



I read a web page post the other day that quoted a council-person during a budget meeting as saying: “ *public recreation is not considered a vital public service such as police and fire protection or street repairs. Not opening the pool was viewed as a necessary action to close the potential budget gap. "The pool has always lost money"*

I also read this: “*The City Council recently discussed what to do with the pool, which remained closed the previous two summers, and there was not much sentiment for reopening it. Councilman _____ said many communities are abandoning the “pool business” because pools are “money losers.”*

AND this “ _____ *public swimming pools are closed for the season. A report says the pools continue to operate at a deficit, even though attendance was up. Preliminary figures say just under 36,000 used the city's three public swimming pools -- that's an 1800 person increase from a year ago. Revenue was up from \$46,000 to \$51,000 this year. The city hasn't factored in labor costs for August, but estimates the pools operated at a loss of \$70,000 this summer -- about the same as a year ago. Pool losses were higher in 2008 and 2009. The city's Parks and Recreation Committee meets today to review its 2012 -13 budget.*

AND this “*The commissioner noted that many towns, faced with similar requirements for their older pools, opt to close the facilities rather than take on such an expense. While lamenting the pool's annual hit on the city budget, officials have never given any indication that they will close the pool. Pools are not meant to generate revenue, Council members have noted, and are instead considered a service to the community.”*

Conclusion = we can no longer look at swimming pools as public service centers. Drastic changes in government budgets are causing local municipalities and schools to re-evaluate their inventory of facilities and infrastructure needs. Priorities are given to facilities that are in better condition as capital improvement funds are virtually non-existent. It's a matter of maintenance and upgrades and these need to be addressed with creativity and a long-term plan for needed improvements. Most municipal/school organizations are not equipped to manage this process. Their short-term needs tend to overshadow long term results. It's a matter of successfully operating a facility and developing a more inclusive user group understanding the principals of pricing programs so they support the facility. It's all about optional upper level programs that are offered in addition to existing programs that most of the public expect.

Budgets need to be balanced or the pool will be one of the 1,000+ closed the past 2 years. Aquatic managers and directors and decision makers need to be proactive in the following areas:

The FACILITY:

- The facility has to be clean, and attractive. Everything from the parking lot to the reception area to the shower rooms to the pool itself has to say welcome to our facility and we care about both the facility and the patrons.

- o Risk management is and always has been super-important. However, it is receiving more public attention than ever before. You have to have a “plan” and make everyone aware. The days of winging it are gone. There are great nationally recognized firms that specialize in helping develop and implement your plan. For more information contact sue@totalaquatic.llc

The STAFF:

You can never spend enough time and resources on staff training and support. Teamwork has become a catchphrase, but it is so important.

- o Staff training and certification benefits everyone. The certification needs to be relevant and from a reputable organization. There is much more to aquatics than just first aid and CPR. Once certifications are achieved, all clientele need to be made aware that the staff is among the best in the country. Market and recognize your staff's accomplishments
- o Each staff member must be conscious of their personal style. How do they appear and relate to others? No one should ever think their “style” is proficient. Improvement is something that just doesn't happen, it is caused. Staff motivation and a concerted effort to be better than last week is critical.

The PARTICIPANTS:

- o These are the people who write the checks. Without them the business does not succeed. Many customer service businesses fail because the staff did not recognize what it took to keep people happy, healthy, and coming back day after day.
- o Give your customers tiered programming options that includes not only group lessons or activities but also higher priced 1:1 or 2:1 custom session with a competent trainer or instructor.
- o Customer satisfaction is a daily challenge that has to be discussed, analyzed, and tracked. Customer comment cards should be available at the front desk. Periodically the staff needs to talk with the participants and see how they feel they are doing.
- o Do all of your participants have goals? Have they been taught goal getting? Have you discussed their personal plan and the benchmarks they will use along the way. People quit because they feel they are wasting their time.

We are in the SERVICE BUSINESS. "**Aim** to please!" Remember the code word **AIM**.

Appreciated = always make people feel their efforts are appreciated. Don't forget staff and customers are both equally important.

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

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

Lastly – Every facility has a better chance of success and survival with Total Aquatic Programming. Every program has a very important place in the culture of success. It is very difficult to have one program functioning with one plan, delivery method, and staffing philosophy while another program works an entirely different way. Aquatic programming has way too many commonalities for us all not to take advantage of the above. Optional programming should be 55% of the pools income to make the business a sustainable success.