



SHAKE IT UP

Fresh approach to kickoff meetings can be positive and productive



By MICHAEL WAGNER, CSP, ASM

Many snow and ice management companies take a traditional approach to snow kickoff meetings, usually focusing on things such as management meetings, discussing billing and invoicing, plowing and equipment operator training, etc.

In our current economic environment, we must consider how we're needing to do more with fewer personnel and less equipment while also creating a culture in which people find winter maintenance fulfilling. This is an opportunity to get creative and make the preparation and learning process a rewarding and effective experience.

➔ Use resources available at my.sima.org, including a variety of safety training documents, site plan templates and more, to complement your kickoff planning.

OPERATIONS

- Take field trips
- Practice preparedness

➔ While this is certainly one of the most important aspects of a snow and ice management program, it's also the area of focus that refines and carries out the service process.

Hit the road. This group has a world of opportunities to initiate a variety of new kickoff meetings, and one of the greatest places to start is taking field trips! Take your team to client sites and use this opportunity to gauge your personnel's capabilities and expertise, while also using it as a discovery tool for new or less experienced employees.

When you take a group out to a site, discuss the level of service you will provide on behalf of the organization; review onsite equipment, vehicle and tool usage; go over safety procedures and practices; and discuss how you will complete the job from start to finish.

The best way to attack this is to take notes as you're walking sites with the team; when you finish, complete a visual cheat sheet of everything covered in your job walk. You can also create a visual repository such as using a cloud-based platform so everyone can always access it. This can be a great place to store photos of site-specific obstacles; specifications and requirements; route plans; emergency and operations points of contact; etc.

Whatever you do, don't train your team and walk away. Train them, and utilize photos, videos or documents as future training and reference materials to make sure everyone knows where they are.

Practice makes perfect. Another great idea is to practice preparedness. While you'll want these components documented as standard operating procedures, be hands-on and interactive in the follow through. Whether you do this during the day or in the middle of the night, practice personnel response and equipment loading and preparation. Practicing this in "live drills" can be a very effective way to make sure people and processes are aligning properly before the first snowfall.

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LEADERSHIP

- Take part in training
- Be open to possibilities

➔ Leading together is better than leading alone. Pick up a copy of Simon Sinek's book "Together is Better" and it will take you on a quick journey through reasoning and leadership and why you can accomplish more when you work together.

The senior leadership team should meet regularly (no matter if it's a formal or informal setting) to discuss the vision and how it aligns with the snow and ice program. Use this to set objectives for the organization. Discuss and evaluate potential revenues and costs, operations, and how the organization's strategy aligns with client retention and developing an exceptional level of service.

The senior leadership team should take time to focus on their personnel and how they can support them by reducing or removing potential constraints that impede momentum and progress.

While the senior group has their own responsibilities, sometimes you have to take a participative approach

and spend time listening to the people who are in the trenches, grinding out the successful achievement of the organization's objectives.

Get a boots-on-the-ground view. As a senior leader, attend your organization's training events, including driver and operator training; administrative training; mechanical training; and safety training. Be visible and be passionate. Be a leader out there hearing what people and teams are struggling with or succeeding on. It will give you a better perspective of how you can lead and support the staff throughout pre-, mid- and postseason.

Be open to improvements. Don't be a prisoner of being content or closeminded. As a leader of the snow operations, it is up to you to foster creativity and help individuals put their plans into action, test them and analyze the outcome. Work with your people to implement new ideas for training and process improvements.

SAFETY & RISK EVALUATION

- Take a full team approach
- ID room for improvement

➔ While in some way, shape or form organizations perform snow and ice operations safety training, how creative are you? Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you discussing the emergency preparedness and operations plan with all involved personnel (e.g., managers, supervisors, shovelers, plow drivers, etc.)?
- How do you convey potential risks and mitigation tactics to all staff?
- What are your greatest exposures, and how well do you evaluate your risk profile?
- Who's conducting contract reviews and acting on learning from previous incidents?

This is one area that should have real emphasis among your staff because it can carry detrimental implications if not properly attacked.

All hands on deck

Round up the personnel involved in various areas, and discuss onsite and off-site details such as those listed below under the relevant positions:

Maintenance and Operations Managers, Supervisors and Foremen

- Plan event response, ensure proper staffing levels, develop contingency plans, train the staff, discuss site



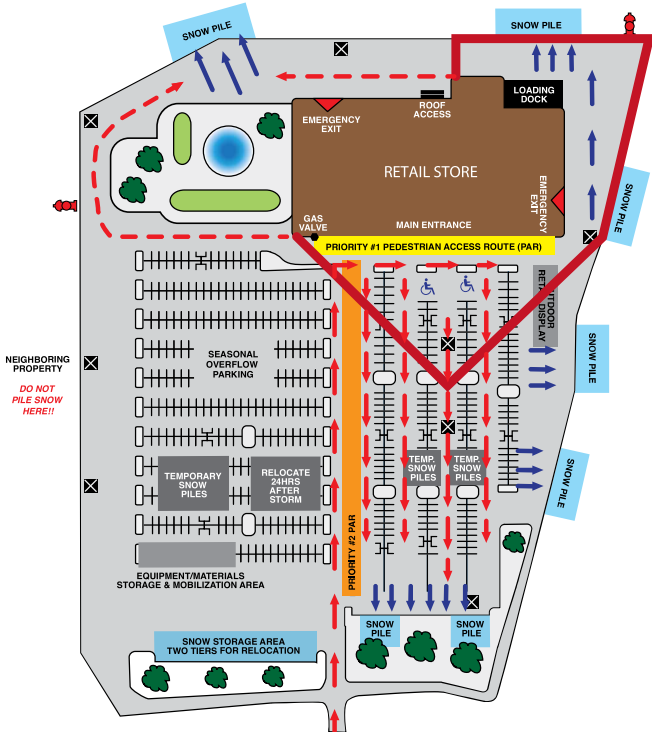
risks with clients and mitigation tactics, stock and assign the necessary personal protective equipment, and discuss insurance coverage for specified high-risk scenarios.

Administrative Personnel

- Ensure that paperwork and documentation for billing and invoicing, timesheets and labor logs, material usage and inventory, is being completed properly and for the required amount of time.

Shop and Equipment Personnel

- Make sure all vehicles and equipment have been properly inspected and repaired at the forefront of the season. Address problems pre-season, and develop an inventory of high-frequency items, as well as items that can cause extreme downtime during a long-duration event.



SITE MAP

As part of a preseason operations "field trip," you should walk the property and identify property characteristics such as:

- Piling zones
- Low and high elevation spots
- Shaded versus unshaded spots
- Surface composition
- General site layout, which includes emergency entrance and exit zones
- High-traffic areas
- Drainage
- Walkways
- Cracks or potholes
- Curbs
- Loading docks and ramps

The effort is worth it

With all this information in mind, remember that the effort that goes into the planning and processes in preparing for the winter season ahead is key. In the realm of business management foundations, the system in which you develop creates an output from its input; and the only way to see the results you sought is to focus on the processes that get you there.

While you must always focus on doing what's right for the organization and all stakeholders, be experimental and innovative, and test ideas before you rule anything out. Strategizing and planning can be a very enlightening experience and will aid in the growth of yourself and everyone around you. Follow a process and develop an inclusive and interactive approach to preseason and kickoff meetings this year. **SB***

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