

Assembling A Winning Team

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Times are tough. For the past few years, many of the high tech companies have been "borrowing" members of our entertainment labor force - everyone from game technicians to ride mechanics - all in the interest of a new evolving business sector. In fact, many of our clients have commented that it has been almost impossible to retain technical people at a reasonable price scale for any definable period of time. It would appear, however, that the tide is beginning to change. As the last of the start-up dot-coms and web merchants take their place in the internet graveyard, a significant volume of these same capable individuals are becoming available again at surprisingly attractive wage levels. Most acknowledge that the change of industry and venue was in fact memorable but probably not worth the added stress resulting from the employer's eventual outcome. One issue that the new generation of employees has not experienced with any great significance is that of job security, but for the first time, many now understand that the grass is not always greener, particularly when the prospects of future payrolls begin to evaporate. At last, there may be a light at the end of the labor pool tunnel - at least in the entertainment marketplace.

You're Business Is Only As Good As Your Weakest Employee

I believe the above subtitle represents the truest of indicators in any business' performance. Untrained or poorly trained employees represent one of the biggest threats to your entertainment facility, as a guest's ultimate experience routinely involves interaction with one or more of a facility's employees. In most cases, one unsatisfactory encounter with an ill-prepared employee can result in a guest's decision to take their business elsewhere.

What constitutes a weak employee? Here are some possible signs: poor grooming and/or hygiene, inattentiveness to patron needs, unwillingness to be a team player, inability to foresee potential events that could result in harm or injury to patrons, rudeness, or general lack of enthusiasm. Every employee plays a role in making an entertainment facility successful; if there's a weak link, the operation can never achieve its maximum level of success.

When A Chef Creates, He Starts With The Best Ingredients

There's no secret that the master chefs of the world only use the highest grade of ingredients when planning a meal. After all, how can the mastery of his work be achieved with substandard raw materials? Are entertainment venues any different? How can one expect patrons to receive a truly entertaining experience if the "entertainers" themselves don't meet the grade?

It's easy to talk about "training" or "retraining" of employees, but what's really involved in making these individuals assets to the operation? For starters, the raw essentials must already be in place - a positive demeanor, a willingness to follow directives, a respectful communication tone, and a high level of alertness. If these qualities are not present, the individual may not be best suited for employment within the entertainment sector. If these qualities are present, the next step would be to tailor and perfect them. Allow these employees to work alongside well skilled members of the staff and take some time to review their daily experiences. Oftentimes, a morning meeting can be helpful in sharing these experiences with all staff members, and in turn, prepare those employees for similar events that may occur in the future. Make a point to put these employees to the test - on their own - once they've been appropriately trained, and routinely rate their skill levels in areas such as customer service, completion of job assignments, adherence to appearance standards, and relationships with others. Encourage the top performers to take new employees under their "wing" in an effort to create a level of consistency throughout all layers of staffing. Finally, organize role playing sessions with both new and veteran employees and utilize real-world topics and circumstances as the basis of learning.

"Quality Facility" + "Substandard Employee" = "Unsatisfied Guest"

Maintaining a staff of highly qualified employees takes a great deal of effort and a willingness to dedicate both time and resources toward its constant refining. Part of this process includes sourcing the marketplace for available talent at all times, not just when an opening arises. Employee turnover through attrition or job change has put the entertainment marketplace on a virtual roller coaster in recent years, so the proactive entertainment facility owner is always looking for capable staff members. Many managers tend to "carry" a substandard employee because it seems easier than the task of rehiring, when in reality the opposite proves true. Substandard employees require greater attention by management, cause dissatisfaction among quality employees, and commonly prove to be poor guest services representatives. In fact, the "cost" of a substandard employee may far exceed the stated salary when these other variables are considered. In short, if an employee can't make the grade, it's time to find a replacement.

Play To Win

"You can't hire good help these days" seems to be a common phrase circulating around the industry of late. Many facilities have resorted to the philosophy of "borrowing" employees from competitors, and in some cases, the same individual has worked for three different employers all in the same year. In the end, who won that battle? Instead, the answer might lie in sourcing individuals that possess the core attributes needed in our industry by looking outside of the industry as well. Sometimes, an individual with a new perspective can make all the difference in an entertainment center. Whatever the choice, hire the very best individuals available. Not satisfied after ten separate interviews? Keep looking. Best candidate requires higher wage? Pay more. All candidates make the grade? Raise the bar. Satisfaction is only achieved when the patron base and financial statements say so. I'll venture to say that a proactive and conscientious employee can perform the roles of these lackluster employees, and in the end, pay for himself or herself ten times over. You've worked so hard to get to this point - why settle for a staff that's anything less than exceptional?

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