

Training on the Go

A Powerful Training Aid for Busy Operations



Ed Rehkopf



Let's Talk Training

Why is training so important in private clubs? The answers to this basic 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 experience fairly high levels of staff turnover, particularly in the critical service area of food and beverage.

For these reasons, a club manager 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 so difficult:

- First, is the standalone nature of most club operations. 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 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; service culture and values; 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 meeting the ongoing requirements of a multi-faceted curriculum.
- In times of tight budgets (and it seems always to be such a time!), the cost of every hour of training is multiplied by the number of employees being trained and their hourly wage – and this can have a significant impact on the bottom line.
- The management staff does not have 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 an effective 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 with a variety of strategies.

What to Do about Training

Having listed the challenges that standalone operations have in designing and implementing the robust and consistent training programs necessary to enhance organizational effectiveness and member service, what can be done about it. While most operations focus their training efforts on line employees, I have long advocated the need for manager and supervisory training in all areas. As agents of the club, these individuals can do far more harm unless well-educated in leadership, business disciplines, and legal and liability issues.

While there is no doubt that the challenges to comprehensive training are significant, the ramifications of weak, inconsistent training are even more significant in that they impact performance at every level and area of the operation – and may, in the case of legal and liability issues, prove to be an existential threat to the club.

Despite its critical nature, there always seems to be reasons not to train. Often the biggest obstacle to formal training programs is cost – as every hour of training is an hour of payroll. But



on closer examination, there is a lot of wasted time in every operation, time that could be spent on training. Ultimately, the real issue is one of **organization** and the **will to make it happen**.

So, what can a general manager do, should he or she want to institute a formal system of comprehensive training? Here are four basic requirements:

- Identify needs. While every operation may have specific needs, there is a great similarity in club operations and necessary training.
- Develop a training plan. (see *Insights and Ideas - Comprehensive Club Training* for more information). This can be used as a basis to develop your own plan.
- Establish priorities. As usual, go for the “low-hanging fruit” – those that are easiest to implement. You might even use one department as the testing ground for others before full implementation.
- Use the concept of “on the go” training for the bulk of initial and ongoing training. The use of ongoing, short training topics will help keep the cost of training down, while providing constant reminders of important issues, best practices, and service techniques. See below for a further explanation of this powerful and cost-effective training concept.

Lastly, I would suggest you use “incremental progress” to guide your training development. You don’t have to do everything at once. Make it a multi-year goal; assign tasks, responsibilities, and timelines. Make a little progress each week while keeping your eye on the result. Each step forward will bring incremental improvements. In time you’ll be amazed at the results!

On the Go Training

How can managers meet their training obligations while controlling costs since every hour of training is a payroll hour for each employee being trained? Added to this is the difficulty of getting all your employees together at one time for a formal training session.

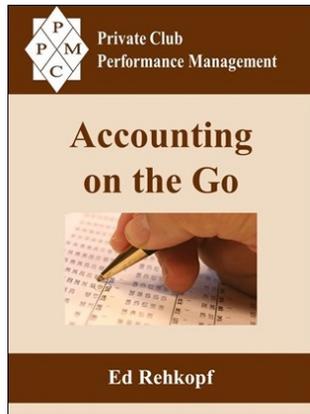
The answer to these challenges is to build your training programs around the “on the go” concept where ongoing training material is formatted in brief – no more than five to ten minute – sessions. In every shift, in every department, there are spare moments, time when employees have finished their shift preparations, time when employees are socializing among themselves or awaiting instructions from supervisors. Since you’re already paying for this time, put it to good use.

In every department there are hundreds of operational details that employees must learn and refresh themselves with some frequency. This is just as true in golf operations, housekeeping, facilities maintenance, and activity programming as it is in food and beverage. All that is necessary is for the department head to outline training requirements in brief doses and format them so they can be pulled out at a moment’s notice for either group-led or individual instruction.

With today’s ability to find anything on the Internet with just a few keywords and keystrokes, all the information you need to teach your employees values, etiquette, product knowledge, safety, security, sanitation, HR requirements, responsible beverage service, or how to operate or maintain any piece of equipment is readily available. You just have to format it for easy use.



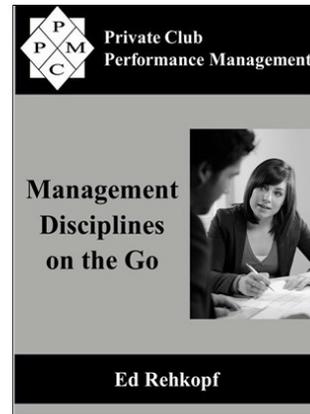
Private Club Performance Management has pioneered the concept of “on the go” training and has developed materials for organizational values, leadership, human resources, accounting, employee development and discipline, service, management disciplines, food service management, and safety. These are all available for purchase on the PCPM Marketplace store and provide a proven method of training. Here are some examples:



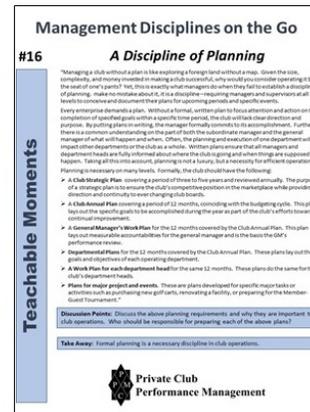
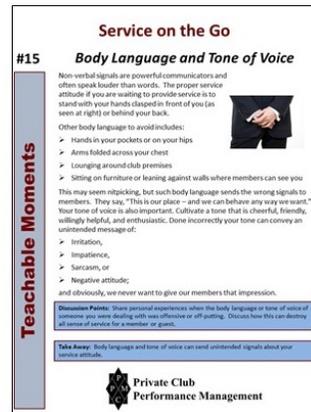
37 Topics



55 Topics



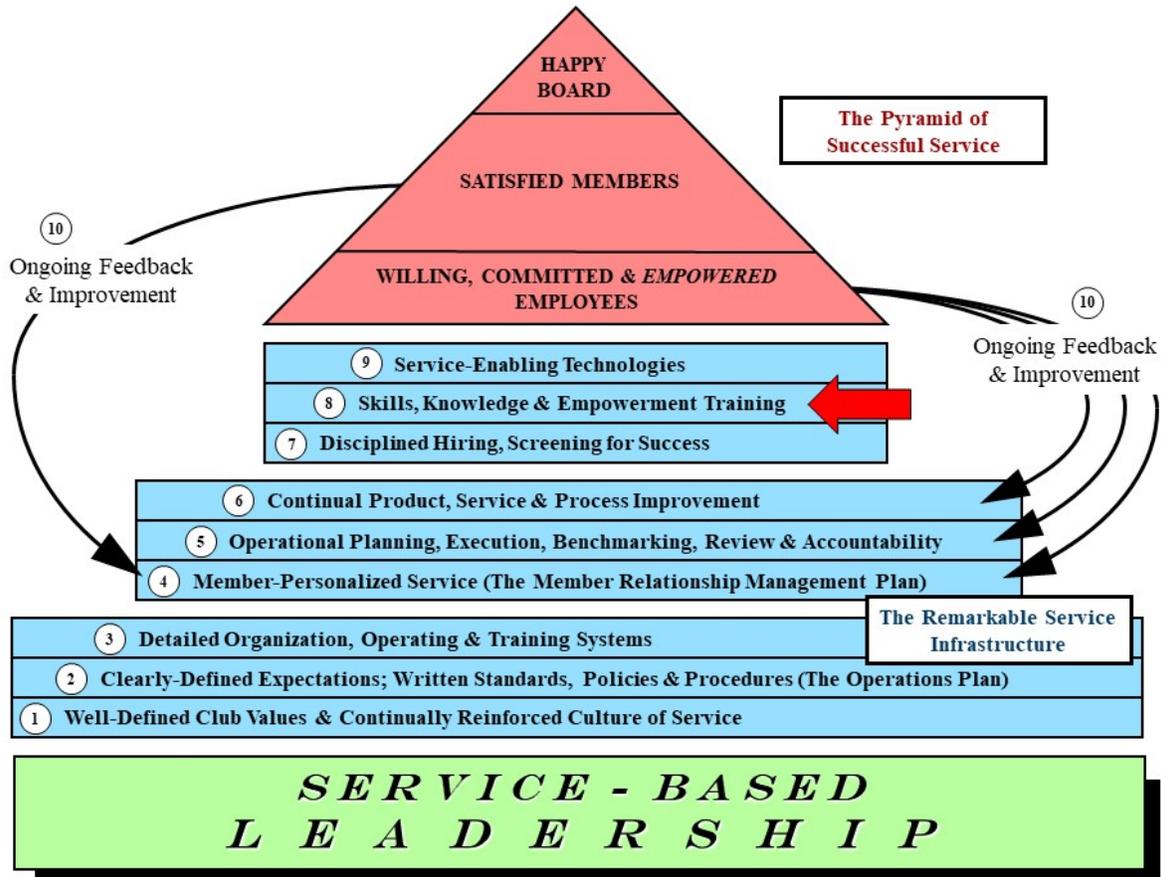
124 Topics



Summary

Without a formal and cost-effective means of delivering the large amount of information and training necessary in a high-performing club, the expectations of members and the board will forever be frustrated. The natural result of this frustration is never-ending complaints and the all too frequent episodes of management change and attendant turmoil in the life of the club (see *Insights and Ideas - What Price Poor Service in Private Clubs* for more details).

As seen below, training, regardless of topic or format, is an essential discipline in the Remarkable Service Infrastructure.



The Quest for Remarkable Service

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

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.