



**Private Club  
Performance Management**

# **Service on the Go**



**Ed Rehkopf**

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# Service on the Go

## *Introduction*

Club operations face a challenging training burden if they are to deliver the high levels of service expected by their members. Yet with tight budgets how can managers meet their training obligations while controlling costs since every hour of training is a payroll hour for each employee being trained? Add to this the difficulty of getting all your employees together at one time for formal, consistently-presented training sessions.

The answer to these challenges is to build your training programs around the “on the go” concept where ongoing training material is formatted in brief – no more than five to ten minute – modules. In every shift, in every department, there are spare moments, time when employees have finished their shift preparations, time when employees are socializing among themselves or awaiting instructions from supervisors. Since you’re already paying for this time, plan on putting it to good use.

In every department there are hundreds of operational details that employees must learn and refresh themselves with some frequency. This is true in all areas of the club operation. All that is necessary is for the department head to outline training requirements in brief doses and format them so they can be pulled out at a moment’s notice for either group-led or individual instruction.

With today’s ability to find anything on the Internet with just a few keywords and keystrokes, all the information you need to teach your employees values, etiquette, product knowledge, safety, security, sanitation, HR requirements, responsible beverage service, or how to operate or maintain any piece of equipment is readily available. You just have to format it for easy use.

Private Club Performance Management has developed a variety of On the Go Training programs for leadership, values, service, food and beverage, human resources, accounting, and safety. These offer a proven model of how easy it is to format material and train your employees to increase their knowledge, skills, abilities, and service techniques. For examples, check out the Training on the Go material on the PCPM Marketplace store.

**Take Away:** Training will always be a challenge in the club business. One solution is to format training material in short, easy-to-absorb and easy-to-use modules that can be used whenever blocks of time open up during otherwise busy operations.



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## *Tips for Use*

One of the major motivations for creating the Service on the Go material is to provide managers and employees a common understanding and application of service standards and skills.

As with any other tool, Service on the Go is only as effective as the effort put into it by the supervisor and/or employee. Each sheet provides the “take away” from the lesson. Comprehension can be improved by asking employees to explain terms or points in their own words, offer examples from their own experience, or illustrate points with real or imagined scenarios. The key is to get them to think deeply about each topic and connect it with their own experience and the context of their job.

The Service on the Go material can be used in group-led discussions for ongoing training of employees to reinforce service skills or they can be used for an individual who wants to work through the entire program in sequence to upgrade skills and knowledge. They are also an excellent way for a newly-hired employee to be brought “up to speed” on the service requirements of the organization.

*Note: Many underlined documents or resources in this book may be found on the PCPM Marketplace store.*

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## #01

### *So You Want to Be a Service Leader*

What's the first step? Teaching employees service skills, techniques, and attitudes? Nope! This approach will have only a limited, short-term effect on some of your staff ... and even these will give up soon if they don't see a consistent service ethic and example from their leaders.

Becoming a service leader requires a long-term, sustained effort from a management team committed to a consistent service-based approach to leading their service teams. The goal of such an approach is to empower employees to think and act like managers – to take the initiative and ownership to resolve service issues wherever encountered with the sure knowledge of their leaders' backing and support.

Simply put, the requirements and priorities for becoming a service leader are:

- Establishing a club-wide service-based leadership style with its emphasis on serving employees by providing all the necessary tools, training, resources, support, and example to provide high levels of service.
- Establishing a culture of service continually and consistently reinforced by all managers.
- Creating a highly organized operation where expectations and standards are understood by all, and managers and employees are held strictly accountable for conduct and performance.
- Ensuring that managers at all levels of the organization understand and consistently employ the many disciplines and best practices of operating a well-organized private club. This requires that all managers are trained to common standards and performance expectations.
- Hiring well and training thoroughly so that the club employs the best people with the right personalities for the positions they hold and that every employee is trained in the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the jobs they perform.
- Empowering your employees to take the initiative, make decisions, and take actions to "wow" members and resolve any and all service issues. Such empowerment requires that employees are well-trained not just in the how's of service, but also the why's. Finally, you must carefully define the parameters of employee empowerment and decision-making and create a supportive environment that doesn't blame employees for their decisions and actions, only looks for better ways of doing things.

Becoming a service leader is not an easy undertaking or one to be approached lightly. On the contrary, it requires the management "will to make it happen" and the service-based leadership to create the environment that naturally promotes service.

But regardless of the effort involved, the bottom line is, as John Tschohl, president of the Service Quality Institute, says – *"Without empowerment, an organization will never be a service leader."*

**Take Away:** Poor service is a threat to viability of any private club operation.



### *Quality and Service*

Every club claims to offer its members ☐ extraordinary ☐ legendary ☐ remarkable ☐ superb ☐ world-class (your pick) levels of service; yet how many of these organizations have taken the time or made the effort to define their quality and service standards?

Given that your club's quality is defined by the relative merits of service standards, let us pose some questions regarding the service to which you aspire or claim to offer.

- Have you or your organization defined what service is for your service-delivery employees?
- Have you explained to employees your members' expectations for service?
- Do you know what your members expect when it comes to service? If so, how do you know? What methodology is used to determine members' needs and expectations?
- Have you identified your key service touch points or moments of truth for your employees?
- Have you taught or demonstrated for your employees how to handle various touch points in all their variations and contingencies?
- Have you documented touch points and service standards, policies, and procedures to ensure that they are taught consistently to each new employee and generations of new employees?
- Do you have a means of measuring compliance with service standards, policies, and procedures?
- Do you have a process to address service failures?
- Do you have a process to make service failures right for your members?
- Do you have a process to discover underlying causes of service failures to ensure they don't happen again?
- Do you have a consistent process to educate employees about changes to standards, policies, and procedures to eliminate service failures?
- Do you have a means of monitoring service failures to identify trends or spot problems?
- Do your employees know that they can self-report their service failures without fear or repercussions?

If you've answered "no" to many of the questions above, you cannot provide quality service. What you do provide is a series of interactions between members and employees that may or may not meet the expectations of members or management. The quality and service you provide is based purely on chance and, therefore, has an unacceptably high risk of failures.

If the above describes your operation's quality and service, there is much to work on to meet the promises you've made to your members.

**Points to Consider:** Think about the requirements above and how your club measures up. Identify your weaknesses and gaps, establish priorities, and begin working to build a consistently high-quality service organization.

**Take Away:** Quality and service do not happen by chance. They can only be assured by a disciplined regimen of leadership, values, organization, and training.



## #06

### *Principles of Service*

The following principles govern the quality of the service we wish to offer:

1. SERVICE is our only product. We aim to provide the highest possible level of service to our members and their guests.
2. Attitude and a sense of enthusiasm are important ingredients in providing high quality SERVICE.
3. The first step in providing SERVICE is to anticipate the needs and desires of our members and their guests. To do this we must examine every area of our operation in detail to determine how we can give more and better service and value.
4. To provide high quality SERVICE, we must know what our members want and expect. Therefore, we should constantly seek their comments, criticisms, and opinions about our operation.
5. If a member perceives a problem, there is a problem. It makes absolutely no difference whether we think there is a problem or not. Furthermore, the problem is ours, not the members. The burden rests entirely with us to change the member's perception.
6. We should never be defensive when a member comes to us with a problem. He or she is doing us an immense favor by bringing the problem to our attention. We must listen carefully to make sure we understand the nature of the problem and take action to correct it.
7. Every problem has a solution. Placing blame for problems is not our concern. Solving problems and analyzing them to ensure they don't happen again is our only concern.
8. The SERVICE profession is a demanding one, but one that offers many rewards. There is nothing more demanding or more satisfying than accepting the challenge of turning someone's anger and unhappiness into a smile.
9. A true SERVICE attitude involves sincerely caring for our fellow man. The good feeling we get from helping others is proof positive that when we give to others, we give to ourselves.
10. A sincere smile is the smallest yet most important element of SERVICE. Though smiles are formed with the mouth, when sincerely given, they come from within. Smiles are more than just lip service.

**Discussion Points:** Select one or more of the above principles and discuss their meaning and purpose. Illustrate with examples from your own experience or describe how a service problem could have been avoided had a principle been followed or observed.

**Take Away:** The Principles of Service and what they mean should be second nature to every club employee.





## #12

### *Teaching the Subtleties of Service*

High levels of service in a club environment are so much more than knowing service techniques, smiling, and greeting members. To do service well requires people who are sensitive to the needs and desires of others and who understand a wide range of the customs and courtesies of human interaction. They need to recognize the subtleties of service. But what do we mean by subtleties?

Subtlety is the awareness and ability to make fine distinctions in how one engages with others or a well-calibrated sense of how to respond to or engage a person in a particular situation.

As leaders how do we go about teaching our employees the subtleties of service? It certainly takes more than telling them to smile and be nice to members. They must have a basic understanding of the underlying customs and practices of service, manners, and gracious behaviors, as well as an awareness of the signs and signals of unspoken needs. Not only do they need to know what to do, but they need to have the sensitivity and perceptiveness to recognize members' needs even before these are expressed.

Such sensitivities improve with knowledge and experience, but unless a new hire naturally possesses these abilities (which experience has shown that few do), club managers must start somewhere in training employees in the subtleties of service. Here's a list of requirements:

- The club must have well-defined organizational values and a constantly reinforced culture of service. When employees are immersed in such a culture, service becomes second nature to all.
- Daily engagement and consistent example of Service-Based Leaders. Without appropriate examples of service from leaders, don't expect employees to possess and provide it.
- Empowerment training that spells out the limits of employee initiative and discretion in resolving issues and problems (see *Teachable Moments* #53).
- Making employees aware of the rules of engagement. Different members will want to engage differently with employees at different times and in different settings. Understanding the issues of engagement is critical to service and service delivery (see *Teachable Moments* #26).
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the mental environments for each area of the club. Different areas have different mental environments at different times of the day. Being aware of the concept of mental environment and recognizing member moods and desires is an important part of providing appropriate levels of engagement (see *Teachable Moments* #18).
- Teach service recovery and how to apologize. This is so basic it hardly needs stating, but experience has shown that a consistent approach must be taught to ensure employees understand the importance of recovering from bad situations and the need for a sincere "we accept all responsibility" apology (see *Teachable Moments* #40 and 44).
- Make sure employees understand the importance of the Three A's of Service – that is:

**Be Alert, Aware, and Anticipate customer needs.**

As with everything else demanding quality, service behaviors and delivery must be defined and taught to all employees. Otherwise how would they know what you and your members expect?

**Take Away:** There is much more involved in service than just smiling and being friendly.



## #20

### *Appropriate Words and Phrases*

Members and guests at private clubs expect high levels of service from those who serve them. Central to this service are the words and phrases that employees use while interacting with them. Below are listed examples of words and phrases that are appropriate in a club environment :

- Please / Thank you
- Yes sir (or ma'am) / No ma'am (or sir)
- May I be of assistance? (use "may," not "can")
- How may I help?
- It's my pleasure
- At your service, ma'am (or sir)
- Good morning (day or afternoon) / Good evening (or night)
- Welcome back, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ / It's good to see you again, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_
- Pardon me / Excuse me
- We look forward to seeing you again
- Certainly / Of course
- As requested
- We hope everything is satisfactory
- Is everything to your satisfaction?
- Right away, ma'am (or sir)
- I'll be right with you, sir (or ma'am)
- Let me replace that immediately

How words and phrases are said is as important as what is said. Whatever words and phrases you use, they must be natural and sincere. Do not sound stiff, robotic, or like they are memorized. Use the acceptable words and phrases above or similar ones that come naturally to you. Speak clearly. Look members squarely in the eye. Smile when appropriate. Be natural, be sincere, be friendly, but most of all, be engaging (that is, "winning, attractive, pleasant").

**Discussion Points:** Discuss the language and terms above and why they are appropriate in a service environment. Also discuss the importance of being sincere and natural in everything you say. Brainstorm with your service team to develop your own list of appropriate words and phrases.

**Take Away:** The words and phrases you use in serving members can have a major impact on how that service is viewed.



## #32

### *Suggesting for a Richer Dining Experience – 1*

Dining offers many opportunities to offer suggestions as can be seen from the following list:

- **Beverages.** Offering beverages is the usual way to start a meal. In addition to offering non-alcoholic beverages such as water, tea, lemonade, and sodas, many diners will want an alcoholic beverage, so be prepared to suggest a wine, beer, or cocktail.
- **Cocktails.** There are a host of creative cocktails for any taste and occasion. The heyday of cocktails was in the Forties and Fifties, but these retro drinks are making a comeback. Many times the person who would routinely order a Vodka and Tonic might be induced to try a refreshing Tom Collins, Sea Breeze, Banana Daiquiri, or other mixed drink. Talk to your bartender about his or her suggestions. Learn about a new cocktail each shift, and in no time, you'll have a large repertoire to suggest.
- **Wine by the Glass.** Diners who don't want a bottle of wine for either consumption or cost reasons, can be tempted to have a glass of wine. In addition to house wines, many clubs offer upscale or premium wines by the glass. Ensure you're familiar with what wines are available by the glass and are able to entice members to try them by knowing where they come from, what they go with, their flavorings and aromas, sweetness or dryness, and reputation for quality.
- **Appetizers.** Appetizers are a great way to start a meal, usually taking less time to prepare, allowing diners to snack on something while thinking about what entrée they want, and they go well with cocktails or other beverages. As you're taking drink orders, suggest appetizers to go with them. Another great way to sell appetizers is to offer a medley or sample of several appetizers that the entire table can share with their drinks.
- **Soups and Salads.** Most clubs will offer a variety of soups and salads, with light, refreshing ones in hot weather and more hearty offerings in the winter. Many diners will opt for just a soup or salad or maybe a soup and salad combination. Often, if your soup, salad, and dressing offerings are creative, you can interest diners in a cup of soup or a salad by enticing descriptors and your wholehearted recommendation.
- **Desserts.** Your club will offer a variety of desserts for those with a sweet tooth. Like appetizers they are often shared. Be prepared to tempt your diners with mouthwatering descriptors and don't forget everyone's often overlooked favorite – ice creams.
- **Liqueurs.** Club carry a wide assortment of liqueurs that make wonderful after-dinner drinks. Many are world-famous for their proprietary flavorings and recipes, and have been around for decades, even centuries. They are great served neat, on the rocks, or even over a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Make a point of becoming familiar with these; just make sure you pronounce their names properly.
- **Cognac, Brandies, Ports** make great after-dinner beverages. Again, familiarize yourself with those your club carries and be prepared to recommend them after dinner with coffee service.
- **Espressos, Cappuccinos, Specialty Coffee Drinks.** Many clubs offer specialty coffees and after dinner drinks made with coffee. Don't hesitate to suggest these to those diners who want to linger at the table over conversation.
- **Sparkling Wines and Champagnes.** These wines are usually associated with celebratory occasions, so be aware if someone is celebrating a birthday, anniversary, or other occasion.

**Take Away:** The more you know about the club's food and beverages, the better able you will be to make dining suggestions to members and guests.



## #39

### *Dining Service Tips – 2*

**Check Linen.** Make sure table linen does not have a “sour” smell. If so, replace it and notify your supervisor. Also ensure there is an adequate supply of clean linen to meet expected levels of business.

**Responsible Beverage Service.** It is against the law to serve underage individuals or to over-serve anyone. Be aware of anyone who is drinking heavily. Watch for slurred speech, inability to focus eyes, loss of motor skills, or blank expressions. Alert management to any potential problem.

**Condiments.** Before the meal period check any condiments that are served to tables in their original bottles to ensure bottles are clean. If not, wipe down with a clean damp cloth. This applies to various condiments such as ketchup, mustard, A-1 Sauce, hot sauces, etc.

**Dishwash Station.** Do not over stack dishwasher station. It'll just result in breakage and spills. Try to help out if possible or make your supervisor aware of the developing problem.

**Music.** Music can be a pleasant accompaniment to any meal, but it can also be a source of irritation if played too loud or if the music is inappropriate to the crowd, the mood, or the occasion. Most clubs subscribe to a music service that provides a wide variety of music. Selecting the most appropriate music for particular meal periods is an important element of establishing ambience. Classical or contemporary jazz is often a good mix for evening meals, while lunch music can mix more popular, light contemporary or classic rock. Regardless of selection, playing the music at an appropriate volume is of absolute importance. Managers should establish guidelines for musical selections and volume for each meal period.

**Lighting.** Setting the appropriate lighting level is an important element of establishing the ambience in the dining area. The lighting level will be determined by the time of day, weather outside, ambient light from the windows, the meal period, the mood you are trying to achieve, whether of not candles or votive lights are used on the tables, and any ancillary lighting such as wall sconces, etc. Most dining rooms are equipped with rheostat switches for their lights so that the lighting level can be adjusted. Make sure to check the lights before each meal period to make sure the lighting level is appropriate to the occasion.

**Sun Glare.** Many clubs have dramatic views from the dining room, sometimes overlooking the 18th green or a lake. While these views add much to the diners' experience, they can also be a source of irritation when the bright sun shines into their eyes. So when the sun gets low, pay attention to whether or not it is shining in anyone's eyes. Close the blinds or drapes until the sun sets lower, then reopen them so members and guests can again enjoy the view. Your consideration will be greatly appreciated.

**Take Away:** Food service is detail-intensive. Remind yourself periodically of these details.



## #44

### *Defense and Offense – 2*

How can you avoid the natural tendency to become defensive? The first step is to be aware that you become defensive when criticized or listening to a member complaint. Notice the giveaways. Are you tense and nervous? Do your hands shake or your voice quaver? Do you feel a tightness in your chest? Do you raise your voice? Any of these symptoms reveal your defensiveness.

Realizing this, what can you do about it? First, understand two important things:

- Complaints are not usually directed at you, so don't take them personally. Allow some distance between yourself and the complaint. Not too much, though; you must show a sincere concern to resolve the problem.
- When a member complains, there is, in his mind, a problem. Whether we think there is a problem or not is immaterial. Furthermore, because of the nature of the service profession, the problem is ours. When considered in this light, the member is doing us a favor by making us aware of the problem. We should be appreciative and thankful instead of defensive.

In addition, there are some things you can do when confronted with a complaint.

- Where there is no conflict, there is no need for offense and defense. Don't allow a conflict to arise. Disarm the situation by cheerfully accepting our problem. Listen carefully to what the member is saying. Apologize sincerely for our shortcomings. If you can solve the problem, cheerfully and quickly do so. If you can't, get a manager who can.
- If you find yourself becoming nervous or defensive, take a deep breath. The inflow of oxygen will help quiet your system and the moment you take to breathe has a calming effect on your nerves.
- If you find yourself losing control, try to leave the room on some pretext. If you are a server, tactfully excuse yourself "to check with the kitchen." Once there, take a deep breath and get control of yourself. Try to put the member's anger into perspective. It's not the end of the world. Resolve to overcome that anger. Take another deep breath and go back to the member.
- Go on the offensive in a positive away. Take control of the situation. Ask pertinent questions about the problem. Take notes as necessary. This taking ownership of the problem demonstrates a proprietary concern and a desire to correct the problem.
- While apologies must always be given, remember that easy apologies and facile excuses do not impress. Our actions speak louder than our words.
- Be sincere. You should have a sincere desire to help any member with a need or concern. If you don't, you're in the wrong business.

Two things you must never do:

- Pass the buck or evade responsibility. You may not have created the problem, but now that it's been brought to your attention, you need to resolve it.
- Don't become defensive. It is not us against the members. We're on their team!

Responding to member complaints is one of the most difficult things we face in the service profession, but when we avoid becoming defensive, we often can create a turnaround situation where the problem is solved, and the member satisfied. There is no more satisfying situation in service.

**Take Away:** By being aware that there is never a need to be defensive when responding to a complaint, employees must handle it in a more positive way.

### *About the Author*

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Master of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic, university-owned hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.