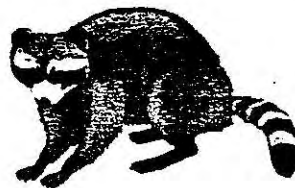


VISITOR SENSE FOR VOLUNTEERS AT ARDENWOOD



For most people a trip to a park is a special event.
Visitors are spending their leisure time or vacation in our parks.
They're in the park because they want to be.
They're seeing interesting things and feeling close to nature.
The mood is really good, and all's right with the world!
Then *BLAM!* Somebody in an Ardenwood costume blows it all to bits.



That's what happens when we brush off a visitor because we're too busy with our own problems...

OR go walking past a visitor trying to ask a question...

OR give information that's completely wrong...

OR snort or sigh impatiently because our work is being interrupted...

BUT... it doesn't need to happen, and won't when the **SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES** of good visitor contacts are followed.

By the way, these apply no matter where you volunteer, whether it's in the Farmyard, gardens, on the train or in the Patterson House.

So, check yourself out. Do your attitudes fit in with the fundamentals of good Visitor Sense?

Do you feel that.....



1. **The visitor is important.**

In fact visitors are the most important people you'll meet at Ardenwood. Here's a little supporting info for that statement:

- * Each East Bay resident is a part owner of the park.
- * All visitors have an equal right to be there.
- * The very existence of the parks depends on how they feel about them!
- * Word-of-mouth from satisfied visitors is our best advertising!

2. **Service is what we give.** Information is one of the things Ardenwood is supposed to provide to visitors. Not just as a special favor, but as part of our work. It is not an option. It's a must!

Now...with those two ideas in mind, the next four points have to do with how we deal with visitors. Doing it right is just as important as knowing that the job has to be done in the first place.



3. **Be Receptive.**

- * If you see that a visitor wants to talk to you, be encouraging.
- * Be friendly. A smile helps to say you are. Offer to help if your visitor seems hesitant to ask a question. It never hurts to say, "Can I help you?"
- * Above all, don't be a grouch if your work is interrupted. Just remember Point #1 (The visitor is important).
- * Give the visitor your full attention. Your interest shows in your attitude.

Park visitors are easy to be nice to. They want their contact with us to be a good experience, and we're supposed to see that it is.

4. **Be Helpful.**

Take time to make sure the visitor understands what you're saying. You may have to walk outside, or down the road, and point. OR write directions. OR repeat the whole thing. Saying, "I don't know" is OK, but don't leave it at that! Help the visitor find out where the answer can be found.

"That's not my department" just doesn't make it as an answer. Show visitors that you're really concerned with helping them. Think how you'd like to be treated in the same situation.

5. **Be Accurate.**

A farm can be a dangerous place. Make sure any information you give is correct. "I don't know but I'll find out," is better than misleading people.

- * Carry a park map, and use it to help visitors.
- * Check any points you're doubtful about with park staff or other volunteers. Get your own questions answered!

6. **Be Informed.**

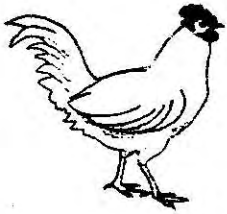
For a start, satisfy your own curiosity about the farm park. Lots of times you'll find your interests are the same as any visitor's. Read all the maps and brochures Ardenwood hands out to visitors. Basic questions about the farm's animals, equipment, gardens, trees, wildlife, history or facilities will probably come up in any talk with visitors. You don't have to be an expert, but they'll appreciate anything you can offer. You might want to make a list of answers to the most frequently asked questions and keep it handy.



Know what programs and activities are being presented around the farm. Let visitors know about all the opportunities available including demonstrations, tours, rides, food service and shopping in the General Store. Let visitors know about upcoming special events.

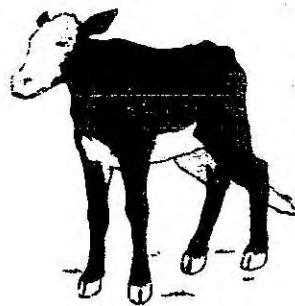
Well, that's about it. It's a big job and extremely important. You may be the only person from the Ardenwood some visitors will meet. The impression YOU make will last a lifetime.

You'll never be wrong if visitors remember their contact with you as a worthwhile and pleasant experience.



TEN WAYS TO BORE THE DICKENS OUT OF CHILDREN -

- ① Insist that the children ignore the squirrel or red-tailed hawk and pay attention to your lesson on decomposition.
- ② Give them scientific names for everything and have the children memorize them.
- ③ Talk incessantly and don't give the children a chance to say anything.
- ④ Make the children write a test on every topic you cover.
- ⑤ Make the children understand how hopelessly we've polluted the environment.
- ⑥ Let your group run wild with no direction.
- ⑦ Tell them not to run, to keep quiet and keep nagging about poor behavior.
- ⑧ No jokes or laughing.
- ⑨ Ask them not to touch anything.
- ⑩ Act bored yourself. Yawn a lot.



??? USE QUESTIONS TO IMPROVE ??? YOUR PROGRAMS

The key to a successful tour or program is not only the body of knowledge the interpreter has mastered, but also how well the interpreter involves the group through questioning. There are four basic types of questions which require different levels of thought on the part of the person answering. A question asked at a given level will result in a response identified with that same level.

It is important to use a variety of levels in your questioning and to make questions clear, concise, and to the point. Make sure you allow time for your question to be answered. Count to ten, under your breath, after you have asked the question before continuing. You will find that the interaction level will double or triple. Once questions are asked, answers should be tossed around to all members of the group, not just between the interpreter and one visitor.

Following are four different questioning levels and examples of specific questions:

Cognitive memory questions contain words such as: recall, identify/observe, yes or no, define, name, designate. These questions involve some recall, memory and facts. They often demand only one word responses. Typical questions would be: What kind of animal is that?
What year did George Patterson move to Alameda County?

Convergent questions use such words as: explain, state relationships, compare, and contrast. This type of question asks the responder to put facts together to obtain one right answer. Examples would be: Can you explain the difference between English walnuts and black walnuts? Compare the difference in food production in the 1880's with that of the 1980's on land like the Patterson Ranch. What is meant by the word "share cropper?"

Divergent questions allow for more than one possible answer. They permit originality by the respondent in the way they use their knowledge to solve new problems; they permit predicting, hypothesizing and/or inferring; they use words such as: predict, hypothesize, infer, reconstruct. Some divergent questions are: If you had moved here in 1850, what crops would you have planted? Suppose you were trying to convince someone to buy the Patterson's vegetables; how would you do it? If you were building a mansion in the 1880's, how would you furnish it?

Evaluative questions require the respondent to judge, choose, value, or defend. They cause the respondent to organize knowledge, formulate an opinion, and assume a self-directed opinion. Words in evaluative questioning would be: evaluate, judge, value, defend, justify your choice. Examples of evaluative questions are: Was George Patterson right in his decision to divert the water out of Alameda Creek? Why or why not? Why do you think knowing history is of value to us? Which type of living history interpretation do you feel is more effective? Why do you feel this way?

Source: Interpretive Methods Training Resource Guide, East Bay Regional Park District.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION SKILLS

As a leader, you have the benefit of setting the tone and mood of your program, most of which is established in the first few minutes. Therefore, your initial tone of voice and enthusiasm are important in determining how comfortable the audience will feel. Come to the program well prepared, begin with a smile, and be sensitive to your audience's needs. Take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy

Aside from simply being yourself, use the following guidelines to help ensure the effectiveness of your overall program.

I. VERBAL PARAMETERS

A. Speech Clarity

Speak with confidence and enthusiasm. Try to develop the habit of speaking at a moderately slow rate. Slow down the rate at which you pronounce individual syllables, particularly in multi-syllabic words (e.g., Exploratorium). Exaggerate your pronunciation of consonant sounds, especially those in the middle and at the ends of words (e.g., because, swift). Emphasize the key words in your sentences by making them louder, longer and higher in pitch than the less important words. (e.g., Do you prefer to hike or to ski?). A slower rate of delivery is especially recommended when the information given is new.

B. Fluency

Attempt to keep speech as smooth as possible. Avoid frequent hesitations and pauses, although a pause after every few words adds clarity. Try and maintain a free flowing speech style. If you can't remember a particular word, describe it instead of stumbling and stammering.

C. Volume

The size of your group and the degree of competition from ambient noise will be significant factors in determining the appropriate volume of your voice. Encourage the group to gather around you as closely as possible in order to minimize undue vocal effort or straining. Position yourself so that you are face to face with all group members (preferably at eye level).⁴ Avoid the tendency to speak too softly. Project your voice sufficiently so that all group members can hear you. Speaking with enunciation and clear, precise articulation greatly reduces the need to speak in a louder than normal voice when addressing a group.

D. Voice

Speak in your normal or habitual pitch level. Avoid speaking in a loud voice for any extended period of time. Vocal straining should be avoided at all times. Voice preservation includes: adequate liquid intake, intermittent periods of vocal rest, and speaking at a comfortable level of loudness and pitch.

E. Speech Style & Vocabulary

Avoid excessive jargon and superfluous detail when on a group outing. Stress the features of the flora and fauna and the experience therein. Adjust your style of speech and presentation to the level and experience of your Participants. Avoid saying 'okay?' or 'isn't it?' at the end of a sentence.

F. Inflection/Pitch-Volume

Speech contains a natural melody or rhythm. Place more stress on those words you desire to be more salient (e.g. "The Mariposa Lily, a rare plant, grows only on Ring Mou tain). Do not place equal stress on all words as that will tend to cause a monotonous quality. It is important to convey a sense of interest and enthusiasm in your speech.

G. Questions

Be sure to ask questions which involve your audience. Ask questions-which require a "yes" or "now answer as well as questions which evoke thought and creativity. Remember to give time for the audience to answer your question. Avoid answering it for them.

II. NON-VERBAL PARAMETERS

A. Eye Contact

Make frequent eye contact with all members of your group. Avoid talking down to the ground.

B. Body Language

Gestures, pointing, and other body movements can serve to complement verbal communication. Demonstration is among the most effective tools in teaching. Avoid extraneous body movements as these can distract your listeners.

C. Facial Expression

Be cognizant of your facial expression. It is important that your facial expression coincides with your verbal communication. For example, a serious look might be appropriate when discussing the increasingly diminishing wetland areas. A happy expression might be more in order when talking about the presence of the rare Mariposa Lily on Ring Mountain.

D. Group Arrangement

Orient your group to make them as comfortable as possible. For example, the leader should always be the one looking into the sun. The advantage of this is that they can then concentrate on what you are saying instead of being unnecessarily distracted. Also, point out where the restrooms, water fountains, and refreshments are located.

Adapted from an article by Angela DiMeglio