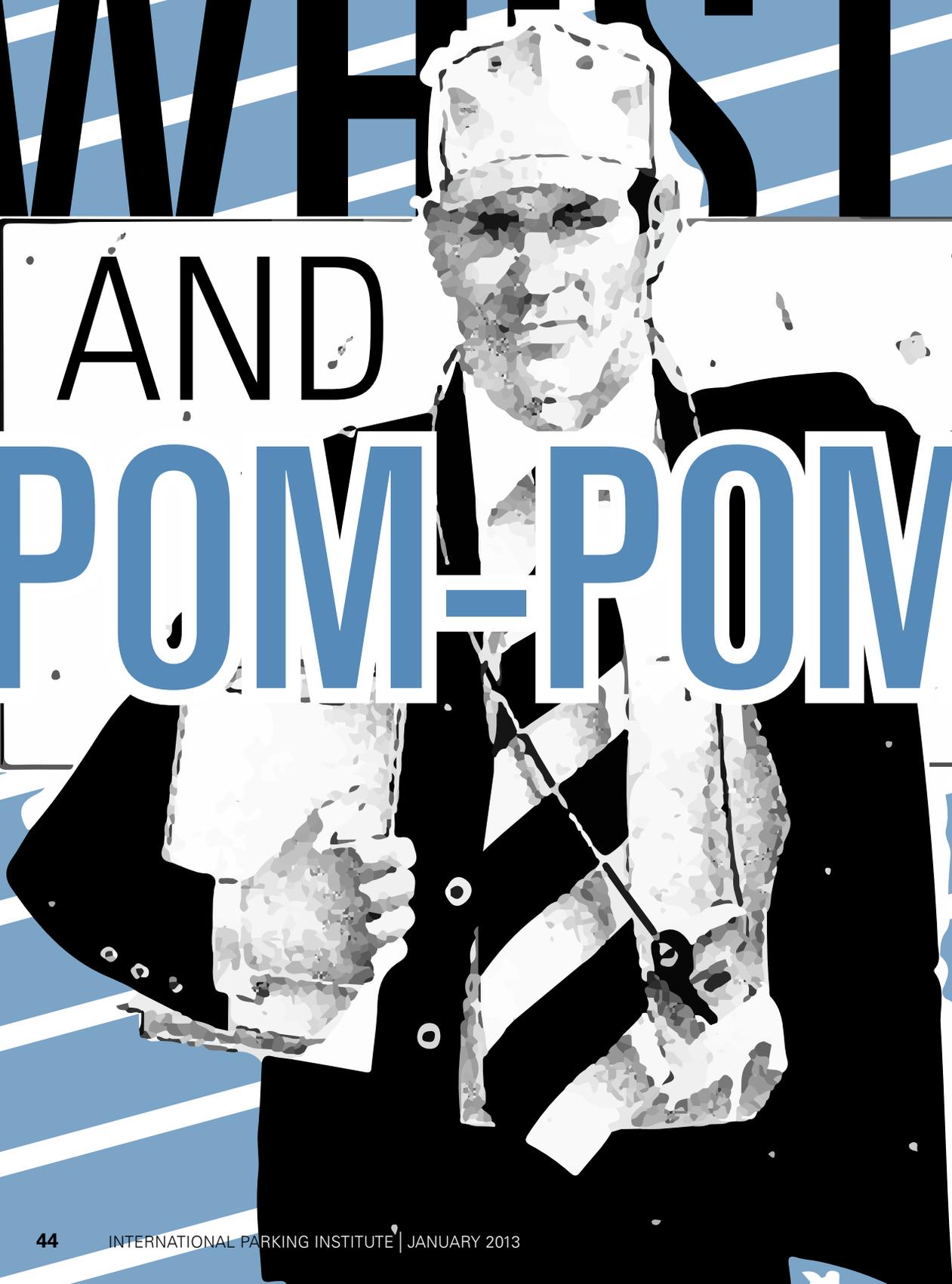


WHISTLE

AND

POM-POMS



THINKSTOCK



By Frank Giles

Managers play many roles, but coach and cheerleader should be forefront in their minds.

Here's how to use both to build a solid team.

What is a parking manager's greatest resource? It's not the parking equipment, it's not the customers, and it's not even the coffee maker. You guessed it: his or her greatest resource is the organization's workers. The trick is successfully molding frontline workers and office staff into a productive, well-oiled customer service machine. So how exactly is that done? Retaining good employees and weeding out bad seeds can be a never-ending task to be sure, but how does a manager concretely turn a staff into a team? I believe it takes a two-pronged approach I call Whistles and Pom-Poms.

I'm not suggesting that you turn your next staff meeting into some sort of pep rally, but I do believe managers should be able to assume the role of both coach and cheerleader, hence the title. The sports world recognizes that both roles are needed, in some capacity, to build and maintain a good team. It's time we in management realize the same.

The Whistle

The role of a coach—the whistle—is to formulate and execute a game plan, train the team before game day, discipline or correct unacceptable behavior, and inspire the team before tough games and at halftime. This role is one of preparation and has more to do with before and after than during the game. A solid game plan is evidence of this.

The game plan comes into play when managers hold their weekly or monthly staff meetings or morning briefings. A good manager should make sure that team members are clear on what their goals are and what the plan is to achieve those goals. This may seem redundant for employees who seemingly have the same routine day in and day out, but without deliberate goal setting from the manager, the team's performance will suffer. People also tend to be more proficient when there is a purpose for each day. The key here is to be consistent. Long-term goals should

be revisited often. Short-term goals, likewise, should be given often and should move the team toward achieving the long-term goals.

A manager also needs to make sure staff members are trained and equipped to achieve their individual goals. Coaches may not go out on the field during the game, but practice is another story. Coaches understand that great teams are made in practice and that they must be fully invested in the preparation of their teams. Training is paramount to having a productive staff and is not one of those things that can be treated as an afterthought. Everything from customer service to emergency management should be expounded upon in training with great care and detail. The key here is repetition. Training is only effective if it is done over and over. Coaches call these drills, but the outcome is the same.

The coach also promotes accountability, getting team members back on track when they do not carry out their responsibilities. Holding team members accountable and taking disciplinary action are not the most fun parts of being a manager, but like the coach, managers should be able to shift seamlessly to bring about correction when the occasion arises. Those in management who are non-confrontational by nature may have some difficulty with this. The good news is accountability doesn't start when a problem

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arises. A manager must be clear about what his or her expectations are; when this happens, employees should not be surprised by fair and necessary disciplinary actions. They will expect the manager to stay true to his convictions. The key here is follow-through. Necessary discipline does not make a manager a tyrant. To the contrary, it strengthens the overall team and streamlines expectations.

A coach should also inspire the team. We've all seen those great sports movies when it's halftime and the team is down in points. Everyone in the locker room looks to the coach for inspiration and in true Hollywood fashion, the coach delivers a rousing speech, everyone is re-enthused, the team comes back to win the game, roll credits. The outcome may not be as dramatic as this in the world of parking management but managers do have the ability to give the team that extra push in an inspiring way. As leaders, we inspire those who follow us by what we say and what we do. For example, working alongside the staff every once in awhile by picking up trash or setting out cones can show commonality and inspire the staff to make at least as much of an effort as their leader. Managers can also inspire by showing faith in the team. Trusting the team or a team member to take on a responsibility that they have not taken on before might inspire them to live up to the trust placed in them. The key here is to be devoted to the personal growth of the team. It will be noticed and will most likely inspire.

Pom-Poms

This brings us to the role of cheerleader, the pom-poms. The role of cheerleader is just as important as the role of coach in management, but it is a bit less technical. A cheerleader encourages the team, praises the team, and rallies behind the team during the game. It is important to note that a manager takes on the role of cheerleader as the staff is working. This means that the team member will not be fully focused on the manager at that time; the manager may merely be a peripheral to the team member. This is quite different from the role of coach. A cheerleader makes an impact on the team without becoming the team's focus.

Any manager who has had to deal with an employee who didn't quite grasp a particular concept as fast as others should know the importance of encouragement. When a new cashier or valet is struggling with keeping pace their first week on the job, the manager has an opportunity to shift into cheerleader mode. This can be done with just a few words that let that employee know they will be just fine.

Remember, a cheerleader verbalizes encouragement and support. He does not take for granted that the team will know he is behind them. The key here is to be expressive. Encouragement should be out loud and natural. The role of cheerleader can be seen more prevalently in new-hire situations but it is relevant for veteran staff as well.

A cheerleader praises success and even anticipates it. A good cheerleader does not wait until the first touch-down is made to break out the pom-poms. He comes onto the field cheering. It is important for managers to do the same. Sometimes it is not enough just to say "good job," or "you handled that well," after an achievement. Managers should anticipate success and pump up the staff at the start of the shift. Those in event parking or valet parking can especially relate to this because of the fast-paced, crunch-time nature of the job. It is O.K. to let your workers know that they are the best parking staff in the city before a single vehicle has come through the gates. The key here is to be deliberate and preemptive.

Finally, a cheerleader should rally behind the team. This is a little different from encouragement or praise. Rallying behind the team takes place when a manager defends the team or gives the team the benefit of the doubt in the face of controversy. Now, everyone knows that "the customer is always right," but parking customers literally come and go. A loyal, proficient, well-trained employee may be hard to come by even in a weak economy. If a manager has been a good coach, he should be able to trust the employee enough to hear their side of the story when there's an issue. After all, loyalty goes both ways; if an employee knows that their manager has their back to a reasonable extent, they will have their manager's back in return. The key here is loyalty. Of course each situation is different and a staff member can always be on the wrong side of an issue, but any employee worth hiring and training is worth hearing out.

Where do you stand as a manager? How do you carry your whistle and pom-poms? Are you more coach than cheerleader? Or have you mastered both roles equally? The keys to the role of coach are consistency, repetition, follow-through, and devotion. The keys to the role of cheerleader are to be expressive, deliberate and preemptive, and loyal. Remember, people don't work for companies. People work for people. Managers have the opportunity to get the most out of their people by considering two essential accessories. When you grab your keys and coffee tomorrow morning and head off to work, please don't forget your whistle and pom-poms! **P**



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