

To swim or not to swim

Recreation New Zealand 2009 Sue Mayo

On 26th May, 2009 WSNZ released results of a survey of swim providers, conducted in conjunction with New Zealand Recreation Association, New Zealand Swim Coaches And Teachers and Swimming New Zealand. It highlighted two main critical areas to be addressed; pool space and staffing. As a result of these two issues a third area indirectly requires management – waitlists.

It is very easy to blame school swimming for the poor ability of young New Zealanders as the core of the problem. But let us consider encouraging the use aquatic facilities for recreation or learn to swim by the under 5 year olds as a more proactive approach to the level of all round benefit to your facility. By the time children are at school the expectation to teach children to swim is unrealistic. Times have changed and we... need to move with them. We have to change our approach to drawing New Zealanders into learn to swim; whether it be as a customer, as a part time employee or as a career. This attitude then is applied to all aspects of the business.

Waitlists can be confusing.

“A wait list is not a badge of honour”

DON'T Tell me you can't fit them in! Why are we dumbing down the system because of fear of change? Rather than stating that the times are fully booked due the times the customers want, we need to be positive selling strategy to draw the customers into your weakest pool times?

Create a system where there is an accurate record of your demand. Analyse the trend of your waitlist. Monitoring and managing the waitlist is a weekly job – up to 3 hours a week depending on the size of your business.

Class levels need to be constantly addressed to see where is the demand. This also includes managing where there is low demand as well as high.

Set methodology on approaching the list. Prioritise larger student teacher ratio classes first, as they are higher return for less wages.

Secondly preschool classes need to be addressed, as they are a long term investment.

Consolidation of classes can free up spaces or an area which can bring in new customers. The staff are already there. Now maximize the return.

Creation of new classes can occur once consolidation has occurred and the market trend has been investigated.

Create a system where there is an accurate record of your demand.

Disregard multiple waitlist registrations as part of your total count. That is; make sure the largest numbers are ACCURATE. (eg Mrs Smith hasn't booked on every breather class available.)

Graph your down times Draw your customers attention to the quiet time for classes. Use a selling strategy to draw the customers into your weakest pool times.

If Saturday is over flowing display a bar graph of the usage of the pool. Indicate Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning classes are not as busy. If car parking is an issue the customer will be much happier attending those quiet classes. They will also feel they are getting better value for money.

Consider 7 am baby classes and evening baby classes. Open up classes immediately next to full classes, and then progressively open as they fill up. Yes even in New Zealand parents will bring their baby swimming early in the morning. The baby is awake and it allows a free day after early morning lessons.

Illustration of table

Analyse your customer base In 2007 the University of Otago conducted a study which found 30 % of Hamilton, NZ children were from single parent families. As a result I changed our pre school classes to accommodate extra classes out of working hours.

Consider and all year round programme i.e. month by month. This will give you an opportunity to retain staff, increase income and reduce the waitlist as you will have a rolling enrollment.

Pool Mapping

"Many swim schools are spoilt with space to the detriment of productivity"

Frequently pool managers allocate a large area for learn to swim which is not always necessary. Listed are maximum areas necessary for specific class levels. Anything over this size is a luxury. The allocation of pool space is commonly known as pool mapping.

The tabulated format shows the guidelines for a suitable area for each level. Baby and preschool classes are you foundation for your business. Infant 'customers in' are prospective clients for five years. (school age) Perhaps even longer. The spin off from these customers is that they need to practice their skills through recreation swimming. This is another 'clip on the ticket' for increasing turnover.

The tabulated format presented will act as guideline on recommended spaces for types of classes.

Guideline to pool mapping sizes and depths.

Pool space	Pool depth	Lane placement	Student teacher	Level of swimmer
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			ratio	
Private Learn to swim classes				
8m x4 6m x 4	1m	Outside Lane	1 : 10 1 : 6	Babies
2m* x 2m	.75 - .8 m	Outside lane	1 : 4 1 : 4	Pre school nervous beginners School nervous beginners
4m x 2m	.75 - .9	Outside lane	1 : 4 1 : 5	Preschool School age
6m x 2m	1m	Centre	1: 6	School age stroking
8m x 2m	1m	Centre	1: 6	School age breathers
10 m x 2m 12.5 m x 2m	1m	Centre	1 : 6	School age advanced swimmers
Schools block classes				
4 x 4m	.8 m	Outside lane	1: 10	Nervous beginners
4m x 4m	.8 m	Outside lane	1:10	Stroking
12.5 m x 2m	1m	Centre	1:10	Beginner breathers
25 m x 2 m	1m	Centre	1:10	Advanced breathers
25 m x 2m	1m	Centre	1:10	All four strokes

Pool depths can be varied.

Fundamental Principles:

- Quality before quantity – short distance before distance
- At arms reach at all times – water safety essential
- Smaller areas for Baby classes means the teacher can have more frequent contact with the parent. This in turn increases the confidence and personalized service by the teacher meaning the customer wants to stay.
- An additional bonus to the programme is deep water exposure
- Pool depth can be adjusted by the use platforms

So once the pool is mapped out and aware of how many classes you can take at your maximum, the waitlist can be attacked. All pool managers must know how much it

costs to run each cubic metre of water. Dead water means the pool is creating an expense.

Do the math.

Fees for: x students – (salary + $y\%$ operating costs) = $z\%$ profit

STAFFING and the Y GEN

“They are here. It's time to do some very different thinking. Deal with it.”

Millennials (aka, Gen Y) - those born from about 1980 to 1995. I am a mother of 3 gen Ys.

Members of generation Y have been born into a world surrounded by technology, growing up in the best economic times. They view a position at an aquatic facility as a **job** and not as a career. If they don't like it, there are others to choose from. Jobs are disposable. Because they are so skilled they are able to get another. It's not only about the money. They have a desire to be trained, take on new challenges, become more capable and as a result take on advanced roles.

Offering a Y gen person more money yet staying the same role does not carry the same recognition as offering 'up skilling' with the view to further a better position in the business. They are **ambitious**, competent, efficient and productive.

They speak a different **language**, responding to direct and timely feedback. They seek recognition of efforts and on going encouragement.

Remember these are the children who received ribbons for participating in anything.

Some key areas which will assist in the approach of gen Y are:

Review the management design – Swim schools may need to change their approach to meet the needs of gen Y.

Ongoing training needs to be a major investment. The interest taken in continually upskilling the existing staff will manifest into a strong loyal team. Acknowledging positive work ethic through incentives and rewards will be respected by the gen Y work force. Reward staff by attending a conference or workshop. Notice when the staff are doing things right! “ Thanks for cleaning up the kitchen”

Quarterly reviews rather than annual ones will gain a more loyal employee. This does not necessarily mean a pay increase. Many employers believe that at every review the employee will seek a financial reward. Simply by acknowledging that the employee is

noticed and heard will be enough. Set out the guidelines of when the wages will be reviewed. They like to have their opinions heard without fear of retribution.

For the gen Y, their life exists in this order - Family, Community, Co workers, Themselves, work. They don't like working long but will work smart.

Being a visible manager will create a positive environment for the gen Y. Welcome conversations between management and the employee.

Training

Put a value on your in house training. 20 voluntary with ASTA costs our company eg \$300. time investment in supervision and monitoring your log book. We don't; take training lightly and we expect you will make a commitment to complete it and attend every agreed session. Lock them in to times and days.

Knowing this - staff training is an ongoing process. Each month have at least one staff member in training. This will allow for replacement of existing staff and growth of the business.

With this strategy

- Classes cannot be taken until the trainee is up to scratch
- There may not be set hours in place but they can act as replacement teacher until position becomes available.

YOU **WILL** HAVE STAFF REPLACEMENTS ...it is a fact of life.

Create a work place culture –

Work has to be fun and flexible. There is no such thing as work / life balance as it all one thing to gen Y. If they are having fun in the workplace it also becomes a social environment where they have a sense of belonging. It is not that members of gen Y have little respect for the employer rather they see the employer has little respect for them. Having a work place culture works as part of the staff retention plan.

How do you communicate with your employees? White board, Newsletters, Pigeon holes, Email, Pay slips, Annual Calendar, Notice boards are all common forms of communication. And all, not one or the other need to be utilized to ensure the messages are effectively delivered. As well as a face to face – thank you. Catch them doing things right.

It gives the younger generation a sense of belonging, appreciated and a sense of pride. Showing you care increases productivity. Provide more autonomy and trust employee to do the work.

Interview process (THEY SENSE FEAR!!!!) - Be prepared for the gen Y to interview you. We discuss questions **you** might be asked and how to be prepared for the interview. Consider a different interview process. You will be surprised how it works.

What is **my** training? What are **my** future opportunities? Be prepared – they will ask.

Interview the position as job then you won't be disappointed. It may develop into a career.

ASK - What are you good at? What are you looking for in a position?

We have sessions on Saturdays and Sundays available – would be prepared to take those sessions? This will sort them out very quickly!

DO NOT ASK where will you be in the next 10 years. Gen Y think in life spans of 2 – 3 years and not beyond

Be prepared for the Gen Y to interview you. Whilst researching this topic I found this article: "Ask these questions to make sure your boss won't suck" Ryan Paugh

What time do you typically get to the office?

☹ Any uncertainty means they can't count on you as a boss when they need you.

What time do you typically leave the office?

☹ If you indicate that you never stop working gen Y believe that you will have a hard time understanding that they **do**.

What type of person do you like to work with?

☺ Gen Y like a manager who knows exactly who they want working for them. As it says much about their character shows that they know enough about their own strengths.

It seems like much effort, however to invest in this management style means there is less micromanagement in the long run.

Clearly state entry level and where they are in the big scheme of things.

Frequently in the Aquatic industry this is the first time the gen Y have been in the workforce and they need to realize there are checks and balances and expectations.

Try an alternative. Instead of an interview, ask them to bring their togs and get wet!. Let the team in the pool 'do the interview'. Are they going to fit into the team? Are they personable with students and staff? After 2 hours see if they are still keen to go to the next level. The last 30 min class is always the make or break with concentration and performance. It is easy to bluff your way through an hour and a half.

House Rules - BE PREPARED TO STATE YOUR POLICY which must include use of cell phones, texting and dress codes (including footwear). With gen Y tattoos and body piercing are fashionable and not a rebellious statement. Know your policy and inform the employee in writing.

The use of phone and personal cell phones must be stated. Are they to be out in the locker until after the shift? Is it ok to have it in a pocket? If you don't have a work option for texting - do it.

Leave applications and expectations of punctuality must all be written as part of your House Rules. Remember a work agreement is set. House Rules can be amended as required. These must be displayed in the staff room so there is clear understanding of expectations.

An **unhappy employee** will be running late, productivity will be down, and display a quick anger. They leave the job when it becomes boring and meaning less.

Understanding the 'technical' addiction. Blackberries and computers are an essential form of communication. Friendships in the virtual world are an extension of people relationships. Meetings held via internet are just as "real" and just as important. It is a form of communication. E.g Webinars are a form of meeting being used not only as a cost effective way of communicating with a team but as effective form of communication. Alternatively have a tracked webpage for your staff to keep up to date with events and training.

However nothing ever beats person to person attention for members of Gen Y. Remember you work **with** them, they don't work **for** you.

In summary

- Map your pool so the maximum pool capacity is manageable.
- Seek to have staff meet the needs of the business.
- Create a work place culture that encourages employees to 'want to be there.' An open door management style works well.
- Recognise when systems need to be reviewed and modified to move with the times. Gen Y may speak a different language and behave in an unusual way, but they are not aliens from another planet.
- Don't get caught out. "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. It's just that yours is stupid. " Gen Y.