

Park Owners/Managers: Jacks of All Trades, Masters of ???

Woodall's Campground Management - From My View - March 2002

Park owners and managers are faced with many demands for their time. They often find themselves frustrated with a myriad of tasks to perform. The smaller the park, the more difficult the situation seems to be because of the limitations of lighter staffing.

While larger parks have more staff to share the many tasks of park operation, small park owners/managers often find themselves performing, or at least sharing, the duties of reservations, check-in, restroom cleaning and grounds and general maintenance — all of which are very important to a successful operation.

The task of managing a park carries with it additional duties to those already mentioned. Managing means directing ALL the affairs of the organization, including marketing and promotions, setting rates, budgeting, hiring, training and scheduling personnel, and proper and complete records of the park's business.

While the duties necessary to accommodate your guests are very important to the park's success, the responsibility to truly manage the operation is the most important task and must not be neglected.

Every time an automobile leaves the garage there is someone at the wheel directing its movements. It does not move without receiving orders from its manager of the moment.

So it is with your park.

If someone does not truly do the specific things that a manager is to do, there will be without question varying degrees of damage to the potential of its success.

But where do you, as the manager or owner of a smaller park, find the necessary time to manage and do all the other things that seem to be necessary in the total operation?

Here is the age-old question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Do you do the management tasks first or do you first perform the tasks necessary to the park's operation?

The answer is very simple. If your park is to ever reach its maximum potential, as the manager you must take the time to truly manage ALL the affairs of the organization.

Using popular football coach Lou Holtz's WIN approach will help you reallocate your time. You must, to yourself at least, answer the following question: What's Important

Now. You must establish priorities among your various duties.

Every park has slack time in guest activity. Some are even closed during certain seasons. How do you use that time? You can choose to take some well-deserved time off and just kick back. You can allow your time to be totally consumed with trivia. Or you can accept the challenge to 'Decide What's Really Important Now' to the park. No park, be it large or small, can ever reach its full potential unless its designated manager performs the specific duties of a manager.

The next thing you may need to do is adjust your attitude. Perhaps you have found yourself in a negative mood in which, unlike the little train in the children's books, you find yourself saying, "I think I can't. I think I can't." This is one of the most common expressions heard from the lips of many small park operators. I can't attend state meetings. I can't attend ARVC conventions. I can't leave my park. I can't afford more marketing. I can't afford more staff. Etcetera. Etcetera. In order to 'take the time' to do the management duties of a manager, you will first need to realize that 'I can, I can, I can' is the only attitude that will let you do what needs to be done to "manage" your park and WIN.

When 'I can't' is used in relation to the management of a park, it is self-expression of a weakness of its manager to perform the duties of a manager.

- Lack of staff is either the result of a failure in budgeting, intelligent hiring, training and scheduling or thoughtfully rate-setting.
- 'I can't afford more marketing' is the result of the failure to set thoughtful rates or budgeting.
- 'I can't do a budget for my park' is perhaps the result of the failure of proper and complete record keeping of the park's business.

Next time you are tempted to use the term 'I can't,' remember that it is really a self-indictment of your own management. This may seem to be an extremely harsh statement to those who find it difficult to accept blunt analysis and advice. However, it has always been my policy to call 'em like I see 'em.

If these comments offend you, I assure you that it was not my intent to do so. It was however, my intent to try to shock you into both adjusting your attitude and deciding What's Important Now for your park. You must take the time to administer the affairs of your park and include the specific task of management.

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