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## **Best Practices in Tennis Operations**

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Recently I have given a lot of thought as to why some organizations, businesses and people always seem to be “one step ahead” of the competition. Why do some clubs consistently produce the type of programs and events we would all be proud of? Why do we walk into some pro shops or retail stores and immediately recognize a sincere and fundamental commitment to service and excellence.

Many of you have heard me recognize the Ritz Carlton Hotel chain in my seminars. Ritz Carlton is widely recognized for their ability to consistently deliver “knock your socks off” service and to please guests beyond their expectations. They are also well known for consistently delivering an ambience that all of us would be proud of within our own workplace. It is interesting to note that Ritz Carlton is also one of the hotel industry’s best performers and most profitable members.

The success of Ritz Carlton is widely chronicled, and in my opinion achievable for all of us, but recently I started to question the attributes and qualities of the *people* behind such an organization. I have always believed that certain “common denominators” exist among the leaders of organizations like Ritz Carlton. However, I still questioned what is it that “makes them tick”, or more importantly, what do the leaders of such a successful business incorporate into their daily management lives, that allows them to execute their business objectives so well and so consistently.

It is clear that every company, in almost any industry has its own set of “core beliefs” or a well publicized “mission statement” from which it attempts to operate. However beyond these “philosophies” lie the operating practices of the people running the company. It is these practices, along with my own beliefs, that I would like to share under the banner headline of “***Best Practices***”.

I examined the habits of several of today’s most successful people in the corporate world. This exercise presented me with concrete and sound principles that if followed, would serve anyone in a position of responsibility well. In reflecting on these “best practices” however, I questioned whether the traits of these corporate leaders would apply in a practical fashion to what each of us needs to do our jobs, on a daily basis.

And so I surveyed some of the best, brightest and most successful individuals in *our industry – the tennis industry*. What I found was that not only do their answers mirror those of our successful corporate leaders, they serve to provide unique insight into the unique challenges we face in our very unique industry.

I believe that a leader of an organization, department or probably in our case, a tennis operation, must be able to understand what he is good at, and to recognize his limitations. To do this honestly and effectively and then translate the answer into an effective management practice can be a difficult task for anyone. Of the many successful individuals that I surveyed, Dr. Jack Groppe said *“to focus on yourself is a humbling experience because you question what has really made you who you are”*.

Predictably, Jack did just that, and later expressed the opinion that completing the exercise helped dramatically as he moved forward in his own career. It is not surprising that Jack would express such an opinion, because on another point he expressed the thought that *“like all of us, I am a work in progress...I have always tried to improve upon who I am and what I do. I believe that every day of life should involve growth of some sort or another... the day you stop growing is the day you start dying”*.

The term “Best Practices” has in my opinion become “overused” and a perceived source of instant problem solving based upon the false belief that “if I know what someone else does, I will do the same”. While partially true, there are two additional and necessary steps required if you are to truly grow and learn from someone else. The first is to understand the perspective from which an “expert” takes a certain action or follows a specific philosophy. You must then reflect on your circumstances and consider whether their situation is relevant to yours. If you believe that it is, then you must examine your own skill set and decide whether or not you really need to change a behavior to achieve a similar level of success. “Knowing about something” is much different, and likely to produce much different results than “Taking Action about something”!

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With almost 30 years of success in private clubs and the international tennis industry, Mark McMahon is the President of *McMahon & Associates*, a tennis consulting company. Mark personally manages Director of Tennis retained-search assignments for clubs. His company provides a variety of operational consulting services including targeted training and professional development programs and tennis facility design, construction and renovation. McMahon’s experience includes directing the tennis operations at Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton, FL

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