

# QUALITY CARE

Exceling in leadership, communication and planning translates to success



By MICHAEL WAGNER, CSP, ASM

**N**ow that most snow and ice operations are underway, are you ensuring your organization and staff are delivering a quality service? As a leader, are you creating a culture that focuses on creating quality opportunities for employees, clients and the communities in which you operate? As you head deeper into the winter season it's important to consider these elements of quality until the last snowfall.

We will work through four of the most important "quality" aspects of a snow and ice management organization and how they impact not only the bottom line, but all relevant stakeholders of the business. These are best practices for any organization involved in the industry no matter the size, whether 5 or 500 employees.

## 1 LEADERSHIP

As the first best practice, quality leadership in any organization is a key to success. Leadership personnel should complete leadership seminars and third-party trainings, and they should consume a mixed bag of leadership-related content including blogs, magazine articles, podcasts and books.

Another great development tool is utilizing peer networks and mentorship programs to learn from other's experiences and be able to share ideas and thoughts with similar professionals.

Quality leaders help provide vision and direction to employees as they work to carry out company-wide goals and the company's mission. Also, true leaders are talented in developing strong teams that can complete required tasks and projects in an efficient and timely



manner. Another important trait of quality leaders is supporting staff when the going gets tough!

### Examples of quality leaders in the snow and ice management industry:

- Understanding the physical and emotional toll of an extended work shift or long-duration storm, and supporting staff where necessary.
- Learning the current and most valuable leadership tools and practices through continuous education and webinars/seminars.
- Devoting time to developing more leaders throughout the organization, and supporting idea generation and creativity.

## 2 COMMUNICATION

The next characteristic of quality within an organization is quality communication, which rivals leadership for No. 1! Developing a system of successful and effortless communication is vital to providing timely and professional service, as well as building respect and trustworthiness throughout the company.

Communication can involve showing empathy and attentiveness to employee needs/wants and problems/stresses, as well as effectively conveying company objectives, goals, values and the mission.

One of the greatest ways to create quality communications within your organization is to be an active listener. This means giving people your undivided

attention when necessary, so you don't miss details such as nonverbal communication cues, the "big" and the "small" picture of the issues being described, and clues as to the root causes of problems.

### Examples of quality communication in the snow and ice management industry:

- Developing a company-wide communications plan that includes hierarchy, points of contact for specific tasks and responsibilities, and process/procedure specifics.
- A culture of trust and respect that comes from leaders and staff listening and responding to the concerns and ideas of others.
- Providing communications training opportunities for leaders and staff.

## 3 TOOLS

The next best practice is to acquire and maintain quality tools for getting the job done; and this goes beyond basic hand tools. This can include quality trucks, plows and spreaders, as well as snowblowers, shovels and loaders. These tools should be ready to use and be dependable for the winter weather season.

Other important tools include quality and reliable computers, cell phones, cellular and internet service providers, weather reporting platforms and enterprise management software systems. All of these are important

tools in influencing increased capabilities for all company personnel; malfunctioning or ill-prepared tooling can cause stress, lost time/revenue and many other problems.

**Examples of quality tools in the snow and ice management industry:**

- Snowplows, trucks, spreaders, snowblowers, loaders and more that have gone through preseason preventive maintenance programs.
- Operating capabilities of cellular and computer devices to handle a variety of data needs, with contingency plans for interrupted service.
- Software that enables streamlined processes within administrative and operating business units for proper job tracking, costing and billing.

**4 SERVICE**

Finally, ensuring quality service is key to organizational success. What makes

this characteristic unique is that if you achieve quality leadership, communications and tools, you are well on your way to providing a quality service.

This includes developing the proper site specifications and requirements, completing the proper pre- and mid-season training activities, and carrying out an exceptional service. Such things as job-specific training and expertise can be taught and must be integrated, and the experience of your talented staff will certainly influence this as well. Remember that the effort you put into the system directly influences the output or the service provided!

**Examples of quality services in the snow and ice management industry:**

- Managing minimal service complaints and reducing insurance claim counts and costs.
- Providing a dependable and timely service for every snow event throughout the season.
- Retaining and adding long-term

clients that see the value in your service.

**Round up**

With these four elements of quality in mind, you should be able to guide your team and the organization in the right direction. Whether it's improving processes or services, quality must be one of your top business and personal values to be successful.

As a representative of the industry, you can provide a necessary emergency service when the stakes are high because things are usually stressful for employees, clients and those within the community that may be visiting sites on which you operate. Be creative, diligent and always keep an open mind regarding organizational improvements. **SB\***

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