

Understanding Club Culture

One Brick at a Time---Building Team Using the “All Staff”

Part I---Strategy

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Why the “All Staff”:

Building the employee team is a big deal. The platitudes are endless. Everyone wants team.

Building team is a slow dirty business and the type of team you develop and how you develop it are markers for your club’s service culture. Every club manager has a pocketful of secrets that they use to develop relationships, community and team. The monthly All Staff is one of mine and worth sharing. Its real and it works.

My monthly All Staff meeting began almost two decades ago when I was struggling for a way to stem the rising tide of worker compensation claims at The Beach Club. After months and years of muddling my way through suspect accidents, insurance claims, hearings, payouts and payoffs, I finally got clever and discovered “The Big Four.” First, well meaning people, given the right training, tend to get hurt less than those who aren’t trained. Second, training is “easy” but making it “stick” is not. Third, people who are recognized as people with personalities tend to accept personal responsibility for their actions. And fourth, people tend not to “screw” people they know and institutions they care for. Good insights. So what? Now what?

The Beach Club’s All Staff monthly meeting started as a training exercise in safety. I showed training videos. Yawn. I lectured at them about respirators and slippery floors. Snore. I was checking the box on training (“Yes, we have a safety training program. Yes, people sleep through the sessions. Yes, our worker comp mod is unchanged, but we are committed to safety training. Look at the syllabus.”), but nothing was sticking. I was bored, they were bored and my worker comp disease raged on.

Then I said “to hell with it all” and decided to “let it flow.” Time to swing for the fences. No more commercial training videos---we’ll steal their scripts and make our own using employee actors. The staff watched, sat up and laughed at their friends. Injured employees became “professors of safety” and got paid for explaining their screw-ups at the All Staff. The employees watched, listened and remembered. I started giving out birthday presents, singing

songs, laughing, yapping, distributing “safety bucks” and flashing photographs of new members. Cash became king and voluntary safety meetings became “mandatory.” No one went to sleep. The program took off and became a “blockbuster moment” for me and my staff each month. Our experience mod went down, our rates were lowered and we saved tons of money. The more I saved the more I gave. The more I gave, the more they remembered. Good stuff.

The program evolved over the years, slowly, continuously and incrementally. Some screw ups here, some flat jokes there, some dull moments in between when creativity went dead and lethargy reigned king. But changes were made, an “All Staff Meeting Template” emerged and the philosophy beneath came shining through.

What I was building with the All Staff was team. A group of trained, dedicated, committed people joined together in a physical, spiritual, experiential and emotional bond whose efforts were directed toward a clearly defined service goal. Team.

Some basic management principles became clear. Consider these “truisms.”

People remember stories that are current, local and personal.

People learn best when good stories about “doing good and doing right” are told well.

Before people can be educated, they must be engaged and before they can be engaged they must be entertained.

Meetings transfer both the tangibles (right practices) and the intangibles (energy, focus, mission, dignity, status and team) to those in attendance.

Public recognition delivers dignity and status to those who are recognized.

Public praise for performance beats private praise for performance.

People want to do stuff that gets them praised in public.

Names are the currency of relationships and relationships are the building blocks of team.

People want an “energy transfer” from the leader of their community.

Employees want to believe that they’re doing what they’re doing for reasons bigger than the dishes that they’re cleaning.

The “Big Cheese” is the one responsible for articulating The Vision.

Education is absorbed slowly, in bits and pieces, and each piece needs continual re-enforcement to stick.

Cash can be used as a “tool for retention.”

People like to answer questions and be rewarding for answering right.

Explaining “why” right is right is as important as explaining how to “do” right.

The master of ceremonies is a high priest---interpreting “The Word,” finding “The Word” in experience, amplifying the message through repetition and ritual, making “street people” part of the congregation and giving them a glimpse of “The Vision” that unifies the congregation.

Powerful stuff.

The All Staff creates community and team. It’s a university that teaches without really teaching. It trains with trainers who embrace the trainees. It keeps worker comp costs low. It reduces employee turnover. It improves morale. It opens the lines of communication between management and staff. It works. Here’s how.

The All Staff---Preparation:

You’ll need some tools to bring your All Staff to life.

The first tool you’ll need is stuff. Find a “sacred space” for the meetings, someplace where the rarely sit, a member area. Find a time that works for all departments---possibly mid afternoon between the rush periods of lunch and dinner. Be predictable as to the week each month, the day each week and the time each day. Install a large bulletin board in the staff dining room, segregated into sections for each of the agenda items routinely used in the All Staff, filled with details useful in the upcoming meeting. Have cookies, coffee and sodas available. Distribute Questions of Consequence---with answers!---for employee review. Create registration slips for employees to sign when they arrive. Have one box for drawing names and a second box for the “Questions of Consequence” draw. Create individual slips for each Question of Consequence. Have lots of free cash to reward the winners. Have envelopes with “progressive cash” for the birthday babies. Have an LED projector, screen, computer with CD player for music and a DVD player for video.

The second tool you’ll need is The Presence. This character is critical. As Master of Ceremonies, their job will be to rev up the audience, engage the disengaged, articulate the big issues, identify the issues, explain the details and transfer energy. This person needs to be a great storyteller, know everyone by name, ooze energy, laugh a lot, get serious when serious is needed. And they need to “feel the power” of the message and the communal embrace. They need to be a preacher and a teacher and to see the All Staff as a group hug, university classroom and revival meeting rolled into one. They need to be a high priest who can fill all in attendance with The Word. Hopefully that Presence is your general manager.

The third tool you’ll need is tactics. Make a point of naming each and every attendee at least once during the meeting. Involve as many people as possible in answering questions or giving

insights and advice. Everyone---management included---can win and should register. Find reasons to make people “Professors of the Moment,” whether of safety or service. Show lots of staff photos on the big screen. Use music to warm up and unify the room before the meeting begins. Use communal cheers to create a single “voice.” Develop a predictable “ritual” for the meeting---an agenda that all know and can anticipate. Hold classroom sessions in advance to review the Questions of Consequence, member names and other issues they’ll be quizzed on at the meeting. And never forget that cash is king, that performance and knowledge are rewarded and that people prefer cash when they “get it right.”

Let the meeting begin.

End of Part I---Strategy!