

TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

Enhancing the Member Experience

By Elizabeth R Kovar, MS

Many wellness and recreation professionals understand that the member's experience starts in the parking lot. However, we typically think the experience solely relies on customer service and interaction. This is highly important, but the member experience is seen as the involvement within your facility or community.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

In the world of customer service, staff are presented with customer opportunities and have several choices. Staff can do nothing, do something, do the right thing or do the great thing. These choices are acted upon a combination of words and actions. Although it results in training staff to "think before they speak," this thinking process is different and requires time and practice.

SCENARIO

Janet, mother of Scott, wants to sign her son up for Youth Strength Training. Scott turns 11, the minimum age for the class, halfway through the course. Janet asks a front desk staff around 5:15PM if she can sign up Scott for Youth Strength Training, as he will definitely meet the minimum age requirement at the end of the course.

Your front desk staff, Mark, can respond with:

DO NOTHING: "I am sorry ma'am, I don't know the answer. It might be best to call in the morning," as Mark continuously scans membership cards.

DO SOMETHING: "I am sorry ma'am, I do not know the answer, but here is the card of the director who can answer your question," as Mark continuously scans cards.

DO THE RIGHT THING: Mark stops scanning cards and

CUSTOMER SERVICE

responds, "I hear youth strength training is a great class.

I apologize as I cannot answer the age approval or give authority to register your son today, but here is the director's business card. She is the best person to speak with. How about I also get you to write down your name and number and I will make sure she gets this information."

DO THE GREAT THING:

Mark stops scanning cards and places the automatic scanner on the top of the desk.

He responds with, "Wow, so you are interested in youth strength training? I am glad to hear that you want him to learn the weight room machines, as I hear it is a great class. Unfortunately, I cannot answer your question or approve his registration. If you have a minute, I can see if the director of the program is still in office. If she is not, you can reach her at this number on her business card."

Obviously, doing the great thing requires an extra moment of time. The combination of action and words reflects that Mark actively listened to Janet, showed he cared about her question during a heavy traffic time, and hopefully made Janet feel like a valued member. The minor switch in initiating the conversation with a positive remark states that there is value to program; in addition, to eliminate buyer's remorse. This sense of regret is more common with expensive, tangible items, but gym memberships and wellness programs are not a priority to the majority of financially stuck Americans. Creating an atmosphere of excitement results in members staying at your facility and

PROGRAMS

LOYALTY

not switching to the local competitor.

PROGRAMS

Programs are the options, connections and inspirations throughout the member experience. Fitness, family, aquatic, art and senior programs must meet the needs and wants of your members. Programmers must also be empathetic when designing the finer details of the program. A goal in programming is to not only reach out to a specific population, but to prove that your facility features quality and organized offerings.

Some major challenges of successful programs are facility room availability or budgetary resources to afford equipment or supplies. On the other hand, one of the main successors to programming is consistency. When scheduling new programs, it is essential to perform a S.W.O.T. analysis. This stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that benefit or hinder success. In addition, programming may incorporate departmental cooperation.

For example, say your facility identified a need to schedule a weight loss program for moms. In order to program to this population it is essential to get feedback from the prospective participants on program time, day of week and length of program. However, say you have identified a couple major threats including: you only have room availability at 2:00pm or 4:00pm and childcare does not start until 5:00pm.

At this point, programmers must be empathetic. Therefore, knowing that the 2:00pm maybe challenging as this is the time where school is ending, but 4:00pm the kids are out of school.

So what to choose? The programmer is trying to schedule a class into a timeframe that is undesirable.

Therefore, the programmer's perspective is thinking, "I have offered a demand and hope mom's can make it." The mom's perspective is, "Thanks for thinking of me, but I have to pick up my kids, take them to soccer practice and cook dinner. Can't this be earlier or later in the day?"

Looking at the later options, can you work with aquatics or the youth development department to allow mom's to drop their children off at swim lessons or an after school program? Or if you know your school's district sport practices range from the 3:00-5:00pm maybe the 4:00pm class would be the better option.

People love routines and consistency, which is why many average Americans eat or shop at corporations. Due to the fact, that the cup of coffee or sandwich tastes the same everytime. Treat your program with value and consistency. Consistently changing rooms, class times, instructors or class cancellations devalues programs and screams disorganized and unreliable.

LOYALTY

Customer service and strategic programming are two of the many ways to enhance the member experience. Hopefully, with courteous staff and stellar programs this generates loyal members and class participants. Loyalty is important due to the word of mouth communication. Satisfied members will refer outside people to join to the facility; in addition, engaged group exercise participants will refer current members to the class, which promotes class growth. It is a win-win situation to protect your facility from competition or the negative comment card.

In the service industry, individuals rave or rage about the quality of service they received. Your facility is no different. From swim lessons, group exercise to personal training, your members will praise their (dis)satisfaction.

Remember in an ideal world, our facilities would have limitless rooms and budget money. However, as this is unrealistic, use your current resources (staff, equipment, room availability) to best suit the needs and demands of your customers. The more the member is connected and inspired, the better the experience.

Good luck! **OSF**

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