

## **Great Programming Begins With Accurate Program Evaluations**

There is real value in knowing the true state of your leisure programs. This allows managers to make wise decisions about current programming and appropriate plans for forward direction. Here are several important considerations for an accurate program picture.

An objective evaluator is essential for true program evaluations. This should be an expert with no connection to your club. A common problem is members with an agenda give the manager or board biased information that does not accurately reflect the program or the perceptions of the general membership. Decision-makers who listen to misinformation or the opinions of the outspoken minority often make poor decisions. Hence, if you are evaluating your tennis program get accurate, unbiased feedback from an independent and experienced Tennis Director who does not know your Pro, any staff or members at your club. Also, when I do operational reviews I like others to assist me who have no association with the club. This further serves the goals of obtaining objective and credible information.

Look at the program environment. Amenities need to evoke good feelings and entice people to participate. You can realize this with clean and orderly settings. Are there maintenance systems in place that are performed regardless who is on duty, or does the staff typically react to maintenance problems? In a fitness center your staff needs to systematically clean equipment and members should wipe machines after usage. Do your members go through an orientation where safe demonstrations are presented? Is your staff trained in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)? Recently, some guidelines have changed. Do you have Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and are these systematically checked?

An evaluation should look at who is leading or teaching a program. Certifications are essential, yet people skills and character are more important. What is your Pro's rating in his or her association? To evaluate a Tennis Pro's doubles knowledge I developed a Doubles IQ which you can use. Go [atrec.net/doubles\\_iq.php](http://atrec.net/doubles_iq.php). For directors look at organizational and administrative skills. Their documentation of programs can be very revealing. People who teach a class need to deliver more than mechanics and must connect with their students. Knowing and saying someone's first name is one way to engage others. Is your instructor enthusiastic? You cannot teach enthusiasm – you have to embody it naturally. Learning sports is mostly visual, yet some members are kinesthetic or verbal learners. Top instructors often teach simultaneously in all three modes. Also, Professionals are punctual and arrive in ample time to teach class. Does your coach rush to set up then start late, or is he prepared to begin class on time?

How well is the program planned and promoted? Successful programs run effective communication systems that are repeated. I like yearly program calendars so you can proactively look ahead and timely promote significant events. Active promotion or people talking is by far the best way to promote, yet include artistic flyers and descript newsletters. Are announcements consistently made like at the end of fitness classes or in weekly e-mails? Do you rely solely on staff to promote programs or do committee members take an active role? One of the best ways to promote a program is to recognize participants. Take photographs of members who participate, get them to write a brief comment then prominently display this

information. Are there programs in place to set up or feed other programs? For example, establishing tiny tots programs at a bargain rate can directly feed other junior programs.

Participation is a key for evaluations, and look at numbers. First-rate programs and professionals have excellent documentation which is readily available to managers. For example, you should know the true number of members in every current and previous fitness class. After each program, is there a log where the teacher writes the number of participants then signs? Does the Director sometimes verify those numbers? Depending on the program there is a target ratio of participation to total members. Two percent or more can be an acceptable number for some sports programs. Do your personal trainers have health histories (which are confidential), necessary physician referrals, release of liability and notes for every training session?

Review program expenses and revenues. You want consistency in operations, and make sure you are not overpaying instructors even if they are well-liked. Know market rates, and keep in mind everyone is replaceable. Marketing people love the word “free”, and I am not a big proponent of giving away programs. If you set a precedent with offering a complimentary program many people will want all classes at no charge. Rather than making a tennis round robin free, you can add value with new balls, sports drinks and fun prizes for a nominal fee. Now, that same program can make money! Is your Activities Director working to create new streams of income? Recently, some members told me they were interested in surfing. Since I am not qualified to teach surfing, I hired an instructor and promoted trial days on two Saturdays. The trial days were successful, so I rolled out a monthly program. Now, this club has a new program and another source of income.

Program formats are important. There are three general types of programs – social, competitive and instructional. Does your club deliver a balance of all three types? In a children’s program is the age range appropriate? Do you have a safe ratio of staff to students? Do your formats make beginners comfortable? Inclusion is the goal for formats which means access to the lowest skill level. Beginners are most important, and programs that nurture novices have much growth and income potential. Do classes change times? Regardless of when an activity is scheduled, some people will not be able to attend. Rotating the same program to a new time can capture new participants. Also, programs within a club should complement rather than compete with other departments. For example, junior golf and tennis programs are best offered at different times.

Get an objective evaluator, review the above areas and find answers to these questions. When you do, you will have a true picture of your present programs.

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