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COMMERCIAL RECREATION: A MEETING OF THE MINDS?
THEORY VS. APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

Information is needed about the commercial recreation field to help understand important developmental issues which will influence the profession. A study was undertaken to identify the topics that practitioners and academicians feel are important to development of the field. Results indicated that there is a diversity of opinion.

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INTRODUCTION

Commercial recreation (CR) as a professional interest area has seen unprecedented expansion in the last few years. Currently ninety-one curricula offer coursework in commercial recreation or aligned areas such as travel/tourism, industrial or private recreation. The chicken or the egg concept could be applied in attempting to determine which came first, a demand for professionally trained commercial recreators or a lack of job opportunities for holding a degree in Parks and Recreation. In either case, the growth of professional opportunities in the commercial recreation sector has increased considerably and holds much promise for future leisure employment.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to identify key commercial recreation interest areas for future development into professional monographs that could provide both practicing professionals and educators with content material in commercial recreation. Over 120 CR professionals and educational institutions offering CR courses were asked to rank seventy-two topic areas on a scale of one to five. These topics were

loosely arranged into three areas: forms (knowledge based), functions (skill based) and issues (new or evolving concepts). The top twenty-one topics were rank ordered for both educators and managers and then compared. Usable surveys were returned from thirty educators and thirty practicing commercial recreation (managers). The list of professionals was obtained from the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association (RCRA) membership list and follow-up mailings were sent to recommended individuals. This is one of the first efforts to compare the importance of CR topic areas by those that profess and those who do. The findings bear close investigation, indeed warrant the question: "Can there be a meeting of the minds between educators and managers when it comes to commercial recreation?" Perhaps more importantly, what do these findings say for the future development of commercial recreation both professionally and educationally?

ANALYSIS

By dividing the twenty-one topics into thirds, a group of seven topics fall into either the top, middle or bottom rankings. This discussion identifies similarities, differences and variances between CR managers and educators.

RESULTS

As might be expected, those working in commercial recreation ranked the CR topics overall higher than did educators. CR managers ranked 16 topics 4.0 or higher while only six topics were so ranked by educators. In the top two-thirds of the topics, educators (E) and managers (M) agreed on rankings (E/M) only three times: Marketing (2/1), Guest Relations (5/2) and Recreation Promotion and Advertising (8/11).

The chart below shows the top one-third topic rankings.

CHART I

EDUCATORS (Managers)		MANAGERS (Educators)	
Rank	Topic	Rank	Topic
1	Defining Commercial Recreation Markets (14)	1	Marketing (2)
2	Marketing (1)	2	Guest Relations (5)
3	Evaluation (10)	3	Budgets (13)
4	Computers (NR)	4	Staff Training/Orientation (10)
5	Guest Relations (2)	5	Personnel Management (9)
6	Experiential Learning (8)	6	Planning the Recreation Prod-

7

Travel/Tourism
Operations (20)

7

uct (12)
Resort Operations
(NR)

Note: NR: not ranked in the top twenty-one (21) topics

Interestingly both educators and managers have one topic in the top one-third that fails to appear at all on their counterparts listing. Educators ranked computers fourth which appears nowhere on the managers top 21. Conversely, Resort Operations, which was ranked seventh by managers failed to make the educators list.

Three CR topics in the top one-third reflect large variances between educators and managers. "Defining Commercial Recreation Markets" was ranked number one by educators but was ranked fourteenth by managers. It would appear managers are more concerned with the "doing" than the "defining" of commercial recreation. "Budgets" ranked as third most important to managers but educators ranked it thirteenth. Educators also placed travel/tourism in the top one-third while managers ranked it almost last (20th). These three discrepancies are perhaps the most significant differences between the two groups and reflect a serious need for increased communications, especially in the areas of curriculum development, internships and research. That educators would rank Evaluation (3/10) and Experiential Learning (6/8) higher than managers seems logical in terms of orientation just as managers rated Staff Training/Orientation (10/4), Personnel Management (9/5) and Planning the Recreation Products (12/6) higher than the educators.

Agreement both increases and decreases when comparing the middle seven CR topics.

CHART II

EDUCATORS (Managers)		MANAGERS (Educators)	
Rank	Topic	Rank	Topic
8	Recreation Promotion and Advertising (11)	8	Experiential Learning (6)
9	Personnel Management (5)	9	Special Events (Programming) (NR)
10	Staff Training/Orientation (4)	10	Evaluation (3)
11	Research (NR)	11	Recreation Promotion and Advertising (8)
12	Planning Rec. Product (6)	12	Accountability Accounting (NR)
13	Budgets (3)	13	Conference/Group Programs (NR)
14	Risk Management (NR)	14	Defining Commercial Recreation Markets (1)

Both groups included topics from the other top one-third but the number of topics with no comparable ranking increased. For educators, Research (11) and Risk Management (14) were ranked in the top twenty-one but absent from the Managers list. Managers, however, had three topics not ranked by Educators: Special Event Programming (9), Accountability Accounting (12) and Conference/Group Programs (13). Some educators noted that they reduced the rank on topics they felt were adequately covered in currently published materials. Emphasis by managers on program topics is probably reflected by the strong resort orientation of many of the respondents. Only Recreation Promotion and Advertising (8/11) was agreed upon by both groups.

CHART III

EDUCATORS (Managers)		MANAGERS (Educators)	
Rank	Topic	Rank	Topic
15	Pricing Rec. Products (NR)	15	Facility Management (21)
16	Role of Recreation in the Commercial Industry (17)	16	Administration(17)
17	Administration (16)	17	Role of Recreation in Commercial Industry (16)
18	Club Organization and Management (19)	18	Group/Conference Sales (NR)
19	Hospitality Services (NR)	19	Club Organization/Management (18)
20	Public Use of Private Facilities (NR)	20	Travel/Tourism Operation (7)
21	Facility Management (15)	21	Consumer Awareness Protection (NR)

In the bottom third, Pricing Recreation Products (15), Hospitality Services (19) and Private Use of Public Facilities (20) do not appear on the managers list while Group/Conference Sales (18) and Consumer Awareness/Protection (21) are not ranked by the educators.

Of the three sub-groups, managers and educators had the greatest amount of agreement in the bottom third rankings. The Role of Recreation in the Commercial Industry (16/17), Administration (17/16), Club Organization/Management (18/19) and Facility Management (15/21) were all areas of marginal deviation between the two areas of expertise.

CONCLUSION

In summary, both groups had six interest areas that failed to rank on both lists. When identifying interest topics by area (knowledge, skill or issue), educators had fourteen knowledge areas to the managers

twelve, and one additional issue area (4/3). As might be expected, the managers ranked twice as many skill areas (3/6) in their top twenty-one topics than did educators.

Speculation as to why there is such discrepancy between educators' and managers' rankings of CR topics would be just that--speculation. However, continued growth within the commercial recreation industry is certain. Crucial to a unified, directed growth is the need for both groups to make a concerted effort in opening channels of communication. The "doers" and the "teachers" need to combine their scope of expertise and develop a symbiotic relationship focused on sound research, documented applied skills and proactive vision. For in this evolving field of commercial recreation, there is much to be learned and even more to be discovered.