



## VIDEO CASE

### BUILD-A-BEAR WORKSHOP

People take the entrepreneurial challenge because of the opportunity to live the American dream, because of profit, and because of the independence offered. On the other hand, not everyone is qualified to take the plunge.

You have to be self-directed and self-nurturing, highly energetic, and action-oriented. Maxine Clark has what it takes.

Named by *Discount Store News* as one of the “30 Most Powerful People in Discount Store Retailing,” Clark has distinguished herself as an innovator in the retailing industry. Clark started as an executive trainee in the May Company where she demonstrated a keen ability to spot emerging retail and merchandising trends. After 25 years with the May Company, Clark moved into the presidency of the Payless ShoeSource from 1992 to 1996. There she developed the retailer into the number one seller of children’s licensed footwear in the world.

Eager to leave Corporate America to start her own company, Clark created the first Build-A-Bear Workshop at the St. Louis Galleria in 1997. Build-A-Bear Workshops are teddy bear-themed experience retail stores. These unique workshops combine the universal appeal of plush animals with an interactive process that allows bear builders of all ages to create their own huggable companions. Clark had a hunch that traditional retail shopping could be greatly enhanced by making the customers’ experience more interactive. While on a tour of a local bakery, she noticed that the children were fascinated by the bread manufacturing process. This provided the inspiration for Build-A-Bear. The innovative retail stores promote creativity and encourage family entertainment in a fun and unique environment.

The customers played a major role in the evolution and creation of Build-A-Bear Workshops.

From the beginning, a store was created that Clark thought customers would find entertaining. From that moment forward it was up to them. New products come from suggestions from customers. The merchandise appeals to regional opportunities as well as entertainment properties, books, videos, and all kinds of other products.

One key to the success of the Build-A-Bear Workshop is the active participation of the employee with the customer or “guest” as they are known. Store managers recruit from both ends of the age spectrum to find enthusiastic and outgoing persons who can facilitate the creative process in children and adults. Any employer will tell you that teamwork and training are two key elements that enhance employee performance. Build-A-Bear Workshop employees or “associates” receive extensive training in customer communication and are taught the value of working effectively as a team.

There are now 40 workshops nationwide and 30 more are planned. Build-A-Bear Workshop was named “Best New Concept for 1998” by *Chain Store Age* magazine. The National Retail Federation (NRF) named Build-A-Bear Workshop the Most Innovative Retailer for 2001. Throughout her career in retailing, Clark has risen up the ladder by providing valuable insights into the desires of the American consumer. In the case of the Build-A-Bear Workshop, Maxine Clark has once again listened to her customers and they are responding.

### Discussion Questions

1. What makes you think that you might have what it takes to be an entrepreneur?
2. What characteristics might you add to the list in the text to define an entrepreneur after watching this video?
3. What could you learn about small business management working for a firm like Build-A-Bear?
4. Which business functions seem to be most important to the success of Build-A-Bear?