

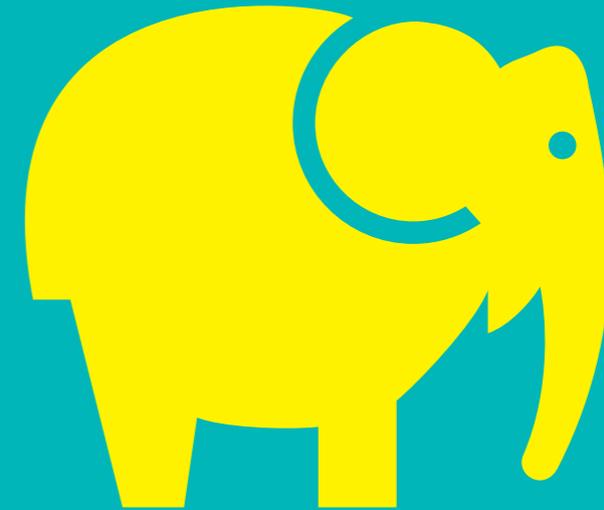
ED-ZOO- CATION!

MAKING THE MOST OF A WILD SETTING



THE BASICS

The zoo is an amazing place to work, and an even more amazing place to learn! As the education department, it is our job to educate the masses on conservation, sustainability, and the intricacies of it all. As a supervisor this year, it is my job to train the education staff to do so. In short, it is my job to educate the educators! Working in such a unique setting is certainly exciting, but poses its own unique challenges. As we should all strive to continuously improve, here I'll hash out a plan to revise my current "classroom" management style, and build upon current training practices.



The "mane" issues

Sometimes teaching is hard!
And that's okay!

- Returning employees receive the same training every year
- Employees are not given enough opportunities to work together
- Rules are not clearly enough defined
- Many employees see me more as a peer than a supervisor
- Training is not immersive enough



Returning employees receive the same training every year.

No one wants to learn the same thing year after year after year. For the last couple years, our training has not adapted much, other than new animal information as our zoo continues to expand. Some employees are now on their third or fourth season, and have now sat through the same training multiple times.

I did notice this year some of the returners got extra distracted during training week, and ventured off--talking to guests, doodling pictures, chiming in without being called on. Though it's easy to get frustrating, wanting them to pay attention and set a better example for new employees, it's hard to fault them when they have heard this same information, presented in the same way multiple times now.



LET'S FIX IT!



► BIGGER ROLE

Returners know this information! Allowing them to take a bigger part in training new employees would give them a sense of responsibility and make them feel acknowledged for their hard work. It may also be a good way for them to share personal experiences with new staff.



► LESS TRAINING

There were many times this year I had to miss out on training because I had to be stationed out in the zoo somewhere we must have staff during operating hours (ex. petting farm). By stationing returners there instead, I wouldn't have to miss out on training of new staff, and returning staff would not have to sit through much of the same information.



► BUDDY SYSTEM

Partnering up returners with new employees during training would immediately start to build those essential bonds, all while, again, giving returners more responsibility. Showing a new staff member the ropes would also hold returners accountable for their actions, so they would be more inclined to set a good example.

Employees are not given enough opportunity to work together.

One of the main things we preach at the zoo is working together to conserve wildlife, and how no one person can do it on their own; we all must work as a team. So why shouldn't we apply this same practice in our training?

At the very beginning of training, employees are grouped off and asked to complete a short scavenger hunt throughout the zoo together. They are given about an hour to do so, and for the entire week-week and a half of training, that's about all the time they spend in a team. Without allowing our employees more time to work in groups, we're potentially prohibiting stronger bonds to be made, thus not creating as supportive of an environment as we'd like. We're also in a way forgetting about students who learn better in groups/pairs, and not quite as well individually. It's important even in non-traditional settings to account for every type of learner.



LET'S FIX IT!



▶ BUDDY SYSTEM

Some strategies will be repeated, and that's great! It means they serve many purposes and are effective! Pairing up returners and newcomers for portions of the training process will strengthen bonds, while providing returners a sense of responsibility and newcomers a sense of guidance.



▶ PROBLEM SOLVING

We often ask employees what they would do in certain scenarios (ex. a guest has a concern about the welfare of an animal). I'd like to see this done as a group activity instead of individual responses. This will allow staff to learn to work out problems together and build off each other, all while making them more comfortable respectfully disagreeing with one another.



▶ MIXING IT UP

We currently have assigned seating in training, simply because it helps up learn faces and names easier. Despite this being convenient, I'd like to try switching up seating arrangements next year. Each day, we should make a goal for someone to learn something about someone new and sit with/work with a different employee each day.

Rules are not clearly enough defined.

Something that we do our very best to stress is that the zoo is a *fun* place to work and to be in general! Because we do hold fun as one of our most important values, it can occasionally get taken advantage of. Most of our staff is in their 20s, so we never want to treat them like they're children. We go in with the the idea that we can trust them enough to follow the rules without needing them explicitly stated or mentioned hundreds of times.

Unfortunately, this year especially, we've noticed some less than desirable behaviors from some of our staff, which may have stemmed from a too relaxed set of rules. Specifically, we have noticed a huge use of cell phones on the clock and in front of guests, and also employees taking multiple fifteen minutes breaks that are actually more like twenty five minute breaks, and thinking they're going unnoticed. Going forward, I think a more straightforward set of rules defined in training would avoid some of this conflict.



LET'S FIX IT!



▶ BE STRAIGHTFORWARD

It's difficult (and almost unfair) to hold employees accountable when we never explicitly stated rules in the first place. Expecting someone to know the rules just because they're an adult and "should know what to expect" isn't realistic. We need to have a clearly defined, verbal and written set of rules for employees.



▶ DOCUMENT OCCURANCES

We sometimes have a habit of seeing an employee off task or on their phone, scoffing about it, and moving on. Keeping records of these occurrences will show our employees just how often they are participating in these behaviors, and also give us some ground to stand on should we need to discipline an employee for repeated occurrences.



▶ TAKE ACTION

Getting frustrated and not doing anything about it won't solve anything. Part of why our employees have had so many occurrences this year is because they haven't faced any consequences for it. Despite valuing fun so highly, we do need to be more firm in our discipline. Even if it just starts with a verbal warning and written documentation, we must start doing something or nothing will change.

Many employees see me more as a peer than a supervisor.

This year has been a huge transition for me, taking on the role of supervisor. Some of the employees I now manage were my equals just last season. On top of that, I'm the same age, if not younger than most of my staff. This puts me in a very unique position where I'm approachable, relatable, and fun, but my authority is also often questioned, and some employees don't respect me or listen to me in the way that they do my manager. In some cases, employees have felt too comfortable with me, telling me things that I have to hear as a supervisor, not as a friend (ex. other employees drinking before work, coming in hungover).

Navigating these waters can be difficult. At first, I thought I was walking a very fine line between friend and supervisor, but the longer I'm in this position, the more I realize how much more defined that line must be. Looking forward, there are clear boundaries that must be set so that it is still clear I'm their supervisor, yet employees still feel they can talk to me.



LET'S FIX IT!



▶ EGO ASIDE

One of the biggest challenges I'll need to overcome is the simple idea that I won't be the favorite all the time. For me personally, I'm very concerned with being well liked by everyone, but I think letting go of some of that will help define me as a supervisor a bit better.



▶ SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Sometimes far too much personal information is shared with me at work. Unless an issue is directly impacting work, I think it may be better for me to not discuss personal matters with my employees. This will help prevent people from oversharing, or getting far too comfortable with me.



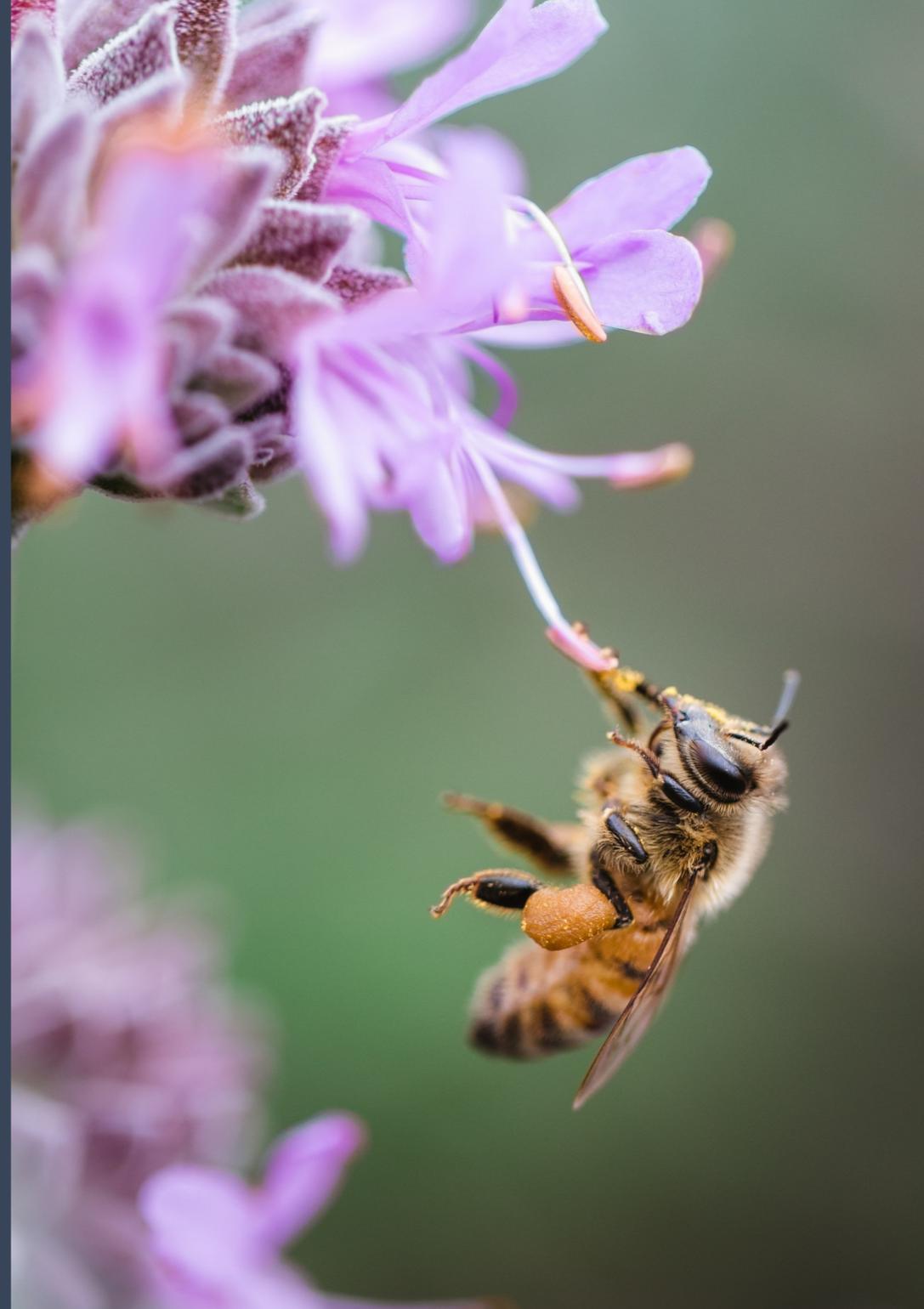
▶ LISTEN AND LEARN

Taking in input from others is critical for progress. As a zoo guide last year, I got a firsthand perspective of how things could run differently to benefit us. Now I'm a little removed from that, but I know how valuable guides' opinions can be. Simply listening and saying "I'd love your input on what we can do to make this better," will let guides know I'm on their side, and I want us to grow as a team. I'm not on a power trip; I truly value their opinion!

Training is not immersive enough.

I often talk about how very lucky I am that I don't work in a traditional classroom setting--the entire zoo is my classroom! So then why does more than 75% of our training take place in a small conference room with a projector and desks? One of the biggest missions we push at the zoo is for people to unplug. We want people away from their screens and out in nature. I think it's time to practice more of this ourselves!

Being the education department, we are expected to know everything about every animal at the zoo. With more than 200 species and 2000 individuals, that is a LOT of information to expect someone to take in. Instead of sitting in front of a screen talking about chimps, let's go to their exhibit and talk about them there while we watch them in action. It's hard to teach someone all about the zoo from one small confined space. Being active and on your feet is also a good way to keep all employees, old and new, engaged and interested.



LET'S FIX IT!



▶ GET OUT THERE!

We have the entire zoo at our disposal and we're criminally under-utilizing it. Like I mentioned before, we can have the exact same training material, just in a different location. It's hard to keep focus when staring at a screen for hours, so getting guides out into the zoo will get them familiar with the surrounding, and also keep them engaged.



▶ CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

It's important to cater to everyone's interests! Guides could pick their favorite zoo animal to research and then present that information at training instead of the managers. This would give them the opportunity to learn about something they're interested in, work on their public speaking skills, and take control of their own training week.



▶ SHOW DON'T TELL

We are required to talk a lot about protocols (ex. how to handle a lost child situation). Rather than just reading text from a document, a hands-on approach might work better for more "boring" topics like this. Doing a full drill would not be more engaging to learn, but would also likely stick in guides' heads better having tried one out, rather than just heard the gist of one.

Toucan do it!

Even educators have learning left to do!

It being my first year as a supervisor, it's no surprise things haven't run perfectly smooth. However, by taking time to acknowledge what I'm doing well and admitting where I can still grow, progress can be made!

Analyzing my current management style and training setup has allowed me to research many more ways to improve. Thanks to the various classroom resources and group work, I feel much more equipped to make the necessary changes that I know will be a huge asset to the zoo!

