

Plumbing, Power Tools And Personal Growth



Secrets to successful camp grounds maintenance

By Beth Morrow

There's far more to successful campground maintenance than keeping the playing fields mowed and the bathhouse pipes clear. If it were only that simple, a few turns of a screwdriver and proper pH level in the pool would be enough to ensure a smooth camp experience. Behind the scenes, grounds maintenance requires perseverance, a comprehensive knowledge of all things mechanical, electrical and chemical, and an occasional education or training session on new equipment.



But the hands-on aspect of grounds maintenance is only one facet of this complex job. Solid manual skills are half the battle; being efficient and productive at myriad tasks is the other. Building interpersonal relationships with clients and co-workers, developing time-management skills, establishing a positive, proactive attitude, and improving effective communication skills deserve as much time and attention as ordering the proper light bulbs for scoreboards. If you (and your crew, if applicable), believe there's not enough time, talent, money and ability to achieve all these goals or finish every job, let's look at four ways successful maintenance managers get it all done.

Positive Attitude

The first--and arguably most vital--skill to cultivate in approaching campground maintenance is a positive outlook. Let's face it--it's easier to see a list of jobs that need completed as chores than as challenges that, when completed, will lead to a sense of accomplishment. But how are daily tasks viewed? Is the glass half-full or half-empty? Approaching maintenance projects from the mindset of what is lacking almost guarantees failure from the start. For example, believing that tasks will never get finished in the time allotted, or that a particular project will be under-budget, or even that a client will not appreciate all the time you've put into a certain chore will lead to negative thinking. Rather than focus on what is lacking, shift the perception to how work improves the camp experience for the staff and campers. What special touches do you provide that make the finished jobs stand out from others? What are your maintenance talents, and how can they be used to your advantage?

Time Management

Do you routinely end each day with three or four unfinished tasks? Do you move from task to task like a hummingbird flitting from flower to flower, never quite giving full attention to each, only to become frustrated because nothing is truly accomplished? While multi-tasking works well for secretaries and creative folks, it's not a helpful skill when attempting to complete a task on a deadline. Knowing how to budget time, to adequately assess needs and requirements before starting a project, and to fit daily tasks into the overall schedule will lead to higher rates of completion, as well as an increase in personal productivity.

Are you spending the bulk of time on the most critical tasks? Spending precious hours in a flurry of scattered activity rather than focused on the most important, most meaningful tasks will backfire. Rather, consider rearranging your schedule in terms of the Pareto Principle, a management theory from the world of business. Originally developed by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto in relation to the distribution of wealth in his native country, the principle is also known as the 80/20 Rule: in order to make the most difference, it is more effective to spend 20 percent of the time on tasks that produce 80 percent of the desired results. In the long run, 20 percent of the tasks necessary to complete are the ones that really matter. Learning to identify the right tasks is a skill that takes practice, but in the long run will eliminate the mental pressure and sense of overload that often accompany grounds maintenance work.

Personal Growth

Most days, maintenance work is a solitary endeavor. Though you may work as part of a crew, much of the time is spent undertaking individual duties. As a result, discovering new ways of interacting with the job and with others becomes more difficult when you spend time alone. While introspection is good for all people some of the time, it is never good for some people all of the time. If you aren't expanding your horizons and seeking new ways of developing yourself as a person, chances are you aren't going to grow as a camp maintenance crew member, either. We've all seen how dank, dingy and unappealing stagnant water can be--a stagnant mind is just as uninviting. Capitalize on a hobby, develop a talent, or take a class to improve mechanical skills or to become a better listener. Just as you prune and fertilize a favorite flowering bush to create larger, more beautiful flowers for others to enjoy, do the same for your mind. You never know what fresh opportunities and special people you might attract.

Communicate Effectively

Basically, relationships matter more than work. But there is a huge project to finish *now* and no time for idle chitchat. Or someone has failed to show for work this morning, and now there are two fields to seed and water. As noted above, maintenance work is often independent and solitary. Spending time alone may be your first choice, but it is likely interruptions will occur, so improving communication skills is important for success.

Folks will treat you the way you interact with them. Are you blunt and impersonal or blasé and unemotional? Are you all-knowing and impatient with others who don't see your point immediately? Just as you would not like to be treated in this way, neither administrators, supervisors, staff or campers would like that either. Show that you value their presence--after all, without them, there would be no need for maintenance--and it is likely they'll do the same for you. Learn to communicate clearly and with purpose. Be proactive in building relationships and bettering communication from the start. Don't assume that others will know your motivation and purpose; be explicit about what you're doing and its benefits in the long run.

Success in camp maintenance requires dedication, problem-solving abilities and essential interpersonal skills. Like learning a new technique through practice before integrating it into a daily routine, making small, concentrated changes in the way you plan, manage time, and communicate with others will move everyone toward a higher level of success and job satisfaction.

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