Instructor's Manual) exactly what points and counterpoints they would expect students to make in debate over their case issues.

Pieces. Winning cases are sited in interesting environments. They tell stories about companies or industries or relationships that are both new and intriguing to students. They stimulate curiosity and arouse interest in the context of the case, as well as its content. They include the subtleties and complexities of the real world.

People. Cases that sing have voices—the voices of real people. These cases permit students to identify with the characters who experience the case's problems. They let students see the places through the eyes of the places' own residents. They bring events and environments to life, by populating them with believable, real people.

Possibilities. Cases that sing look toward the future, with alternative courses of action or decisions that managers might plausibly take. They give students an opportunity to follow different melodic lines, and to argue for their own choices as opposed to others.

For most of us, the four Ps are easiest to capture if we find the data for our cases through field research, where we meet the people and see the places with our own eyes. Secondary source cases can also sing, however, if their sources capture the essence of the problems, places, people, and possibilities of the situation.

Steve Allen's classic case on Harold Geneen at ITT Corporation is an example; drawn from a variety of superbly written articles, the case sang to a generation of students about the organization and control of diversified conglomerate corporations.