



Respecting Other professionals in Your Environment

To understand “other professionals” we must define the term. A professional is a person who understands and properly practices the ethical and technical standards of a profession and one who participates for gain, success, and livelihood, in an activity or field sometimes engaged in by amateurs.

Many people consider themselves professionals but may not reach the standards you would expect. Who gets to set the bar – you or them? Both and neither because the opinion of the clients they serve will be the most important factor. Personal style plays a huge part in this and there as many different styles as there are people. Whether in speaking or writing, a professional will be known for their style. Style is their own; it is part of their nature. Sort of the “more than one way to skin a cat” theory. One of the most difficult roles a leader plays is working with staff with a hodge-podge of styles and making each one feel they are as important as the next.

Regardless of style, a true professional will always have good **AIM** - which stands for:

Appreciated = always make people feel their efforts are appreciated. Too many people confuse the "appreciation factor" with ego.

Important = make someone feel important whenever possible. This applies to clients, co-workers, acquaintances.

More = give people more that they expect and more than they have paid for.
Quantities of Quality!

The other mandatory attributes a professional must be proficient in applying are the use of the 6 senses:

- Sense of Humor -
- Sense of Purpose -
- Sense of Fairness -
- Sense of Honesty -
- Business Sense -
- Common Sense - Common sense is the ability to see things both how you want them to be and how they must be.

It seems the last sense – common sense – is becoming rarer every year. The true leader who can identify professionals and then help them to become better and more effective must have all 6 senses developed and under control.

"Leadership is 'show business'; it is symbolic and often dramatic. Today's successful leader is not necessarily a cop, referee, or a dispassionate analyst. The new leader is more of a cheerleader, coach, nurturer of heroes, builder, facilitator and historian. Almost every professional has some level of desire to be a leader. They are already leading in some way. They may lead their clients, or their supporting staff, or others in their industry. When leaders/professionals get around each other, there needs to be a super leader to stay the course.

Key Leadership recommendations:

- Create a unique culture for your environment.
- Love your associates and what you do.
- Listen deeply.
- Visit your competition to find out what they are doing.
- Choose a priority {and clearly, repeatedly, religiously, urgently, attentively, passionately focus your discussions and energy on that priority

In almost every situation, if a group of professionals are in a contained environment, they will all passionately believe that their area of expertise is the most important. During actual interviews with the very competent staff of a highly successful aquatic facility the following was found:

The Aquatics Director – described their job as the most important. They felt that they held the staff together and that the overall success of the business was due in large part to their leadership.

The Aquatics Program Coordinator – described their job as the most important because they had daily contact therefore responsibility for their clients. With them as the leader of the program, the clients would be unmotivated and lost.

The Land Program Coordinator – described their job as most important. After all we have to live and function on land not in the water, so they had the essential task of keeping their clients healthy and happy on land. Water was simply a steppingstone to get to their important phase.

The Business Operations Manager – described their job as most important. Money makes the world go around and without it no bills get paid or salaries distributed to the staff.

The Facilities Operation Manager – described their job as most important. The comfort and safety of all clients and staff depended on the job they did.

The Guards and Tech's – described their job as front line customer service representatives and after all – they do save lives. What can be more important than that?

The Coaches and Personal Trainers – thought they had very important and impactful jobs. They were individually responsible for the health and safety and progress of their clients or groups. They were the reason why the clients kept coming back.

Reads like an Aesop Fable doesn't it? In fact, all are important pillars holding up and promoting a culture. All must be strong, efficient, effective, and very professional. So how do they function in harmony when each thinks their job is the most important?

- They have to have a mutual respect for one another. This is taught. Yes, respect is also earned but it has to be nurtured by the leaders or it never has time to be earned. There is only one letter difference between learned and earned.
- Lose the word “most” and stress the “important”. Importance implies value and value is relative to the end user. All jobs and task are interrelated in a successful culture.
- Each staff member must have more than a casual knowledge of what each other staff member does. In the ideal situation, every professional should be able to switch jobs and fill in for another staff member for a whole week without missing a beat. This above all else will foster a respect amongst staff.

Problem solving is the ultimate test. Invariably, one professional will need more program time, more space, more attention, more resources, more something than another professional. This means something has to give and someone has to make a decision. Scheduling conflicts are inevitable. Some programs and people will always be more popular than others. This does not mean they are more important, just more in need at the present time.

E.G. The team and lap swimmers want the water temperature in the “big pool” to be 80 degrees. The learn to swim instructors and personal trainers want their clients not to shiver and shake when they are doing a more passive activity, so they want the “big pool” to be 87 degrees. All programs are income producing and important to the facility. What to do?

Evaluating importance is a tricky business. Which would you say is most important?

- Teaching a child how to be safe in the water or using aquatic therapy to help save an injured person's life and get them back to being functional.
- Having the swim team coaches teach a young person commitment and dedication and giving them the opportunity for a higher education or having the personal trainer work with an obese adult and help them with their self-esteem and life-style choices.
- Having a lifeguard assist a person who is in trouble in the water or the pool technician who notices a chemical leak in the filter room and fixes it before an accident happens.
- The coach who has a swimmer win their first race or the trainer who enables their client to take their first steps after an injury.

See why we have to lose the “most” and just emphasize “important”?

One answer to the “what to do” question posed above is to meet with staff and show that 84 degrees is a workable compromise for a single pool application. The swimmers doing the higher aerobic activities can adjust to slightly warmer water and those wanting warmer water can purchase some thermal aquatic wear that will make 84 degrees more comfortable. Compromise and collaborate. The super leader needs to be a facilitator.

Versatile staffing is a benefit to both the staff member and the culture of the business. One of the most positive traits of the true professional is that they do not consider what they do “work”. They look forward to every day and that attitude rubs off on everyone around them. Many of the staff does not consider what they do as a full-time job. School teachers teach school during the day and then coach after school. Lifeguards may go to classes during the day and then guard in the evenings. Trainers may only work 20 hours a week. Coaches may be on deck only 4 hours a night. Swim instructors may only teach lessons after school or on weekends. If the culture of aquatics is so intriguing, why not have the swim instructor be a personal trainer and an assistant coach? This allows the professional to fulfill their needs full time and make a better living. Everyone benefits and we have a better rounded professional.

Respect is knowing what each client and professional is going through to achieve their goals and doing everything possible to acknowledge and support their efforts. Collaboration amongst professionals truly assures a successful culture and business.