

Comprehensive Club Training

Meeting the Promise of Quality and Service



Ed Rehkopf



Comprehensive Club Training

Why is training so important in private clubs? The answers to this question are simple and commonsensical:

- Clubs are detail-intensive – there is much for managers and employees to learn, know, and do.
- Service is people-intensive – it takes a lot of people in all areas of the club doing all the right things day in and day out.
- Members expect and should receive a higher level of quality and service than they get from public establishments.
- Club relationships and engagement with members are far more personal and critical to success than in other hospitality sectors. To do this well requires ongoing employee training to understand the subtlety and nuance of service.
- Like most hospitality operations, clubs can experience high levels of staff turnover, particularly in the service-intensive areas of food and beverage.

For these reasons, club managers should recognize the absolute importance of initial and ongoing, consistent and formalized training for all employees. Yet in far too many clubs, training is an afterthought or haphazard in design and implementation. So, if training is so important, why is this the case and why can't we do better?

The Achilles Heel of Club Operations

Here are some of the factors that make training in private clubs so difficult:

- First, is the standalone nature of most clubs with limited resources and no economies of scale. Busy managers have little time and, in some cases lack the necessary skill set to design a comprehensive training curriculum for employees. Complicating this is the fact that operations span multiple business disciplines, including accounting, human resources, marketing, member relations, golf operations, food and beverage, aquatics, golf course maintenance, and other areas. Few managers have the detailed knowledge of all these disciplines to design the well-integrated systems, policies, and procedures that seamlessly cover all areas of the operation.
- The general manager and management staff have not formally defined the standards of quality and service they wish to provide their members. Without formal standards, how can they determine their training needs?
- Given the many positions involved in club operations, there is the need to develop a curriculum for each position to provide employees the appropriate skill set. This is a daunting task, though focusing on critical member-facing positions is the first step.
- In addition to individual skills training, employees must be trained in the organizational culture and values; laws affecting the workplace; employee work rules and policies; liability abatement training such as safety, sanitation, and public health; human resource issues such as sexual harassment, discrimination, conduct, and performance criteria; accounting policies and procedures relating to their work, such as point of sale training,

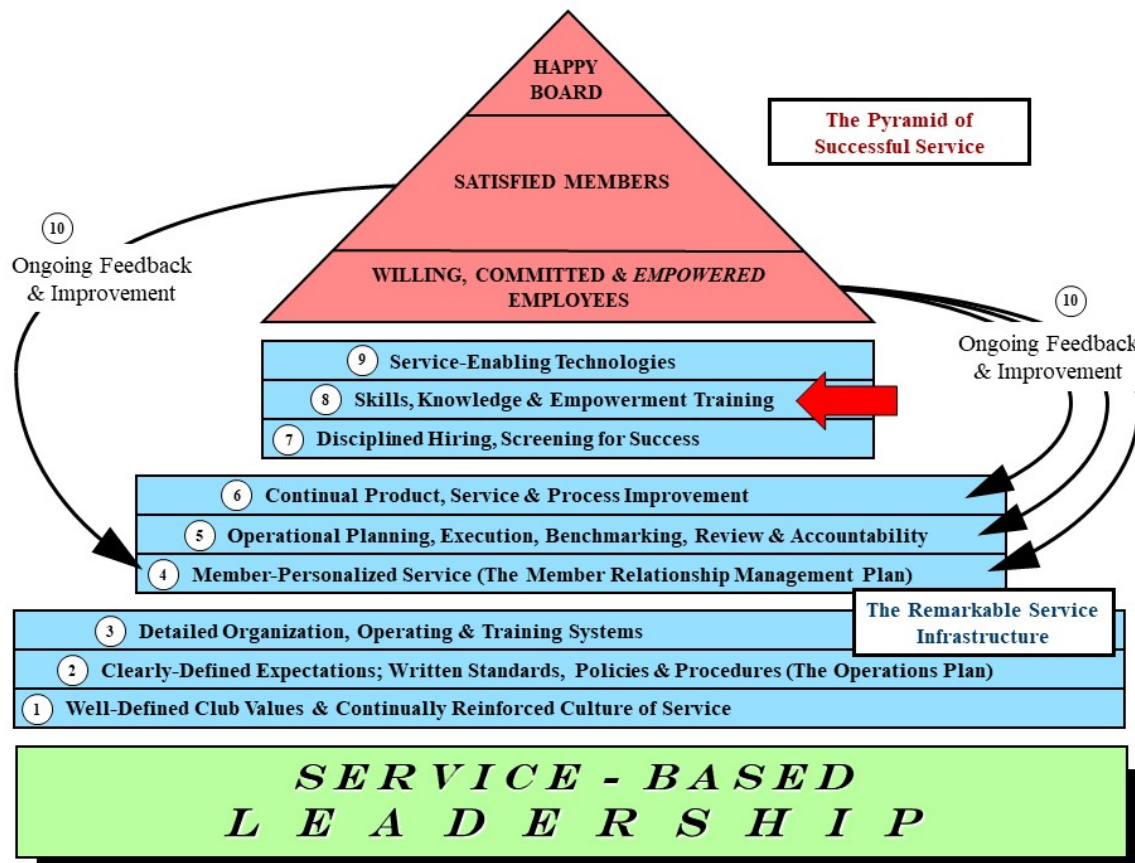


inventory procedures, and timekeeping; and all the operation's various organizational systems that enable the club to function efficiently.

- Managers at all levels must be trained in a variety of disciplines including leadership; club values and culture of service; various laws affecting operations; departmental systems; accounting standards, policies, and procedures; human resource standards, policies, and procedures – to name a few.
- Few operations have a comprehensive training plan that guides subordinate managers in training standards, responsibilities, budgets, resources, and necessary curricula.
- There is no easy way for the general manager to monitor training execution due to the lack of training administration software and training benchmarks. Short of attending each training session, how does the general manager know who is training and whether the requirements of a multi-faceted curriculum are being met.
- In times of tight budgets (and it seems always to be such times!), the cost of every hour of training multiplied by the number of employees being trained and their hourly wage can have a significant impact on the bottom line.
- The management staff does not have either the time or the will to make it happen given all the other management requirements, demands on their time, and competing priorities.
- The board, while demanding high service levels, does not always understand the direct link between formal training and quality service or, even more importantly, the challenging task of designing and implementing a comprehensive club-wide training program. In many cases, the general manager has not developed the training goals, assessments, a well-designed plan, proposed budget, and "sold" the board on its necessity.

The bottom line on all these issues is that unless focused on and attended to conscientiously, training routinely falls through the cracks. While the training requirements of a well-run club operation seem overwhelming, they can be effectively implemented over time by creating a plan, establishing priorities, and providing appropriate guidance to department heads to develop departmental training.

See red arrow in the diagram below, indicating training, regardless of topic or format, as an essential discipline in the Remarkable Service Infrastructure.



The Quest for Remarkable Service

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(See PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Remarkable Service Infrastructure - An Overarching Plan for Club Excellence for more information)

Management Training is an Essential Part of a Quality Operation

Manager and supervisory training are even more important than training line employees since poorly trained managers and supervisors can do far greater harm to the operation by failing in any of the following areas:

- Managers and supervisors direct your front-line employees. If they don't have a complete understanding of their duties and expectations, the club's service message and vision for the operation will not be passed consistently to employees.
- A management team with different leadership styles ranging from Service-Based, to military, to athletic, to collegial, to Neanderthal, will not interact with employees consistently or fairly – and consistency and fairness are touchstone issues in meeting the requirements of equal opportunity, fairness, morale, and motivation. Ideally, the club should have one management and leadership style, promoted by the general manager and practiced uniformly by all managers and supervisors. Anything less invites inconsistent service and performance.

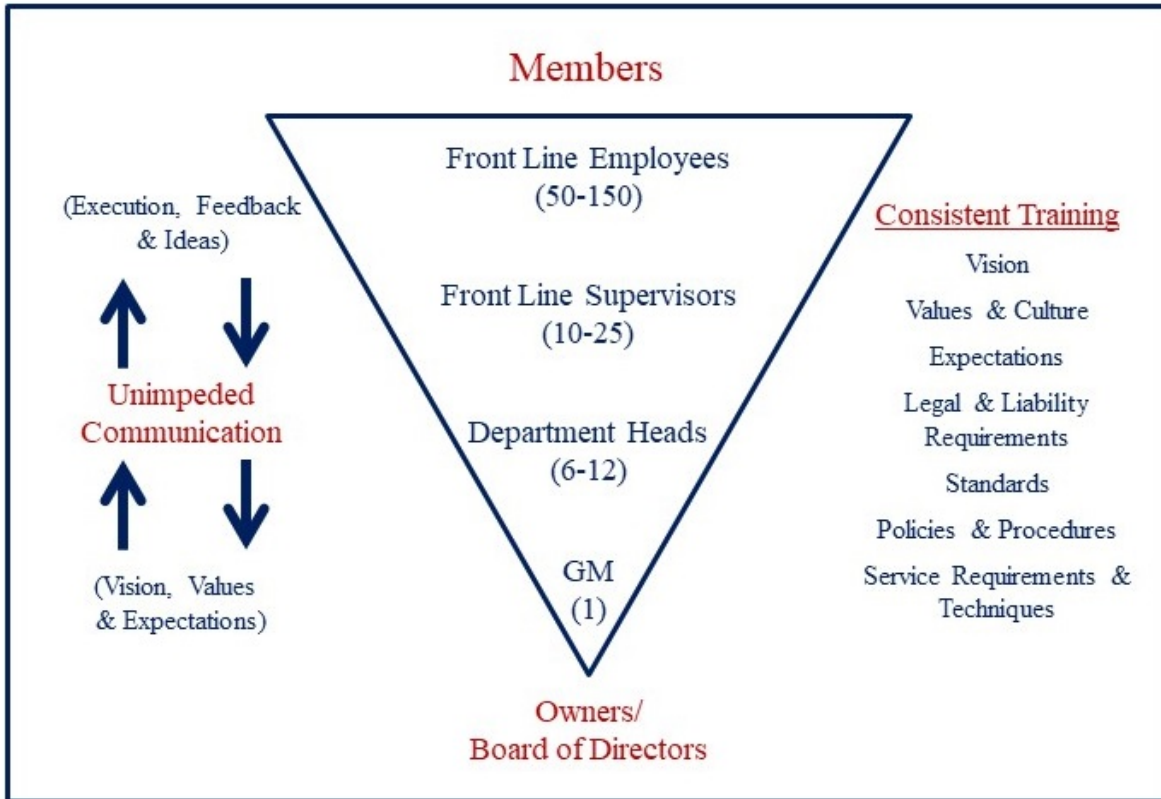


- The club's organizational values and culture or service require constant reinforcement to all employees and must be consistently modeled in word and deed for employees. Without appropriate manager training and development, the example and message will be contradictory and confusing.
- Managers and supervisors are the people with the answers. In addition to their job specific knowledge and skills, they must have a thorough understanding of all the club's rules, regulations, work policies, service policies, administrative and accounting systems and procedures. Without training they cannot have a firm grasp of these complex and interrelated matters. Consider the problems that can be caused by two different managers giving conflicting direction or answers to employees or members.
- Managers and supervisors act as agents of the club. If they do not have an in-depth understanding of all the laws and governmental regulations affecting the operation, the club is open to liability issues and litigation. Examples include: The Fair Labor Standards Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Alcohol Law Enforcement regulations, Equal Opportunity issues, sexual harassment, food sanitation, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, and others. While you may have experts in each of these matters on staff, their knowledge must be shared with other managers to avoid what could become major problems for the club. Throughout my hospitality career many of the most significant problems I faced were as a result of managers without a proper understanding of these important issues.
- Ethics training is a requirement for all managers. Some may think it unnecessary, but experience proves this to be a naïve assumption.

To expect managers with different backgrounds and experiences from a variety of operational disciplines – golf, golf course maintenance, accounting, personnel, facility maintenance, food and beverage, sales and marketing, activities, tennis, and aquatics – will have a common understanding of and approach to leadership and management is unrealistic in the extreme.



The Necessity of Unimpeded Communication and Consistency of Training in Club Operations



Quality and Service are both detail- and people-intensive requiring that all employees understand what they must do in all situations. Such complexity can only be mastered through unimpeded communication and consistent training. Unimpeded communication flows naturally from Service-Based Leaders, while written values, expectations, standards, policies, and procedures promote consistent training.

Training Planning and Tips

Without formal and consistent training, a great number of clubs suffer from high employee turnover, service complaints, lack of organization, and generally inefficient operations – all of which have a negative impact on member satisfaction, and ultimately the club's bottom line.

Here are some of the strategies and tips to design and field a formal training program for both line employees and management:

- Start with a plan. As with any major project, there must be a plan. Things to consider when planning include goals, program requirements, training principles, impacted positions, priorities, budget, timelines and milestones, curricula by position, equipment



and supplies, resources and materials, benchmarking, administration and documentation, plan and implementation review, and designated responsibilities.

Tip: Start small and grow. You don't have to do everything at once. Pick key member-facing positions with the greatest number of employees to get your biggest bang for the buck. But don't forget the importance of manager/supervisor training. In the long run a well-trained, knowledgeable, consistent, and disciplined management team will be far more valuable to the club's success than anything else.

- Appoint a training manager to shepherd the project. Assign this responsibility to an existing department head. This individual will draft and present the plan, oversee its implementation, and report directly to the general manager on plan progress and developments.

Tip: The training initiative must have the absolute and enthusiastic support, backing, and "will to make it happen" of the general manager or it won't go anywhere.

- Charge department heads with the task of developing a curriculum outline for each position in their department. These are the topics that employees in any given position must be familiar with. Much of this information should be written, but some must be communicated or taught by other means, such as demonstrations, videos, etc. In addition to the "what" (curriculum topics by position), the outline should also include "who" must learn the material, "when" it must be learned, and "how often" it must be taught for material that requires ongoing refresher training, such as sexual harassment, safety training, sanitation, and others.

Tip: For service skills positions, the standard four-step training process of "Tell-Show-Do-Review" can be improved upon by hospitality consultant Jim Sullivan's 7-step process: 1. Say What: explain what will be covered, 2. Say Why: explain why the information is important, 3. Show How: demonstrate the correct way, 4. Detail Variables: since service is situational, discuss acceptable variations, 5. Guided Practice: rehearse skills together, 6. Spaced Repetition: repeat the skills training over time until each employee "gets it," and 7. Teach Back: have employees teach back lesson as an instructor.

- Charge the designated training manager with developing club-wide training topics. Usually this would be done in cooperation with the HR manager, controller, facilities manager, or other subject matter experts. Club-wide topics include an overview of amenities, facilities, and operation; rules impacting members; employee rules and work-related policies; organizational values and culture of service; organizational operating systems; legal and liability issues; and leadership development.

Important point: Keep in mind that while much of the information employees and managers must know is similar; there is often a different thrust to the material. For example, line employees must know what to do if they feel they are being sexually harassed, while managers must understand the nuances of what constitutes sexual harassment, how to avoid it, and what to do if reported to them.

Tip: Many of these topics have been covered in materials found on the PCPM Marketplace store, for example: Organizational Values, Service-Based Leadership,



Managers Handbook, Employee Handbook, Safety Plan, and “on-the-go” training, such as F&B Training on the Go, Safety on the Go, HR on the Go, Values on the Go (see *PCPM, Training Resources, Training on the Go*), and Daily Huddle topics.

- New hire training starts with basic information such as job descriptions, performance expectations, club AND departmental orientations (these are different, though covering some of the same topics to help reinforce), employee handbook, and managers' handbook. Any plan to provide a more formal approach to training must include a review of, or if not already in place, the development of such orientations and documents to ensure they cover all necessary topics and are fully integrated, that is, they are consistent and reinforcing.

Tip: Again, a good starting point for these documents is the material on the PCPM Marketplace store. Both the *Employee Handbook* and *Managers' Handbook* rely heavily on and flow naturally from club standards, policies, and procedures, thereby ensuring consistency across all materials. See *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, The Club Operations Plan – A Legacy Contribution for Club Excellence* for more details.

Other Tips:

- Experience has shown that critical information provided in small doses over time (hence the value of the training on the go material) is the best way to provide ongoing training at the lowest cost. Instead of specially scheduled, on-the-clock training sessions, some sort of pre-shift meeting for every department and shift is an excellent way to do this. The key here is to have a pre-developed, organized system of material, so that managers can take advantage of such meetings without having to jump through hoops to find and develop topics. Keep in mind that once such material is developed, it is available for future use with little or no effort.
- Because of the one-time intensity of gathering and developing training material, this project is best done during the "off season." But to maximize the effectiveness of this limited time, the initial planning and timelines should be completed prior to the slow season to ensure that everyone "hits the ground running" when things slow down.
- Training resources can be found anywhere. The advent of the Internet and search engines makes it relatively easy and convenient to find training material for almost any topic or position. Some will be free, and some will cost, but once department heads determine topics, they should begin searching for relevant material.
- Presenting the material in a professional manner is key! Do not hand your employees a 3-ringed binder filled with odd sheets of copied information. Efforts must be made to eliminate contradictory terminology and information written by different authors. Spend the time and effort to present it professionally – each topic should be presented in a common format with appropriate context, segue, and without extraneous information. Such a jumble of information lacks clarity and is confusing to all. See *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Beyond Oral History – The Importance of a Club Operations Plan* for further discussion.

The beauty of the Internet material is that it can be copied, pasted, and edited in your own formatted documents. Also, when preparing training material, don't forget to



develop quizzes. They can be used for formal comprehension testing or during informal teaching Q&As by supervisors.

- Review material over time, adding to it and improving it as you go. Ask employees to give you feedback on the adequacy and effectiveness of the material – ultimately, they are the best judges of what's useful and what's not.

Developing a comprehensive training plan and program is probably one of the most challenging things a club can do, but the time, cost, and effort is well worthwhile. Over the long haul, the effort you put into developing the professionalism of club staff and improving the quality of service will have far-reaching positive effects on member satisfaction and your bottom line.

Types of Training

There are a wide variety of topics that must be taught to both managers and employees to fully prepare them for their jobs.

1. **Leadership Development training for managers and supervisors** – designed to teach consistent, club-wide leadership skills, which are the driving force behind the club's success (see *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Service-Based Leadership – The Foundation of Successful Club Operations* for more information).
2. **Organizational Systems training** such as Human Resource and Accounting Standards, Policies, and Procedures **for managers and supervisors** – designed to teach the underlying systems that permit the enterprise to operate efficiently.
3. **Club Values and Culture of Service training for all employees** – designed to foster a thorough understanding of the club's values and service ethic.
4. **Legal Compliance training for managers, supervisors, and employees** – designed to provide all required training in matters with legal implications for the club's, such as Equal Employment Opportunity, Fair Labor Standards Act, Sexual Harassment, and others.
5. **Liability Abatement training for managers, supervisors, and employees** – designed to limit the club's liability exposure for occupational safety and health, food sanitation, or product safety.
6. **Service Technique training for employees** – designed to give employees the skills necessary to perform their jobs and meet high standards of service.

Items 1 through 5 above should be developed by the club and provided club-wide for consistency; item 6 is specific to each department and should be developed and taught by individual department heads.

Training Principles

There are a several principles that should guide the development and implementation of any training plan:

- Not all employees learn equally well or fast; and not all employees find the same teaching techniques conducive to learning. Therefore, you need to develop training



formats that meet the needs of all learners. Such formats will include self-study manuals, checklists, handouts, quizzes, DVDs, Power Point presentations, “on-the-go” training material, scripting of key member interfaces (touch points or moments of truth), and ongoing discussions at staff meetings.

- Training employees is not a one-time task. New employees must receive initial training, but the amount of material that must be mastered requires that ongoing and refresher training be given in most topics and job skills.
- Some sort of Daily Huddle should be used by every department every shift to inspect staff, remind them of important service details, provide “on-the-go” training, and ensure every employee has the proper mind-set and enthusiasm to deliver high levels of service.
- Some training covering such topics as discrimination, sexual harassment, and safety training is required by law. Because of legal and liability issues, such training must be consistently taught throughout the club and such training thoroughly documented.
- All individuals tasked with training responsibilities must be trained. Completing a “Train the Trainer” class is a prerequisite to training other employees.

Strategies for Meeting Training Requirements

The following are suggested to help busy managers allocate the necessary time and resources for training:

- **Incremental training** – review the curriculum for each position. If there are 30 topics to be covered each year, break the training down into one lesson per week or two lessons every two weeks or five per month. By spreading the training burden over time, the amount that needs to be taught in any given week is lessened.
- **Schedule in advance** – plan and schedule a full year’s training in advance so busy and slow periods can be noted and considered when scheduling training. Every so many weeks schedule an open training day that can be used to catch up when unforeseen levels of business force postponement of classes.
- **Take advantage of traditionally slow times** (identified by benchmarking revenues) to schedule the bulk of the training or instruction that takes longer to provide.
- **Establish standard training days and times** – this helps make training routine for both the instructor and employees.
- **Use the Daily Huddle for “on-the-go” training material** to give short training sessions. On-the-go material can also be used whenever unexpected windows of time open.
- **Consider charging training hours to a general & administrative account** instead of to each department. Charging them to departments may prove a disincentive to train when managers’ bonus calculations include controlling payroll costs.
- **Benchmark all training sessions** – track topics, dates, times, how many in attendance, as this will help establish a more efficient schedule for future years, as well as validate the return on investment of the training program.



What Might a Comprehensive Club Training Program Look Like?

While recognizing that no two clubs are alike, there is much common ground in how clubs want to organize and deliver quality and service to members as can be seen in the following proposed outline of a comprehensive club training program:

Club-Wide Initial Training

Topical Resource	Presentation	Recipient(s) ¹	Purpose ²
Employee Handbook	Booklet	Line Employees Managers/Supervisors	Provides basic operating philosophy, legal and employment information, work policies, benefits information, safety & security information, and conduct expectations.
Managers' Handbook	Booklet	Managers/Supervisors	Provides operating philosophy, leadership guidance, management resources, legal and employment information, work policies, employee development/conduct/discipline/discharge policies, accounting overview, and safety & security information.
Club Orientation	Meeting	Line Employees Managers/Supervisors	Gives all new hires basic information about their employment with the club.
Organizational Values	Booklet	Managers/Supervisors	Ensures recipients understand the values that underpin the club's operation.
Culture of Service/ Club Etiquette Training	Class	Line Employees Managers/Supervisors	Provides guidance on the manner and means of interacting with members and fellow employees.
Leadership/Employee Empowerment	Books Meeting	Managers/Supervisors	Describes purpose and application of Service-Based Leadership and the development of Employee Empowerment.
Member Relationship Training	Class	Managers/Supervisors	Describes in detail the methods of managing the club's relationship with its members.
Human Resource Requirements	Standards, Policies, Procedures	Managers/Supervisors	Provides the details of the club's relationship with its employees, including legal requirements and liability issues.
Employee Development/Discipline	Booklet	Managers/Supervisors	Describes the requirements by which managers develop, guide, counsel, discipline, and discharge employees.
Accounting Requirements	Booklet	Managers/Supervisors	Provides detailed guidance to recipients concerning the club's accounting requirements.
Basic Safety and Security Information	Class	Managers/Supervisors	Provides a basic overview of safety and security information, including fire safety, emergency evacuations, Material Safety Data Sheets, safety inspections, hazard and accident reporting. etc.

1. Notice the extent of material to be presented to managers and supervisors, clearly demonstrating the importance of their roles as club leaders and agents.
2. By design there is a fair amount of repetition throughout the various topical resources. This is done to continually and consistently reinforce key material to recipients.



Departmental Initial Training

Topical Resource	Presentation	Recipient(s)	Purpose
Departmental Orientation	Class	New Hires	Provides recipients with basic information about individual departmental operations, standards, policies, and procedures.
Service Standards	Meeting	New Hires	Provides detailed guidance for departmental touch points.
Individual Skills Training	Instruction/ Demonstration	New Hires	Provides recipients basic skills, policies, and procedures for their respective positions.
Point of Sale Training	Instruction/ Demonstration	New Hires	Provides POS training to employees as necessary.

(continued)



Ongoing Training

Topical Resource	Presentation	Recipient(s)	Purpose
Leadership on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Values on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Management Disciplines on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Accounting on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
HR on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Employee Development and Discipline on the Go	Discussion	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Service on the Go	Discussion	Member-facing staff Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Food Service Management on the Go	Discussion	Food Service Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Safety on the Go	Discussion	Line Employees Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides reminders of topical issues.
Values Pocket Cards	Review	Line Employees Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides recipients with personal "touchstone" of club values and culture of service.
Daily Huddles	Meetings	Line Employees Mgrs/Supervisors	Reviews values, service standards, work processes, operational information; celebrates "wins" and recognizes employee performance.
Notable Quotables	Bulletin Boards Staff Mtgs	Line Employees Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides constant reminders of values and service requirements. Fosters understanding of leadership and management disciplines.
Professional Development	Reading List	Mgrs/Supervisors	Provides ongoing professional development.
Departmental Communication	Meetings	Line Employees	Constant communication with employees on issues impacting the department.

While the above tables detail a lot of information and effort to properly train managers and line employees, it plainly demonstrates the amount of essential material that needs to be covered, both initially and ongoing, to consistently provide high levels of quality and service to members.

In surveying these training requirements what becomes obvious to even the casual observer is that the real challenge is not "what" material to train, but "how" to go about doing it without breaking the bank. Clearly, the underlying success factors for club training are the "will to make



it happen,” the development and organization of the material, and the management discipline to train, remind, and reinforce – comprehensively, consistently, and continually.

Private Club Performance Management has created a wide variety of training resources to assist club managers in organizing their training programs. The great strength of these materials is their single authorship which results in a highly integrated and consistent messaging across all resources. The materials can be used as is or as the basis for clubs to develop their own customized training.

Implementing Training Initiatives with Incremental Progress

While I have attempted to lay out a comprehensive club training program, each club will have to assess their capabilities, resources, and time commitment in developing their own plan. For most clubs, it will make sense to identify and work on training programs for smaller, high priority areas of the operation. Though you must keep in mind that much of the departmental training, such as food and beverage and golf operations, will flow from club-wide standards, organizational values and culture of service, human resource and accounting standards, policies, and procedures (see *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, The Club Operations Plan – A Legacy Contribution for Club Excellence* for an overview of club-wide operations guidelines).

So, what strategy can be adopted that will allow progress toward ultimate goals without degrading operations, member engagement, and service delivery? A proven strategy for any major project is that of incremental progress.

Incremental progress allows forward movement on any significant plan by means of small steps taken daily or weekly ultimately bringing you and your team to the desired goal. But to be successful there are some specific steps that you must take:

- Call a meeting of all affected department heads to lay out the initiative. Explain fully the benefits of the initiative and the desired implementation date. Allow department heads to express concerns or objections. Engage them in discussion to fully explore any opposition and the exact reason for the opposition. Take genuine concerns into account and adjust the plan or desired completion date accordingly.
- Explain the necessary steps to implementation and require department heads to provide a detailed implementation plan and schedule of milestones for their tasks to be completed.
- Appoint a project manager to the overall implementation or reserve this task for yourself (the larger the project the more compelling the reason for the general manager to lead the effort). Plot all tasks that have required antecedents (such as developing the comprehensive club training plan and assigning specific project responsibilities), develop a master timeline with actions steps and milestones for each affected department head.
- Schedule a series of meetings to monitor progress toward completion of individual tasks. Depending upon the implementation timetable, use the Monthly Review of Financial Statement meetings to review individual progress toward implementation.
- Encourage responsible individuals to accomplish their action requirements in small steps – that is accomplishing something daily or weekly. If you sense any department head is waiting until the last minute to complete any action item, counsel them that this approach



often leads to sloppy, poorly executed implementation and, in fact, may jeopardize the timetables of other department heads or the project as a whole.

- Use weekly staff meetings for quick updates on project progress, thereby continuing to monitor the project momentum. Work with or counsel lagging subordinates as necessary.
- The bottom line for using incremental progress to move a club toward the implementation of a formal club-wide training program is the persistent involvement of the general manager to ensure that all subordinates stay focused on the larger task while continuing to run their operations.

Once the management team has completed a project as significant as establishing a formal training program, they will find it much easier to tackle other large projects. Remember that Jim Collins in *Good to Great* spoke of the need to push persistently in “a consistent direction over a long period of time” to build momentum and achieve breakthrough.

With everything else your management team must focus on, addressing the club’s large initiatives in small, consistent steps is the only logical way to move the club forward.

Summary

Developing a comprehensive training plan and program is probably one of the most challenging things a club will do, but the one-time effort and cost is well worthwhile. Over the long haul, the effort put into developing the professionalism of staff and improving the quality of service will have far reaching positive effects on member satisfaction and the club’s bottom line.

About the Author

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Master of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.