



## *An Opening is Like an Ironman: Key Points to Winning the Race*

by Merrick P. Dresnin

From an HR perspective, opening a property takes many months of preparation with considerable planning and anticipation of guest and employee needs. Preparation requires a solid critical path guiding the management team through a strategic process involving decisions regarding anything from what china to purchase to what toilet paper to use.

Certain strategies need to be kept in mind when running a race, and similarly, key points must be kept in mind for a successful opening.

### **Accountability**

It is essential that everyone involved in the process hold each other accountable to every step on the path – if one is missed or if one person falters, it is like falling off a bike mid-race. You have to get back up, assess your wounds, find out how far behind you are and recover before moving on.

For example, let's say you have a key manager in IT that you thought had been identified, but they ended up turning down the offer. That manager is needed to program systems affecting payroll, HR, guest service, etc. Nothing can move forward without that manager. The team needs to be prepared to fill the gap. Time to use resources from sister properties or outsource on a temporary basis the IT needs so as to ensure progress is not lost and you can continue with the race.

To open successfully, the team must adhere to steps, deadlines and progress. The team has to be ready for anything that threatens to throw everyone off the racecourse.

### **Setting Goals**

Weaved through your property's critical path needs to be a set of goals. What do you want to accomplish once the doors open? What experience do you want to create for your guests and customers? A luxury hotel wants to create a different experience than a convention hotel. A casino wants to create a different experience than a hotel. The business goals must be identified, and clearly communicated both before your opening and after. It is the "after" of this communication that is critical to initial and continued success. The gun goes off, and how ready are your people to perform? They will not be ready if they do not know the direction of the "finish line." Goals need to exist and be clearly communicated to everyone involved in the project.

### **Communication**

Communication is critical to settling the many minds of your employees, and getting them to perform in a unified fashion.

In an Ironman, the goal is finishing in a healthy state. This means you need to have the right nutrition and hydration throughout the thirteen or so hours of the race. Similar needs exist for the build up to the opening and the months/years after. Communication is the nutrition and hydration needed for your employees. Several forms of communication exist that may be useful – the forms need to be obvious, varied and repeated.

The communication forms should vary based on one's environment. They should somewhat mirror the environment you have for your guests. A fun-loving, jovial casino environment invites a similar communication style in the "back-of-house" for the employees. A high-luxury hotel environment should have a classy, clean (but fun) look and feel for its employees "behind the scenes."

Regardless of the theme and style, several techniques of communication can and should exist. A short daily or weekly publication is of great value. Name this document for the property or brand, and ensure that it contains service reminders, along with birthday and company anniversary celebrations. Include guest-facing event information, as well as property fact reviews.

Information regarding property happenings and information should be posted throughout the back-of-house. Consider the equivalent of a posted "shopping mall map" of outlet locations with information on each one. Such information placed near the employee entrance is important. It is like that race water station that appears every few miles – you can depend on the information, and see it on a daily basis. It is a reminder of what everyone needs to know, and employees can share that information with every guest they encounter.

Imaging is key, but so is daily operation meetings in every area. Such "stand ups" should go over relevant information for the day/week that every employee needs. They can take this information, and just as a triathlete, tackle their shifts with key points and projects to ensure they share the goals of the property. They can provide guest service with educated, confident answers.

The above communication steps/tools ensure that every employee is on track with property goals and guest deliverables. These should be ingrained in the employment experience, as daily, weekly expectations that never go away. Just as an athlete can rely on nutrition, every employee should be able to rely on these tools to deliver guest service. This never stops, so long as the property is open and the goals remain clear and

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unchanged. Predictable places of communication are key, followed by repetitive messaging.

### A Great Finish

Determine and establish communication techniques for your employees to unite them towards your goals, and color these techniques with what needs to be relayed to your employees so they, too, can support property goals. Communication is the nutrition as you pursue your accomplishment

of opening your doors. If you plan correctly and communicate right, you will not only finish your race, but create something that lasts well beyond the challenging finish line. ♣

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