



## Theft inside the dolphin tank

*Don't play with the dolphins.*

*It makes them too tired to perform!!!*

**T**he message printed in bold letters on a small scrap of paper attached to my time card was plain enough. I understood. Yes, this is a story about dolphins and what I learned about them in the strangest job I will ever have. But, as much as I learned about dolphins one summer long ago, I learned as much about people — that even trusted employees, when offered the “perfect storm” of opportunity to steal, may steal. A surprisingly large number, in fact, if you believe what some “experts” say.

What circumstances encourage employee theft? They're staggeringly simple:

1. a need;
2. an inviting opportunity; and
3. a perception of minimal risk of any detection and arrest.

While there's little you can do to assuage an employee's needs, you can dramatically reduce opportunities for theft and increase the risk of detection within your operations by learning from the experiences of other owners in this month's cover article (see page 16).

OK, back to the dolphins.

Decades ago, I took a seasonal security job at a large amusement park and was promptly assigned to babysit four young Atlantic bottlenose dol-

phins. Each day, hundreds of people filled a huge, concrete, bowl-like arena to watch them launch themselves through hoops and perform other stunts. They represented a huge investment for the amusement park — the reason why I was hired to safeguard them from 11:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m., six nights a week. Or at least that's what I surmised at the time.

We became acquainted, the dolphins and me. Perhaps even friends. Who knows? Sometimes we played together in the dark. One of the dolphins, feeling frisky, would snatch up a ball that had been bobbing in the pool and toss it out toward me. If I tossed it back, likely as not, another dolphin would chuck it back to me. Sometimes this, or some other diversion we invented, went on well into the night. It didn't occur to me that they, like me, would be tired once each day broke. Sleepy dolphins can't leap as high as rested dolphins.

Now, my people lesson.

Occasionally, prior to going to our assignments, the third-shift security force gathered for training. That's when a park police sergeant would go over a list of do's and don'ts, including the park's zero-tolerance policy on theft. He tried to impress upon us that he fully expected 70% of the park's seasonal employees to steal or attempt to steal something during their employment there.

The inference wasn't subtle. After all, we were seasonal employees, too. Unannounced visits to our security stations by police officers in the night's darkest, quietest hours reminded us of this.

I don't know how the police there came up with the 70% figure. I suppose they based it upon their on-the-job experiences. While I recall bristling over the suggestion that I might steal, too, looking back on that summer, blithely unaware of it then, I helped validate that 70% prediction. After all, wasn't my frolicking with the dolphins, resulting in them not performing as they should each day, *stealing* from the enjoyment of the hundreds who came expecting a great show?

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