



*A Ten-Minute Informative Communication of the
International Association of Conference Center Administrators* **December 2003**



Suppose this was your story in coming to your new center...

Congratulations! Following an extensive application and interview process, you've been hired as the new Executive Director of a very respectable conference center. You signed your contract with the Board Chair, who is committed to be your partner and supporter, and which clearly defines your position, responsibilities, compensation, annual review procedure, and authority.

On your first day you arrive at the center and pass through the lobby where neat, well-stocked display racks contain up-to-date information about your center and attractive brochures for future events. Your first encounter is with your conference and office staff, who are excited, eager, capable and hospitality oriented. A close look at the conference schedule shows a full year of guest bookings. Your program staff is carefully storing their supplies and equipment so they will be fully prepared the next group. They have just completed a 3-week training program, and they are excited and highly energized. Your center's team has maintained a national reputation for the developing and hosting excellent programs.

As you take your initial walk around the campus, the Director of Housekeeping proudly shows off their department and facilities. In the guest rooms you note the uniformed housekeepers cheerfully cleaning and preparing each room with attention to smallest detail. The sheets and towels match, the furniture is dusted, the pictures straight, and the carpet is freshly vacuumed ...even under the beds. (You smile as you note the vacuum cleaner bag has been recently changed.) You also notice that the plastic trash can liners are opened up making the entire can useful. Turning around you see all the windows are crystal clean, and the blinds are matched in their open levels.

Your next meeting is with the Maintenance Director. In his office are displayed Fire Department inspection reports showing 5 straight years of perfect scores. There is also a certificate for the recently installed fire sprinklers in all buildings. There are also certificates posted showing that all staff have completed training in health and safety management, and a letter from your workers compensation agent noting no claims for the past 10 years. He proudly shows you their loss prevention, and preventative management programs. You cannot help but notice that the maintenance personnel, all with their personal eye and hand protection equipment folded in their laps, are spending their morning break seated around a table watching a safety training video on proper lifting techniques.

As you head to the Dining Room you pass the grounds crew, who have just stopped mowing when they noticed a group was starting a meeting in a nearby room. Without any other instruction, they eagerly begin to pick up litter and pieces of trash on the grounds. You are impressed with all the clean, well cared for walkways, as well as the helpful, well placed and easy to read signage.

In the Dining Room you find the hostess just finishing the flower arrangements and preparing to fan-fold the dinner napkins. In the kitchen you note everyone in clean uniforms wearing hairnets and safety shoes. The equipment, while well used, sparkles from cleaning and proper care. Lunch is being prepared, but as is the normal practice, will not be cooked until just prior to serving. The Food Service Manager greets you with a cup of freshly ground and brewed coffee. He also has a tray of 5 different cookie recipes that are being tested by your chef that day. It's obvious that they take pride in developing new recipes and ideas and serving them to your guests. The chef says he would like to schedule a meeting with you to discuss several new dinner menu options involving more freshly prepared items. He assures you they will all fall within or below the per plate budget plan.

On the wall you see posted recent health department inspection, noting 100% scores, and a letter congratulating your kitchen on being named the top food service facility in the state. You are overwhelmed as your Food Manager demonstrates the computer-based menu-planning program, which is integrated into the on-line ordering-purchasing, and inventory system. Your reservations department can post meal counts directly to this system, allowing for easy and prompt changes, which rarely occur because of their high efficiency in getting the necessary information in an orderly and timely manner.

Finally you get to your office where you find a copy of the current financial statements, noting a balanced operating budget, with earnings slightly above projections, and expenses right on target. You look at the recent auditor's report and are impressed with the sound budget, coupled with responsible fiscal operations, controls, and safeguards. The report also outlines some new tax and accounting codes for the coming year, which your staff has already reviewed, totally accepted, and placed in effect.

There is also a file on your desk that contains:

- The center's personnel manual and copies of staff performance reviews for the past 2 years.
- A letter from your insurance carrier informing you that because of an excellent claims history, you will receive a refund for last year, and your rate has been reduced by 15% for the next 2 years.
- A memo from your Human Resources Manager containing a list of highly qualified and pre-screened applicants wanting jobs at your center, but due to high levels of employee and employer satisfaction and your excellent pay and benefits scale, there have been few openings over the past several years.

Your secretary gently calls to tell you the center attorney is on the phone. You wonder if there is a problem, but instead, he tells you that a long time guest recently passed away and left 4.6 million dollars to the center. The bequest specifies that half be spent on facility improvement and program development under the sole discretion of the Executive Director. The other half is being added to your 15 million dollar endowment.

Later you address a meeting of the full staff. You are impressed to look out and see that each of them is wearing a proper nametag that is clean, in the right place, and straight. You share some initial thoughts and ideas for their input. They break into small discussion groups, crossing departmental lines. About 30 minutes later they come back together. To a person, they applaud your ideas, totally ready to jump in and follow your suggestions. Never once do they utter the phrase, "But we've always done it this way."

And you think to yourself ... wow, and I get paid for this... **WAKE UP! It's all a dream!**

Being a "dreamer" should be a part of every Director's job description. It's not enough some days to accept things as they are. It's part of your role to work to make things the way the "could be" and the way they "should be." It's not enough to maintain the vision, you also have to maintain the standards and details. Sometimes the hardest part of that is encouraging and training the rest of your staff to worry about the details, too. And who knows... maybe it's just possible that with enough patience and persistence that eventually all these dreams can actually come true. Except, of course, the one about the vacuum cleaner bags.



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