

INCREASING YOUR OFF-SEASON VALUE TO THE TEAM: OR HOW TO KEEP YOUR JOB

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INTRO

Good morning everyone! My name is Heather Nabozny I am the Head Groundskeeper for the West Michigan Whitecaps, we are a class "A" affiliate with the Detroit Tigers. During the months of March thru November I will call it our in season period, I maintain our playing field, through different procedures and renovations on which I will touch a bit later. As I am sure you are all aware, it is extremely important to maintain that playing surface to it's best possible condition. Some of the players that are playing have and will make it to the major league level and in some cases are already major league players that are down for rehabilitation. The money at which these players are worth is phenomenal. If an injury were to occur it is certainly not out of the question for officials to point their fingers at the groundskeeper for having provided an unsafe playing surface. With that I am sure you understand my importance to the to the Whitecaps organization in providing a safe playable surface.

On the same token I am just as valueable to the Whitecaps organization during the season as I am during the off season the winter months. The reason I say this is because I have a dual position and the position I fill in the winter is just as equally important to the operation. I am a group sales representative during the off season a position that is as crucial to the Whitecaps organization as the field is to the players. The players need a well maintained surface to play on and the whitecaps organization needs to have adequate attendance to pull in revenue in order to operate. Group sales coupled with my groundskeeping position increases my value to the organization. They have one person that can perform two separate positions.

As many of you may know each groundskeeper or turf manager, does things a little bit differently, which can be attributed to each us having a different situation, different soil, different grass varieties, different climates, etc. I am going to share some of the procedures which I practice on my field. I also took some pictures during some of the field care operations. First off is mowing. I currently mow at height of 1.5 inches, which was not the case for the first year and a half. For the first year and a half I mowed at 1.75 inches because the turf was having some trouble rooting and this was one of many decisions I made to aid in root depth. I use a Jacobsen Tri King 72 in. width. This machine has worked very well for me and lays the turf down nicely for some of the different patterns that we cut at Old Kent Park. One of the reasons the roots were not developing well into the soil was because of a compaction problem. The field is Vertidraind at least twice a year to help break up some of the compaction which occurs especially in the heavy wear areas. The field is also core aerified and swept 4 times a year; first to help alleviate compaction, second and more importantly it helps to physically remove some of the heavy thatch layer that exists on my field. And of course all of the other benefits that go along with core aerification. After the plugs have been cleaned up I topdress the field, this aids also in thatch control and helps to keep the field consistent and level. When I fertilize the field I try to time it right after a core aeration because during the summer months when the soil temperatures are high I use an organic fertilizer which produces more microbial activity. This in turn, aids in the break down of thatch. Ahhh, the joy of sod replacement. It must be done because that nasty clay moves into the grass and eventually smothers the poor little guys. We replace the sod around the plate and in front of the mound about every four to six weeks depending on our schedule. We replace the sod at first and third base less frequently. If we spot Poa it is removed as quickly as possible. Finally the last among my procedures that I am sharing with you today would be the care of the clay skinned area. This is an end of season procedure that is called rototilling but this particular machine is called a Roterra which actually from my experience works better than a traditional rototiller because it tills and mixes the clay together more consistent than some of the other units. This procedure helps keep the clays mixed together well, and it keeps the clay material consistent. I also mix into the

infield some calcine clay which all of you probably know is an absorbant clay used in drying up wet areas. This aids in the over all absorbancy of the infield. Those were some of the maintainance practices that we engage in at Old Kent Park. I don' t mean to toot my own horn but my crew and I do a pretty good job of keeping the field looking its best and I feel that I am an asset to the Whitecaps organization. They have expressed their gratitude as well. However, I feel that it is good to be well rounded as an employee that way you are just that more valuabe to your company. I know we all would like to make more money and by being more valuable to your company your compensation should reflect your worth.

I'm going to now show you a short video. It is our promotions video that our advertising sales reps use on their sales calls. If you have never been to a Whitecaps game hopefully thiswill give you an idea of how many fans we pull into the stadium. And also how much fun people have at the games. After it is over I am going to explain how the group sales dept. increases our organizaions success.

VIDEO

Well if you couldn't tell by the video the team clenched the championship title. However, the baseball team was not only team to receive a prize. The front office staff showed its hard work paying off by breaking yet another attendance record making this the third year in a row. There are many reasons why we pull such a high attendance, but among the leading reasons is our group sales dept. which I am a member of during the winter months.

DEFINE

The group sales dept. sells tickets to groups of 20 or more people. These groups consist of civic organizations, sports leagues, company outings, schools, and many different clubs. The group sales staff consists of nine members two of which are full time and the rest have other duties for example, our accounting dept. are group sales reps. Group Sales offers many options for groups to chose from when they book an outing. We offer seats in the reserve section, the lawn area, and the outfield reserve. We sell pre game picnics for those groups wanting to come into the stadium early to have a meal with their friends. Often it is the companies that plan picnics for there employees. It brings a unique twist to just an ordinary company outing, they are served a meal then get to relax to a baseball game. We offer 2 birthday parties per game for groups having a minimum of 10 people. The birthday person gets to throw out the first pitch, gets happy birthday sung to him or her on top of the dugout, recieves an autographed baseball, and gets a delicious birthday cake. I know that for a fact because the front office staff gets to eat the cakes that were not eaten due to cancellations. And our most popular item the is right field deck, which holds a group of up to 200 individuals. The group who reserves the deck has exclusive right to that deck for the game. They basically get to have their own private party because only the members of that group have access to the deck. It is such a hot item that when we put it on sale it is sold out in about 13 minutes.

BENEFITS

As I mentioned early our group sales dept. is key component to our success, the reason being is that the group sales ticket is a proven ticket. What I mean by proven ticket is that the members of a group outing show up for games, whereas a season ticket holder usually does not show up for all 70 games. Leaving a rather high drop off rate. The group outing members show up because they are coming out for an event, with people they know and enjoy to be around. And for this very reason the drop off rate among groups is extremely low.

Groups play a key role in generating our revenue. From each group we receive not only the ticket revenue, but concessions, souvenir, and parking revenues. These groups provide our advertising sales reps a hand in selling advertising. For the reason of it being a guaranteed ticket these people are exposed to the game sponsors, billboards, public address announcements, on field promotions, and many of the other advertising strategies. This makes it a little bit easier for our sales reps. to sell advertising. Group sales also helps our advertiser by offering them information to help reach their customers. Because some of our advertisers have display dates (where they have their product on display inside the park) groups sales has the capability to inform these particular businesses of the dates that their potential customers may be in the stadium. This is an excellent opportunity for these businesses to display their product, in a relaxed friendly atmosphere. For instance a rental company that sells and rents Bobcats has a display date so I called and gave them some dates at which they would have a large amount of potential customers in the crowd. This also helps me as a groundskeeper because we trade advertising to the use of their product. Of all of the benefits that come out of group sales it also accounts for 40% of our overall attendance, which has been very important in setting

attendance records year after year.

CONCLUSION

Because the group sales dept. is an integral part of the Whitecaps success and the fact that I am part of that, makes me all that more valuable to this organization. Through the fine work that we perform on the field to the business that I help pull into the stadium has increased my value to our organization. The benefits I get from taking on a dual role are the fact that I am now more marketable and I receive better compensation than if I had only grounds responsibilities. In giving this presentation I wanted to get across the point that there are other options besides equipment and stadium maintenance and/or snow removal during the winter. The two greatest things about having a sales position is the commission checks and the fact that you are generating the revenue that you are so good at spending during the season. THANK YOU.