

IMPROVE YOUR WATERPARK PERSONNEL RECRUITING, TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

BY GEORGE DEINES



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FOR THOSE OF YOU that just finished up the 2018 summer season, congratulations! You spent countless hours providing a great aquatic and recreational experience for thousands of people in your community. Hopefully you had a great season, but chances are it didn't go perfectly and you have some room for improvement in various aspects of your operation.

You might think it's time to relax, take a few days off and remember what it feels like to only work 40 hours per week, but don't forget that the countdown to the 2019 summer season has already begun! I don't mean to completely burst your bubble as you still have over 200 days until it starts, but the best time to start planning for next year is when everything from this past season is still fresh in your mind.

When looking at the past season, the success or failure of your season ultimately falls upon your frontline and supervisory team members and how well they perform. In keeping with that premise, I believe that the primary area that always needs improvement in any waterpark deals with your facility's personnel, particularly in the realm of recruiting, hiring and training.

BOOST YOUR RECRUITING

If you're like most waterpark operators in the U.S., you've probably noticed heightened media coverage of the so-called "lifeguard shortage" over the past 3-5 years. While I'm not entirely convinced that a shortage exists, I certainly do realize that it is a difficult task to find enough people to staff your waterpark for the entire summer season, both lifeguards and guest service team members. Because of this, the end of a season is the perfect time to start recruiting for next year.

You can start next year's recruiting by retaining this past season's lifeguards! Send them a personalized "thank you" note this month, showing your appreciation for their hard work and dedication this year and encouraging them to return for another season. While you're at it, ask them to invite a friend to work for next summer to help ease your recruiting burden. After all, responsible team members typically have responsible friends.

Finally, make sure that you take your recruitment on the road this year. The days of potential team members seeking you out have ended. Use the off-season to meet the activities director at all the local high schools, visit the community college career center and set up dates to attend job fairs and school lunches at high schools and colleges. While technically you may not start recruiting until the first of the new year, use October and November to get these dates scheduled to keep you on the right path to a fully-staffed team next summer.

EVALUATE YOUR TRAINING

Once you have next year's recruitment taken care of, it's time to start looking at your current training programs and how they can improve as you want to make sure that all trainings are productive and essential. Unless you didn't have one personnel issue all summer, or no guest complaints about your facility, you should spend time reviewing what you train, how you train and why you train. As an operator, I always broke down training into three distinct, yet unified parts: pre-season orientation, weekly in-services and daily interactions.

Waterpark operators need to view every interaction they have with a team member as an engagement and training opportunity. While the preseason orientation typically covers the do's

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and don'ts of your operation, that doesn't mean that it cannot be fun and engaging too. Use this time to talk to your team members about the importance of their position and providing positive aquatic experiences for your community, while setting the expectation for them to work hard, smile often and go the extra mile each day.

When it comes to weekly in-services, the emphasis should be on training and retention, ensuring that each team member is well-versed in every aspect of your operation, whether they work in guest services, lifeguard operations or food and beverage. You can spend your time in the offseason asking your supervisory team which trainings they view as essential and what employee behaviors could improve from last summer. Once you have this list, then you can make small tweaks to your training program; or if you had a rough summer, then start a complete overhaul.

While orientations and weekly in-services are critical to training your team, don't forget about your daily interaction with all of your team members. Every time that you see one of your team members, view it as an opportunity to engage with, and train them. Take the time to say "hi," ask how their day is going, encourage them to work hard and show them that you care about them. When team members see that their supervisor cares about them, they will work harder, perform better and stay engaged in their work all summer long.

TAKE YOUR TEAM'S PERFORMANCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Personnel issues tend to top the list when waterpark guests complain. Through my analysis of in-park guest surveys and mystery shopper reports back in my operation days, complaints about park team members always came down to one of three areas: Knowledge (what to do), Efficiency (how to do it) and Engagement (why it mat-



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ters). Whether a team member didn't know the correct answer to a guest's question, a guest had to stand in line too long to enter the park or a guest did not receive a welcoming greeting from a park team member, these three areas will make or break your operation.

Knowledge refers to the increased level of awareness and understanding that each waterpark team member has about their position and how it relates to the overall operation of the waterpark. Efficiency deals with team members being capable and competent to increase their job proficiency based on the comprehensive knowledge they now possess. Knowledge and efficiency come together in team member engagement where they possess motivation to continue their exemplary work ethic to assist in achieving the waterpark's goals and strive for its future success.

The goal is to take each individual team member and train them as best as possible in what their job requires, how they do it well and why it matters that they do it well. I like to call this process the "KEE to success!"

Outsiders often view the offseason life of a waterpark operator as easy since they "only work three months out of the year." Running a successful waterpark takes an enormous amount of time, effort and planning, all of which starts in the offseason. Use this offseason to brainstorm and develop ways to better recruit and train and you'll be glad you did. •



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