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## Best Practices in Tennis Operations

By Mark McMahon, President

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Recently I have given a lot of thought as to why some organizations, businesses and people always seem to be “one step ahead” of the competition. Why do some clubs consistently produce the type of programs and events we would all be proud of? Why do we walk into some pro shops or retail stores and immediately recognize a sincere and fundamental commitment to service and excellence.

Many of you have heard me recognize the Ritz Carlton Hotel chain in workshops and seminars. Ritz Carlton is widely recognized for their ability to consistently deliver “knock your socks off” service and to please guests beyond their expectations. They are also well known for consistently delivering an ambience that all of us would be proud of within our own workplace. It is interesting to note that Ritz Carlton is also one of the hotel industry’s best performers and still one of its most profitable members.

The success of Ritz Carlton is widely chronicled, and I believe achievable for all of us. When exploring the attributes and qualities of the *people* behind organizations such as Ritz Carlton it generally surfaces that certain “common denominators” exist among the leaders of the organization. The question remains however, what exists at a deeper level...what is it with these organizations that “makes them tick”, and more importantly, what do the leaders of such a successful business incorporate into their daily management lives, that allows them to execute their business objectives so well and so consistently.

Almost every company leader, in almost any industry, will profess to a set of “core beliefs” or “mission statement”, a foundation on which to build its operation. However beyond these “philosophies” lie the operating practices of the people running the company. It is these practices that I would like to share under the banner headline of “***Best Practices***”.

I examined the habits of several of today’s most successful people in the corporate world. This exercise presented me with concrete and sound principles that if followed, would serve anyone in a position of responsibility well. In reflecting on these “best practices” however, I questioned

whether the traits of these corporate leaders would apply in a practical manner to what is required of a leader within the tennis industry.

Several years ago I surveyed some of the best, brightest and most successful individuals in the tennis industry. What I found was that not only did the answers offered mirror those of successful corporate leaders, they serve to provide unique insight into the challenges we face in our very unique industry, and how such challenges can be addressed.

A leader of an organization, department or a tennis operation, must be able to understand what those things he / she is good at, and to recognize their limitations. To do this honestly and effectively and then to translate the answer into an effective management practice can be a difficult task for anyone. Of the many successful individuals that I surveyed, Dr. Jack Groppe said ***“to focus on yourself is a humbling experience because you question what has really made you who you are”***.

Predictably, Jack has done just this throughout his career, and later expressed the opinion that completing this exercise regularly helped dramatically as he moved forward in his own career. (Note: Jack’s company focusing on human performance in the athletic and corporate world was sold to Johnson & Johnson in 2008!) It is not surprising that Jack would express such an opinion, because on another point he expressed the thought that ***“like all of us, I am a work in progress...I have always tried to improve upon who I am and what I do. I believe that every day of life should involve growth of some sort or another... the day you stop growing is the day you start dying”***.

Leaning on the discovery a new “Best Practices” for some can quickly become a crutch for mediocrity. Trying to blindly follow a new “theory” from an “expert” with the hope that the concept or idea will become a source of instant problem is a dangerous path to walk. While many ideas or practices offer great opportunity and proven results, you can sure that Jack Groppe has not blindly applied every good idea he has heard, without first considering how it applies to what he does and for whom he does it.

If one is to truly grow and learn from someone else there are two additional and necessary steps required. The first is to understand the perspective from which an “expert” takes a certain action or follows a specific philosophy. You must then reflect on your circumstances and consider whether their situation is relevant to yours. If you believe that the idea or practice is relevant and can be applied to your environment, the second step is to examine your own skill set and decide if execution requires a change in your own knowledge base, to achieve a similar level of success. “Knowing about a concept” is much different, and likely to produce much different results than “Taking effective action about something”!

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With almost 30 years of success in private clubs and the international tennis industry, Mark McMahon is the President of *McMahon & Associates*, a tennis consulting company. Mark personally manages Director of Tennis retained-search assignments for clubs. His company provides a variety of operational consulting services including targeted training and professional development programs and tennis facility design, construction and renovation. McMahon's experience includes directing the tennis operations at Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton, FL and Dunwoody Country Club in Atlanta, GA; being a founding faculty member of the CMAA Sports Management Education Program; delivering workshops and seminars worldwide, including the CMAA World Conference; Board Member and Division President for the USPTA; International Pro of the Year (2000) and recipient of the USTA Tennis Facility of the Year – Private Club Category (2003). McMahon recently completed a three-year assignment with the U.S. Tennis Association where he managed a new industry growth initiative that was driven by the introduction of 90 Tennis Service Representatives who now work with clubs, tennis facilities and parks across the country growing tennis participation. Mark may be reached at [m.mcmahon@earthlink.net](mailto:m.mcmahon@earthlink.net) or (404) 271-3088 or through his firm's web site: [www.mcmahonassociatesconsulting.com](http://www.mcmahonassociatesconsulting.com)