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Aquatics Professional Development

Leland Yarger and Robert E. Ogoreuc

Competent aquatic professionals must actively take part in professional development activities. The aquatic industry is constantly changing; as a result, those leading aquatic staff must stay current in areas of training, risk management, health, and aquatic safety. This article will provide activities and areas of concern that current and future aquatic professionals should understand.

What Is Aquatic Professional Development?

Professional development in aquatics constitutes many activities. The dominate activity for aquatic professionals is training and recertification. Additional activities include reading aquatic related literature; maintaining aquatic industry qualifications with continuing education, including reauthorization activities such as teaching, pursuit of academic degrees, or Continuing Educational Units (CEU's); joining aquatic organizations; subscribing to aquatic serials; and attending professional aquatic meetings.

The aquatic professional needs to regularly network with other aquatic professionals about current and future industry concerns, policy and procedures, and promoting other aquatic staff to continue their aquatic education. The primary mechanism in the past has been attending conferences. In today's information age, maintaining membership on Internet lists, discussion groups, and blogs is more important than ever and less expensive than traveling to conferences.

The Beginning for Many Aquatic Professionals

Most aquatic professionals start in the field with extensive experiences around the water before assuming any aquatic leadership position. In a 1998 aquatic management survey, 104 or 71.2% of the 146 respondents reported that they held some aquatic position before their aquatic management post (Yarger, 1998). This is an important finding due to the hands-on nature of aquatic leadership positions. Aquatic leaders must have and retain a high level of technical expertise for aquatic

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venue management. This is due in part to the very limited number of professional aquatic positions in any one organization. Often a single aquatics professional must be the driving force at places like parks, recreational facilities, YMCAs, YWCAs, health clubs, as well as colleges and universities.

Aquatic facilities offer a vast range of opportunities in which interested individuals can gain valuable experience toward acquiring the necessary leadership skills before assuming professional positions. From attending swimming instructional programs to helping swimming instructors as aides and then going on to become a swimming instructor, the advancement possibilities include but are not limited to many of the activities listed in Table 1.

Each of these areas has valuable exposure for people wishing to advance within the field of aquatics. Domains for knowledge, skills, and abilities are greatly enhanced by exposure in classes as a student, an assistant to a program administrator, and finally leading a program.

As an individual starting a career in aquatics, attending basic level classes, gaining working experience, and then becoming an instructor or leader in the content area is a great way to start. With plenty of documented leadership experiences through records for courses, carefully tracked work hours, and proven observation by mentors, the future aquatic professional can advance and make a difference.

Experience Counts

For the future aquatic professional, actual experiences are critical. Simply wanting a leadership job or certification is not enough. Many entry level aquatic positions can be attained because you have a desire to work and get paid. In aquatic leadership positions wanting to attain the next level is not enough; the candidate must consistently undergo additional training, retraining, and have significant experiences at the previous level to advance. For example, if you wish to teach a water related topic, often there are prerequisites based on basic level knowledge, skills, and abilities. Once the prerequisites are achieved and instructor content mastered, then the individual goes on to presenting the entry level content.

The steps in training and leadership are in place to help reduce accidents, reduce damages, and insure consistent training. For example, in the operation of pool mechanical systems, if an operator switches the wrong valve at the wrong

Table 1 Aquatic Activities

Recreational / athletic	Small craft	Operational
Water aerobics	Canoe / Kayak	Lifeguard
Jr. lifeguard	Sailing	Pool operations
Swimming	Powered watercraft	Swim instructor
Diving	Water rescues	Lead lifeguard
SCUBA class	Water ski class	CPR / FA instruction
Synchro swim		Coaching water sports
Water polo		Facility management
Competitive swimming		

time, parts can be damaged or broken, personal injury or death could occur, and the facility may lose revenue due to closure.

Today it is not uncommon to find individuals attempting to skip steps in training and leadership. Some individuals see the next level of title or credential as a way to boost their resume versus having the true ability to perform at a high level of competence. Commonly seen are people with no proven or documented experience at the previous leadership level that hold instructor certifications attempting to become trainers for the instructor materials.

This trend or sense of entitlement is hazardous to our industry. The process to become an aquatic professional requires actual work. Through both educational experiences and real world working experiences, individuals can earn the next level positions. The results of placating people with an entitlement attitude is that future aquatic leaders do not even have the ability to perform at a basic level much less as a leader.

Professional Development Opportunities

Reading Industry Publications. There are a variety of publications available to enhance the aquatic professionals' knowledge in the field. These include scientific and educational journals like *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education (IJARE)* and the *Journal of Emergency Medical Services (JEMS)*. Industry publications like *Aquatics International*, *Swimming World*, *Water Leisure & Lodging*, *American Lifeguard Magazine*, *World Waterpark Development and Expansion Guide*, *Waterpark Resorts Today*, *Dive Training*. Also available is the American Red Cross' electronic serial, *Aqua Zine*, and others.

Reading Industry Texts. Aquatic texts are available for a host of aquatic activities and specialties; we will discuss those specific to the aquatic professionals dealing with staff and facility management. Several examples of leadership and management texts specific to aquatics are included in Table 2.

Regular Retraining. Keeping up on basic level certifications is a key part of retraining in aquatics. Common basic certifications that every aquatic professional should hold are listed in Table 3.

Many other annual training sessions should be attended that are specific to employer requirements. Some may be specific to organizational standard operating procedures; others may be representative of local or regional considerations.

Continuing Education. Attend additional professional education courses that include CEU courses, courses toward advanced degrees, aquatic schools, and industry conferences. The more contact with educational resources helps you to stay abreast of current issues and trends.

There are approximately 33 colleges and universities that have aquatic degree curricula (Crume & Yarger, 2005). Course work can lead to credentials, including specialist, concentration and track, and up to aquatic minor degrees or even a bachelor's degree. The authors' universities both offer aquatic degree programs.

Meet With Other Professionals. Networking and developing mentorship is vital in an individual's success in any profession. Both networking and mentorship can start right in college with faculty on staff. Finding someone who can serve as a

Table 2 Aquatic Leadership Texts

Organization	Year of Pub	Title	Publisher location	Publisher
American Red Cross	2007	Lifeguard Management	Yardley, PA	StayWell
American Red Cross	1995	Head Lifeguard	St. Louis, MO	Mosby Lifeline
Clayton, R. & Thomas, D.	1989	Professional Aquatic Management	Champaign, IL	Human Kinetics
Clayton, R. & VanRossen, D.	2005	The Aquatic Administrator	Ft. Collins, CO	Aquatic Partners, INC.
Clement, A.	1997	Legal Responsibility in Aquatics	Aurora, OH	Sport and Law Press
Fawcett, P. A.	2005	Aquatic Facility Management	Champaign, IL	Human Kinetics
Fawcett, P.A.	2001	NIRSA Aquatic Director's Handbook	Corvallis, OR	National Intramural Recreational Sports Association
Gabrielsen, M. A.	1987 4th ed.	Swimming Pools, A Guide to Their Planning, Design and Operation	Champaign, IL	Human Kinetics
Graver, D.	2004	Aquatic Rescue and Safety	Champaign, IL	Human Kinetics
Griffiths, T.	2003 2nd ed.	The Complete Swimming Pool Reference,	Champaign, IL	Sagamore Publishing
Johnston, K.	1999	The Encyclopedia of Aquatic Codes and Standards	Ashburn, VA	National Recreation and Park Association
Sawyer, T.H.	2006	Facility Design and Management	Champaign, IL	Sagamore Publishing L.L.C.
YMCA of the USA	2003	YMCA Aquatic Management	Champaign, IL	Human Kinetics

good mentor in a particular discipline can allow one to learn valuable life lessons and provide guidance to their career. This often leads to the mentor introducing the individual to other aquatic professionals, which broadens the network base. Having contacts and resources plays a pivotal role in continued advancement.

Join Professional Organizations. Professional membership is another keystone in one's professional development. Joining a professional organization enhances an individual's opportunity to learn and share new ideas for a common goal. It will also expand the networking base and provide opportunities to attend that organization's conferences and workshops. This is another way of multilayering contin-

Table 3 Certifications for Every Aquatic Professional

Basic Level	Preferred Certifications
Lifeguard training	Lifeguard instructor
CPR for the professional rescuer	First responder
Standard first aid	Swimming instructor
Automated external defibrillation	Trainer or faculty level for lifeguard, swim instructor, CPR, and First Aid.
Emergency oxygen administration	
Pool operations	
Blood borne pathogen	
Hazard communication	

ued scholarly growth in the profession. The following is a list of some of the aquatic organizations with professional memberships. Many of these organizations have journals, certification courses, and conferences of which members can take advantage:

- American Association for Physical Education and Recreation and Dance (AAPHERD) Aquatic Council
- American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA)
- Divers Alert Network (DAN)
- National Drowning Prevention Alliance (NDPA)
- National Intramural Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA)
- National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)
- National Safe Boating Council
- National Water Safety Congress
- New England Aquatics Network
- Professional Pool Operators of America (PPOA)
- United States Lifesaving Association
- United States Water Fitness Association (USWFA)
- World Water Park Association

It should be noted that there are many other membership organizations with collateral relationships to aquatics at the national and regional levels. A good example is State associations of the NRPA; in Florida it is the FRPA.

Conclusions

Experience working in the field is of critical importance to the future aquatic professionals. The experience gained by working in different aquatic positions provides a base of knowledge required to actively lead aquatic staff and facilities.

Most aquatic professionals become aquatic educators due to the nature of the position. Take the time to become an aquatic instructor; actually teach an extensive number of courses, and then if you enjoy that aspect, continue to advanced level trainer education. An individual that is willing to skip steps is an aquatic liability that the industry does not need.

Take advantage of multiple resources to become a well-versed aquatic professional: Read books, journals, and on-line literature to gain knowledge. Network-

ing with other aquatic professionals via e-mail and attending conferences and local or regional meetings is a great way to expand your resource base.

Retraining is not an option, but required for aquatic professionals. True aquatic professionals diligently continue to maintain their certifications and promote such activities to other future professionals.

Unlike most other leadership professions, aquatic professionals must hold many credentials to remain current. So often, the professional must decide which of these activities to pursue. Due to time and financial limitations, it is difficult if not impossible to hold a professional position and complete every area of professional development each year.

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