

Importance of Guides to Your Business

It is important for all operators to remember that they are in the hospitality business. You can have the best fishing or hunting in Canada but if you don't deliver great services, then customers won't come back. The service that means the most to your business...**Guides!**

You can have the best accommodations, food, lodge, etc.... but it will all mean nothing if the guide does not do a good job.

Key critical point:

If guide fails to deliver service then clients will not come back. It's that simple and absolutely true.

1. As an operator/manager of fishing or hunting services it is key that you discuss the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are expected of your guides. There is a great deal of competition in the market and customers expect the best from their guides which is why they need to be professional and serve as standards for all guides. Remember, your guide(s) will spend more time with your client than you, so their influence on a future booking with that client is essentially in their hands. Consequently, if you want the guides to succeed at promoting your business, then ensure you give them the tools to do so.

2. The following points/suggestions are based on feedback from clients on what they expect, don't like, and what impresses them. These are generic points that apply to both hunting & fishing guides.

a. Attitudes of Guides

Stays positive when dealing with Adverse Weather & Poor Fishing/Hunting. It happens to every fishing and hunting service, you get poor weather and things go sideways. It is critical that your guides remain optimistic and reinforce to the client that they are doing nothing wrong.... just need to keep going and things will change for the better. "The fishing/hunting here is fantastic, it is just the conditions." Clients can catch no fish but still consider it a wonderful day if the guide does their job.

b. Prepared & Punctual

Is always prepared and punctual. Clients do not want to be waiting at the dock or standing by the truck while the guide is still putting things together. Your guides must ensure everything is prepped and ready to go for the set time. This includes ensuring meals/lunches are prepared, packed and ready to go. Boats need to have full fuel tanks, be cleaned up and the motor run-up to ensure it working properly – all before the client arrives. Whether it is a boat, ATV, truck, etc...your guides need to ensure at the end of every day, they start working on getting ready for the next day of hunting or fishing. Clients HATE being made to wait while a guide is getting prepared for the day.

c. Dressing Professionally

Guides should always dress professionally when working with clients. Torn t-shirts, hoodies that are ragged or covered in paint/grease, these are not acceptable today. Ensure your guides wear the appropriate clothing and equipment that reflects the professionalism of your business. One way to help is to provide some branded clothing (ie name of lodge or outfitter on clothing items) to your guides. Another means is to get your guides setup with Pro Staff deals with manufacturers. Most have Pro Pricing for guides and all they need is your endorsement and they usually received 40-60% off retail pricing. This in turn will encourage your guides to dress appropriately plus they will appreciate your assistance in getting them on Pro Staff status with industry companies.

d. Smoking

It is a fact the many guides smoke. That is okay as long as they do it correctly. First, they should ask permission of the client to smoke and establish what is acceptable to them (some are very allergic to smoke). Second, when a guides does smoke, ensure they know not throw the cigarette butt into the water or bushes. This demonstrates disrespect for the lands/waters, the very same pristine environment that US customers have paid big money to visit. Ensure your guides know to collect all cigarette butts in a can or similar device and bring them back to the lodge each day for disposal. A client will often not say anything to a guide or owner when they are upset about bad smoking habits – they just won't come back the next year.

*The use of chewing tobacco has the same criteria and standards of respect. The guide should ask permission to use it and then dispose of it in an environmentally appropriate way.

e. Garbage & Litter

This seems almost obvious but unbelievably some guides will still litter. Of course this demonstrates a total lack of respect for the environment. Ensure your guides know to never leave litter and also pick up any litter they find and bring it back to the lodge. By doing this, they clearly show they care about the environment and helping to keep it pristine. Remember: no respect = no client

f. Superior Knowledge

Your guides must demonstrate exceptional knowledge in all aspects of fishing or hunting. So it is important that you help train them, whether through literature or hands-on training. A guide should thoroughly understand the lay of the land, geography and waterways. It is okay if they pull out maps for reference, but it is not okay to have them guessing. Make the time to help show them where things geographically are and also ensure they know of any dangers in the region.

g. Knowledge of History & Wildlife

A good guide needs to have things to talk about when sitting in a stand or boat. You can help your guides by teaching about the history of the lodge or business (when started, who owned it, biggest game/fish caught, etc...). As well, ensure your guides

know something about the wildlife, fauna, and forest. They don't have to be experts but they should know the difference between a Osprey and Bald Eagle or different types of trees. All this information is important for your guides when they chat with the clients. Most are from big cities where they don't have exposure to wildlife we take for granted. So ensure your guides are well versed in knowing some history of the region/business and also confirm they know good info about the wildlife and fishery. Often a small booklet prepared for your guides as a reference can help a great deal in providing continuous education

h. Field Craft/Landing Fish

Nothing upsets a client more than the loss of a trophy fish because a guide does not know how to properly handle a net. A guide who does not understand basic field craft when taking hunters out is also a liability to your business. Some skills you should ensure your guides know:

- Landing fish using a net (leading fish in by the head)
- Never touching the leader or fishing line when bringing a big fish to the boat
- Know how to tie at least a half dozen knots (Improved Clinch, Rapala Knot, Turle Knot, etc...)
- How to make a fire, build a temporary shelter from weather, identify animal tracks, etc...essential field craft skills

3. In addition to the essential skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to become a good guide; great guides go the extra mile.

Some Ways of Going the Extra Mile

- a. Great guides bring the extra things, and work harder than the client to catch fish or bag that big game. Client needs to see and hear the guide is doing everything they can to help them succeed
- b. Provide drinking water/sunscreen/insect repellent/walking stick/snacks, etc.
- c. Have a folding field chair available for breaks (often important when hiking with older or out-of-shape clients)
- d. Have a full first aid kit in their backpacks including Band-Aids, bug bite sticks, etc....
- e. Finally great guides have great people skills - they engage with clients. It should be that when the clients leave, they are good friends with your guide. Teach your guides to constantly engage with the client and treat them like new friends.

4. Here are some important points on what Guides should NOT do when guiding clients:

- a. A good guide NEVER goes ahead of the clients and leaves them to follow. Clients get very upset when a young guide runs ahead and leaves them

- behind. It makes the client feel inadequate and some are uncomfortable being left alone on a trail. Ensure you guides clearly understand this, it is one of the number one complaints we have heard about from clients (especially hunting clients)
- b. Guides should NEVER discuss previous clients, tipping or other related subjects. If your guides make fun of how poorly another client can shoot or how badly someone tipped, then this will generate negative thoughts with the people they are guiding.
 - c. Guides should try always AVOIDING discussion of religion or politics. Especially at the current time with US politics, it is important that your guides do not slur or make jokes about the President or any political person in America. You never know where loyalties lie with clients and saying the wrong thing can really change the mood of a group or person from positive to negative. Equally important, it reflects poorly on your business and it's professionalism.

5. How to Get Guides to the Levels You Need & Retain Them

a. Pay as much as possible so you keep their services. A quality guide is hard to find and more importantly, a good guide is often the reason many clients come back year after year. Pay them as much as you reasonably can and offer any benefits you can to make them want to return each season to work for you.

b. Establish standards. Write up a one-pager that summarizes what you expect of your guides and then sit down with them and explain/discuss these points. By doing this, you are setting the professional standards you expect from everyone

c. Team building. If you want to keep your good guides, then you need to do little "extras" that help make working for you fun. Some lodges will run Guide Fishing Tournaments on an evening before clients fly-in or on a free day. Even bringing in conducting a shooting contest between the guides can help foster camaraderie and bonds between your guides and you.

d. Lead by example. Many operators will guide themselves, especially when short of staff. Ensure you lead by example and don't be a hypocrite by not sticking to some of the standards you established for your guides. Lead by example and they in turn will aim to meet or even exceed your standards of service.

6. Summary of Importance of Guides

Guides are critical to the success of your business, because they spend the most time with your clients. If clients have a bad experience with a guide, it is more than likely they won't return. So treat your guides well, show them respect and help them succeed through education & training. Remember, it costs 9 times more to get a new client than to keep one. Ensuring your guides deliver good service, you guarantee future repeat business, which makes total sense & leads to better profits.