

Club Managers, What Have You Done for Me Lately?

How often have we in private clubs heard that from our members? No one but a few creatures of inviolable habit likes the “same ol’, same ol’,” yet that’s what many clubs serve up month after month, year in and year out. Why not try a different approach that will “wow” your members? Make “wow factors” a part of your club’s traditions.

What is a “wow factor”? It’s anything, usually unexpected, that causes your members to say or think, “Wow, that’s really neat!” or “Wow, I didn’t expect that!” or “Wow, that’s impressive!”

Wow factors are characterized by their unexpectedness and as such any particular wow factor cannot become part of your club routine. They are executed for one-time or short-term effect. They are also characterized by being unusual – either cutting edge or just out-of-the-ordinary. They can be extravagant and expensive, but these should be few and far between. Most wow factors should be small scale, inexpensive, and momentary, that is, of short duration as in one day, one evening, or one event.

The key to making wow factors is to challenge your club’s department heads to come up with a specified number of wow factor ideas for their areas of the operation – say 10 new ideas for the coming busy season. Each idea should be briefly described on paper – what it is, how it will be done, what items need to be purchased, any talent that needs to be contracted, any associated labor cost, and an overall estimated cost. Then all department heads should meet with the General Manager in a brainstorming session to discuss, settle on, and schedule the roll out of each wow factor.

Here are a handful of ideas to give you a sense of the program:

- Complimentary mini-trio sampler of desserts or appetizers for all diners on a given night – this is also an excellent way to preview or market a new menu.
- Free soft-serve ice cream or smoothies for the kids (of all ages) at the pool on a hot summer day. An alternative would be to arrange for the local ice cream truck to pull up in front of your pool with music playing. Everyone gets their specialty ice cream treat and you pay the bill.
- Flowers for all the ladies dining on some non-special night just for the surprise effect. Google search “special days” for calendars of unusual celebrations and holidays.
- Have the General Manager act as the club “doorman” on a random evening to greet each member and guest as they arrive.
- A giveaway of a sleeve of golf balls to each golfer on a busy Saturday morning. Handed out by the Head Golf Professional on the first tee for maximum effect.
- Free mini-pizzas in the lounge on an unexpected evening.
- A themed ice carving for a ladies luncheon.
- Complimentary and unusual hors d’oeuvres for the weekly card game in the men’s lounge.
- Face painting or a clown or a balloon artist at your next children’s event.
- Complimentary wine for no special reason. A great way to clear out dead stock or showcase new wines.

Again, the key to the wow factor is its unusual nature and unexpectedness. Several tips:

- Execute your wow factors where they will have the most effect – food and beverage areas, golf areas, locker rooms, special events, activities, aquatics, tennis.
- Plan, budget, and schedule. Formalize your program enough so that the wow factors are spread out and spread around. Always have a budget. Say you budget \$500 per month for club-wide wow factors. The cost to the club is \$6,000 per year – not an inconsequential amount, but think of the benefit to member pleasure and even employee morale.
- Wow factor ideas are everywhere. Borrow from other establishments or something you saw on vacation. The Internet is a treasure trove of ideas. Google search words or phrases such as “Fun,” “Fun Ideas,” “Fun Activities,” “Fun Recreational Activities,” and “Inexpensive Activity Ideas” and you’ll get a sense for how many resources are out there.
- To keep your costs down, get together with vendors for freebies. Many would be thrilled to get some exposure to your members for their products and services. Just make sure you prominently give them credit for their donations.
- Once you’ve used a particular wow factor, save the concept for some future time. Avoiding routine doesn’t mean never doing it again, just doing it again when unexpected. Over time, you’ll develop an extensive list of wow factors that can be deployed for maximum effect at some future moment.
- Keep your wow factor strategy, plans, and schedule under tight wrap. Don’t ruin the surprise with “loose lips.”
- Let your members do the talking about the wow factor, not you or your staff. Act like nothing special is going on, while the members “buzz” about the unusual and unexpected. Certainly, you may acknowledge a wow factor when asked about it, but act like it’s no big deal, just some little thing that happened “spontaneously.”

There are hundreds of websites offering unusual and fun ideas. Get your department heads and staff excited by searching out the most unusual activities, events, or ideas. Your members will still ask, “What have you done for me lately?” but they’ll be delighted by the unexpected moments and your staff will be energized by the fun of “giving” these special gifts to your membership.

Ed Rehkopf, Hospitality Resources International