Many of the classroom sessions will be conducted by the case method of instruction. Cases represent authentic business situations requiring analysis and action choices. The following paragraphs present the underlying philosophy of the case method, its objectives, and the benefits we hope to derive.

**WHAT IS THE CASE METHOD?**

The case method of instruction is not new; it originated many years ago in law schools. Legal proceedings place high emphasis on the judicial rule of *stare decisis*, in which previous decisions can be cited as authority for current disputes. Recently, the case method has been used in business training, but in a somewhat different way. Business executives only rarely can resort to precedent as a solution to their problems. The business world changes rapidly, and while the “tried and true” ways of handling uncertainties may provide useful analogies, they rarely offer definitive solutions.

In essence, the case method focuses the analytical and creative thinking of participants on specific business problems that are representative of widely encountered situations. The approach is intended to be much the same as that found in the situations themselves; the participant (or study group) reviews the essential facts of the case, analyzes those facts, sifts out the important from the unimportant, defines the major issues, explores possible solutions, and selects the most logical course of action. As an educational process, the objective is to enhance each individual’s abilities to cope with many different kinds of problems and to arrive at logical and creative answers.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF CASES**

Often when executives are exposed to the case method for the first time, they are frustrated because precise and definite decisions cannot always be reached. Cases may lack all the information required to indicate one clear-cut answer, and the option of obtaining more information is not available. Of course many business decisions also must be made with incomplete information, time pressure, and changing conditions.

Moreover, participants often will find that the faculty leader and the various study teams will not arrive at the same, or even at a single, answer to each case or question. Even when all class members possess the same set of facts, many different interpretations can be drawn and many compelling courses of action can be offered. This is quite natural as each individual will draw on personal experience, training, and convictions. Individual decisions will then be exposed to the analysis and arguments of other group members, and, through this process, a consistent and powerful pattern of reasoning can be forged.

The benefit that each individual gains from participating in case discussions is related directly to the amount of thought and effort devoted to case preparation before the discussion. It is advisable to read through the entire case and any provided discussion questions to get a complete picture of the situation. This can be followed by a more careful analysis of the pertinent facts and relationships, and the design of possible solutions or courses of action.
In the end, many cases require difficult choices. Although each executive may devise a particular method for analyzing cases, it is a good idea to take notes on the major questions and key ideas that arise in the group study sessions.

It will not always be feasible to conduct the same kind of analysis for each case; cases vary considerably in nature, form, and length. Some cases are accompanied by specific discussion questions, some are not. Your study time will be limited and your familiarity with the different case situations will vary considerably. For that reason, the use of study groups to discuss the case, after each member has read the material and formed initial impressions, can be very enlightening.