



INFORMATION PLEASE!

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

IN SERVICE TRAINING SERIES

INFORMATION PLEASE

Training Bulletin

for

Field Employees

of the

National Park Service

United States

Department of the Interior

by

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IN-SERVICE TRAINING SERIES

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FOREWORD

Every year the employees of the National Park Service welcome millions of men, women and children who have journeyed in search of recreation and relaxation to the areas of the National Park System. In some cases these visits may be annual affairs; in others they may be the one trip of a lifetime.

The average visitor, arriving at these areas of scenic and historic interest, generally has little conception of what there is to see or how to go about seeing it. If this statement is doubted, one has only to consider the questions asked most frequently in each area:

"Where is ?"

"How far is ?"

"How do I get to ?"

"What is there to see here?"

Almost as important as food and lodging to the welfare and comfort of these visitors is the skillful and courteous offering of reliable information. Whatever your job, this booklet is designed to help you impart information to the visitor efficiently, skillfully, and courteously.

In compiling this information Ralph Anderson has drawn on the wealth of experience of a number of Service employees who have intimate knowledge of the information needs of the visitors to areas of the National Park System. In addition, we have sought out other organizations which do a somewhat similar job of public service, and we are pleased to find that their experience confirms our own ideas on the subject.

The keynote of this booklet may well be expressed in the words of a recent visitor who said, "I found an atmosphere of complete cordiality and sincere interest in us on the part of the Service personnel we met."

I urge you to become familiar with the principles and suggestions presented in these pages and to practice them in an unremitting effort to render the best possible information service to the visiting public.


Conrad L. Wirth
Director

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I HEREBY RESOLVE

Doing a good job in giving information requires a certain attitude toward the task which is expressed in these resolutions, recommended to all those who serve as sources of information:

1. Service to the visitor gives me an opportunity to increase his enjoyment and to enlarge my own experience. All visitors are entitled to my help, without discrimination or distinction, whether they are famous or humble, young or old, courteous or discourteous, thoughtful or thoughtless. At all times, even if I am tired and even if people seem demanding or exasperating, I will be cheerful; I will be patient; and I will be courteous.

2. I will do my best to know the answers to the questions which visitors may be expected to ask, and to answer those questions clearly and accurately.

3. I look upon the job of providing clear and accurate information as a service on which the visitor's opinion of the National Park Service is likely to be based; I will do my best to perform it in a way that will create a favorable attitude toward the Service.

THE IMPRESSION YOU MAKE

In the public eye, the key personnel of the Service are the men who wear the uniform. Often the man at the entrance station is the only representative of the Service with whom the visitor has a chance to talk. But whether the contact is at the entrance station, in an information station, in a museum, along the trail, or anywhere else, the visitor's impression of the Service may be determined, or at least strongly influenced, by his impression of one individual. To a great degree the reputation of the Service is in the hands of you men who meet the visitor and answer his questions.

Important as this meeting is, it should not breed uncertainty or a feeling of frustration. From the start, the man in uniform has many points in his favor. In the first place, the visitor is seeking him, which is the opposite from house-to-house canvassing. The Service employee wears a uniform which deservedly inspires respect. Many years of outstanding public service have established public respect for the man in this uniform and the visitor looks to those who wear it for information and helpful guidance. The visitor bent on enjoying a vacation is receptive, more than at any other time, to anyone who can help him.

The American Express Company has this to say about first contacts:

"Seemingly little things are actually important in creating a favorable first impression. Neatness of the representative's personal appearance . . . the everyday courtesies 'Thank you,' 'Please,' 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir'; the willingness on the part of the representative to be of assistance . . . all of these things contribute to a favorable first impression. Moreover, the representative must guard against passing on to the traveler any personal irritations or annoyances."

First impressions are the most lasting and a bad first impression is extremely difficult to correct. That first impression may be influenced by four factors:

1. The attitudes which the visitor brings with him.
2. The appearance of the surroundings.
3. The personal appearance of the man in uniform, and
4. His attitude as it is reflected in what he says and does, and how he says and does it.

Visitor Attitudes. The man in uniform has no immediate control over the disposition of the visitor who has had a flat tire, a greasy meal, rude service at a filling station, or some other unpleasant experience en route to the park, or even of one who is feeling the effects of uncomfortable or inclement weather. We must take these into consideration in dealing with visitors who are irritated, or who may even have a belligerent attitude toward everyone they meet. Always it is necessary to be alert to dissatisfaction or anger in the voice of a visitor and to make plain your desire to be helpful. You will find it to your advantage to try to understand the problems which confront the visitor at certain times of the day or week so that you may deal with him more effectively. A late Saturday afternoon search for non-existent accommodations can be a frustrating experience for the most even-tempered individual, and a subsequent encounter with a man in Service uniform who shows no interest in his difficulty will offer little comfort to this visitor.

The Looks of the Place. If the visitor seeks information of a uniformed man at a duty station--be it a ranger station, information desk, museum, office, or other focal point--that station should have a clean and orderly appearance. Literature, maps, or other aids should be neatly arranged; bulletin boards, desk, or under-glass materials should be reviewed frequently and shabby, inaccurate, or no longer timely material removed or replaced.

Your Own Appearance. In person and in uniform, neatness and cleanliness are essential. Keep your head up, shoulders back, and wear your uniform with the pride it deserves. Though it is an expensive item, replace your Stetson when it becomes misshapen. Keep your uniform clean and well pressed, and avoid the extra adornment of flicker feathers, the needless use of chin straps, or any embellishments which tend to destroy the

uniform effect. Adhere to every detail of the uniform requirements as contained in Volume 19, Uniforms, National Park Service Administrative Manual, even down to socks, one of the items most frequently disregarded.

While the visitor waits for you to answer his questions he is in a position to examine you closely and critically. He notes whether or not your face and neck are clean, your teeth brushed, your face well shaven, and your fingernails clean. He will notice if your shirt is soiled, if your hat is sweat stained, or if your collar devices are put on askew. If you have an unpleasant breath or smell of sweat it will affect him just as you are similarly affected when you notice it on others. Be prepared to face this test of eye and nose by being extremely careful of personal hygiene and appearance. If you work into the evening it may be necessary for you to shave twice a day. If you have a hot, sweaty job to do during the day, you certainly will want a bath and clean shirt for that evening.

The Little, but Important Courtesies. Personal mannerisms can contribute to or detract from a pleasing first impression. If you are seated when a visitor approaches, you show him only common courtesy when you stand to answer his questions. If you are smoking, common courtesy again dictates that you remove the pipe or cigarette for the duration of your contact. Excepting in unusual circumstances, it is always proper to remove your sun glasses while speaking to a visitor.

CONTACT

The first man in Service uniform whom the visitor meets has the greatest opportunity. It is his rare privilege to shape the visitor's enjoyment of what may be the trip of a lifetime. If he is approachable and offers valuable service, then the visitor is conditioned to expect the same from other uniformed personnel. Every day during the heavy travel season someone enters the area in which you serve who will never return. Many people save for years to make a trip to the national parks. It is a momentous occasion to such persons, and it should be for us. We can do much to make their trip one always to be remembered.

Your appearance and that of your office or counter create impressions before you say a word. What you say and how you say it in your contacts with visitors, is equally important. Be cordial, enthusiastic, and sincere and cultivate a genuine desire to serve.

Following are some specific suggestions to help meet these Service standards for public contact:

Your Greeting. Greet people as they enter a building, as they approach you, or as you approach them--thus establishing contact with them and indicating that you are human and approachable. Unless you break the ice, many visitors will be reluctant to do so themselves. It is the friendliness of your approach that, on first contact, will distinguish you in the mind of the visitor from other less satisfying contacts which he has had. Give the same cordial greeting to everyone, regardless of race, creed or color.

The Greyhound Company's Library of Courtesy states:

" . . . Yet only a very few of us are born with a natural tendency to like strangers. Similar to most worthwhile things in this world, this rich pleasure is cultivated. With strangers we must take the first step, and they usually respond readily. A smile for every contact with strangers begets a smile from them. A pleasant word of interest in them usually stimulates a desire on the part of the stranger to make your work pleasanter. Folks traveling are lonesome, and they look upon you as their only friend. How it pleases

them to discover that they are right!"

Smile. "Keep the light of a smile in your eye, and the tone of a smile in your voice." One of the most gratifying things you can give is a smile--not a forced grin, but a genuine expression of interest and concern for the visitor's welfare. While it is not at all difficult to summon a broad smile at the sight of a pretty girl (and we pray that it will continue to be that way!), it nevertheless remains that every visitor is entitled to courtesy, given with a smile.

Be Yourself. Avoid trying to imitate anyone else. If you are naturally friendly, so much the better. If not, you can develop your personality until it becomes second nature for you to be courteous and helpful. You can accomplish this by developing the habit of graciousness.

Listen as Well as Talk. Once you have made the contact, and greeted the visitor, leave to him the choice of what and how much service you may render. You may say "Good morning"; the visitor responds. You may say "It's a fine day." He agrees. If he has a question, or wants service or assistance, he will carry the ball from there.

At an information desk, be alert and aware of the presence of the visitor. Make sure that you talk directly to him and enunciate clearly. He will generally be keenly interested in the information you have to offer him, and eager to receive it, so don't make it difficult for him to hear or understand you. If you are doing other necessary work, do not hesitate to interrupt it long enough to make plain to any visitor who enters that you are aware of him. If you must go on with what you are doing, at least greet the visitor and tell him that you will be with him as soon as you can.

If you get a long-winded visitor, or one who seems to want to monopolize your time, and there are others waiting for information, you can sometimes give him something to read while you take care of the others, returning to complete your conversation with him later. It is also possible to suggest to such a visitor, pleasantly and without offense, that there are others who must be served and that, if he needs further information, he wait until you are in a better position to spend more time with him.

Say Nothing Unflattering About Previous Visitors. Foolish or thoughtless questions should not be repeated to other

visitors in ways which may be taken to reflect an uncomplimentary attitude toward all visitors. Those who hear you are more likely to sympathize with the other visitor than with you, and to be left with an unfavorable impression of the National Park Service. Wise cracks are seldom appropriate; never when they are directed against a visitor or make him the brunt of a joke. Never place a visitor in an embarrassing position. The term "dudes" may be appropriate in a dude ranch setting, but it is seldom appropriate when applied to a visitor by a park ranger.

Every Visitor Has a Right to be Heard. Complaints or criticisms should be heard in full. Often the mere opportunity to unburden satisfies the complainant. This is particularly true if he is given honest assurance that the matter will be investigated, and if he is thanked for bringing it to your attention.

Don't attempt to defend the National Park Service or yourself from a visitor's complaint, unless you are reasonably certain of the reason for the conditions in question. If you do know a valid reason, do not hesitate to offer it, but not argumentatively.

In listening to complaints, show an interested but neutral attitude. Complaints in all cases which cannot be satisfied on the spot should be obtained in writing if at all possible. Avoid arguments, contradictions, or statements which might tend to aggravate the situation. Department stores have a saying "No one ever won an argument with a customer," and, while this is not literally true with park visitors, there is a degree of caution in it which should be observed.

Any complaint, justified or not, indicates dissatisfaction--something we take great pains to avoid and correct. Your first responsibility is to obtain the facts. The second is, if possible, to modify that dissatisfaction in the mind of the visitor, either through your own efforts or by referring the complainant to someone more qualified to discuss his complaint. However, care must be taken so as not to leave the impression that you are giving the visitor the runaround. The third is to discover means of preventing that kind of dissatisfaction from rising again if it is within your power to do so. Report all complaints to your supervisor, even those which you are able to handle satisfactorily yourself. The handling of complaints is of high priority and a little time devoted to them immediately may often save hours in correspondence later on. When

all sides of a situation are expressed in person, there is often less ground for the complaint and, of course, if a bad situation is reported, the sooner it is corrected the better.

Serve Impartially. Information centers often become crowded. Manage your service so as to give a fair share of your attention to all. This attitude applies to your supervisor and fellow employees as well as to visitors. The park naturalist, chief ranger, or superintendent normally does not expect you to discontinue a service to a visitor, or to interrupt any other public activity, in order to give him immediate attention. If he has an urgent matter to discuss with you, he will so indicate. Otherwise, continue your activity with the visitor and then, in proper order, turn your attention to your official visitor. To drop everything the minute an official visitor enters your presence is an act of rudeness which reflects both on that official and on you.

READY AND EQUIPPED

Be ready to serve from the minute you go on duty. If you are opening a station, be there ahead of time and have the flag raised before opening time. If it is an entrance station, be sure that no visitor has to wait after the opening hour because you are not ready for him. Be sure there is a good supply of Service publications, concessioner leaflets, naturalist programs, and maps on hand before the rush of heavy traffic arrives. Be sure you have the latest information on road conditions in the area, any rock slides that might detain motorists, any sections of roads at higher elevations which might have been opened or closed. You should memorize the more important recurring items of information such as the hours of naturalist programs, the opening and closing hours of dining rooms or other concession facilities, and other specific items of like nature. Check on the weather reports for your area. You will need to know where it may be snowing so as to give proper advice about use of park roads, or where not to go for a scenic view if the mountains are enveloped in fog. The men on duty at ranger and information stations must be well equipped with that type of information which the visitor needs in order to travel about the park. Important to him are such items as these: certainty as to destination; shelter for the night; places that are open at that season; prospects for suitable weather during his stay; condition of roads; hours for dining, campfire programs, and other activities; and helpful advice on how he may see the most important things and take part in activities most to his liking. Few visitors can think of all the things they need to know, and the alert ranger or naturalist can often supply helpful suggestions which will add immeasurably to visitor enjoyment.

What is more, this voluntary action on the part of the Service employee can transform a routine duty into a pleasant, stimulating experience for him. If the visitor has but a few hours in which to see the park or monument, you will in all probability not suggest a horseback ride; perhaps not even a talk at the museum if such activities would prevent him from seeing the area itself. Watch the time of day and, knowing what is scheduled for all hours, you can direct the visitor accordingly.

TOWARD GREATER EFFECTIVENESS

Rangers at information stations and naturalists in museums can go into more detail than those employees at the busier entrance stations. You will soon learn what are the most common questions. Study your effectiveness in answering these and strive to improve on it. The most important points in directing park visitors are:

1. Orient the Visitor Before Using Directions. To say "Drive north half a mile, then west on Highway 30" is utterly confusing if the visitor has no idea where north is. When marking a map for a visitor place it right-side-up to him so that your directions become clear.
2. Provide a Marked Map to Supplement Verbal Directions. Even a rough sketch on a piece of paper is better than no map at all. Park folders are designed to make it easy for you to mark a route for the visitor. Use a red pencil or, when possible, a marking pen. The felt tip of the latter makes a wide but transparent mark through which the user can see the lettering on the map. Green and orange inks are most transparent.
3. Relate Your Directions to the Signs They Will See. Use place names which the visitor will recognize on the signs, and avoid using those place names not on the signs. If possible, know how the signs read at the principal road intersections, at least those signs within a few miles of your station.
4. Put Flesh on Bare Facts. Do not overlook road and trail conditions, steepness of slope, or differences in elevation which may have a bearing on how long or how difficult the route may be. Visitors tend to consider 50 miles of highway an hour's drive, or 10 miles of trail an easy half day's hike. Fifty miles is often much more than an hour's drive, particularly where the topography is rough and the traffic is heavy and where the speed limit is less than 50 miles per hour. If time is important, as it often is, the visitor may be greatly disappointed or irritated if he has been given directions which cannot be followed within the time at his disposal. Incomplete information may even jeopardize life if the visitor has a heart ailment, or is encouraged to hike a trail without being equipped with suitable clothing or, in some areas, without an adequate supply of water.

5. Be Informed as Well as Uniformed. You are not expected to be a walking encyclopedia, but you should know where to turn to get the answers to practically every question which comes your way. If you don't know the answer, frankly say so, but try to get the information for him, or refer the visitor to other sources of information. Never bluff. When you are stumped, accept it as a challenge to know the answer the next time.

The National Park Service training booklets Tips On Your Job; You Start; and Conducted Trips will be helpful to you. In addition, the Development Outline, which is a part of the master plan of each area, contains valuable information. Some superintendents have duplicated certain sections of the Development Outline to assist employees in answering visitor questions.

These books will provide background of value to you in your task of providing information: Steve Mather of the National Parks, Robert Shankland; The National Parks, What They Mean to You and Me, Freeman Tilden; Exploring Our National Parks, Devereux Butcher; The Romance of the National Parks, Harlean James.

6. Give Detail Only When Relevant. Remember that most people have difficulty in remembering more than two unrelated details at the same time. For this reason keep directions to a minimum; avoid giving any alternate routes unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

7. Help Keep the Visitor Out of Trouble. Helping the visitor to avoid infractions of regulations is a valuable service to him and also makes our own job much easier. We can often shape visitor actions through tactfully given suggestions which will help develop attitudes toward wildlife, care of fire, use of the park folder, use of garbage cans, and use of vehicles on park roads. You may even have time to give him some basic ideas about the National Park System. But be careful to avoid preaching to him.

THE USE OF YOUR VOICE

A good clear voice is second only in importance to the friendly, helpful attitude which the ranger or naturalist uses in greeting the visitor. A tendency to speak too softly can be corrected with a little conscious effort. There is an element of discourtesy in failure to make yourself heard distinctly. Gauge the volume of your voice to the needs of the occasion, neither too loud nor too soft, neither too high nor too low. We would do well to apply the principles of public speaking to all public contact work. This practice will help you as much at the information desk as it will at the campfire program or other public activity. Read the National Park Service training booklet Talks for additional hints on the use of your voice.

Greyhound Lines has this to say to their representatives on the importance of a good speaking voice:

" . . . By the use of the voice, you establish ninety percent of the impression you make on the patron. And yet hours are given to the consideration of how you dress because of its effect, although dress only functions for an instant, whereas your voice is always carrying the major load . . .

"Voice training, in every walk of life, is fast becoming of first importance, because oral communication makes up practically all of our activity in the presence of other people. We write our thoughts on paper once a week; we express ourselves with our voice a thousand times a day."

THE BULLETIN BOARD

The bulletin board can do much to stretch the effectiveness of a limited information force. At busy information centers where visitors must wait to ask questions, an opportunity to read a bulletin board often satisfies their needs and saves their time and yours. Careful study by all concerned should lead to improvement of such devices as bulletin boards, signs, literature, and automatic tape message repeaters to take the load off limited information staffs.

You should inspect the bulletin board critically every day or two to be sure that only fresh and timely material is posted, and that it is neat in appearance. The bulletin board can be valuably supplemented by framed material on walls, such as the map, Recreational Areas of the United States; a map of the area; and other items which normally are not subject to change during the course of the season.

Bulletin boards should tell the visitor about the interesting activities available in the area, and where and when he may enjoy them. Specifically, they should give the details of the interpretive program; the location and open hours of the museum; when and what guided trips or caravans are scheduled; where and when campfire programs of both Service and concessioner are to be held; and the subjects and speakers for the different programs. They should include data on fishing, hiking routes, climbing precautions, fire warnings, and other information which may be advisable to include.

Where the talents or facilities are available to provide it, bulletin board material should be in type larger than that of an ordinary typewriter. In some cases lettering can be done by hand or by means of a LeRoy template. Such bulletin board notices can be read from a greater distance and permit more people at a time to read them. However, if they cannot be presented neatly and attractively, it is better to stick to type-written, mimeographed, or multilithed materials, but these should at least be uncrowded, with generous spacing.

Park visitors make extensive use of bulletin boards for messages to friends, arrangements for transportation, even notices of lost and found articles. The accumulation of these materials on an informational bulletin board sometimes needs to be discouraged, but adequate provision for such announcements

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seems necessary and desirable. Concessioner bulletin boards in many cases satisfy this need. Bulletin boards should be located at principal gathering places, such as park headquarters, museums, stores, hotels, campgrounds, post offices, and eating places.

WHEN THE STATION IS CLOSED

There is nothing more disheartening to a visitor than to arrive at a closed or unattended station which has a large, inviting sign above the door reading "INFORMATION." While it is not possible to man information stations 24 hours a day, we do have the responsibility of providing a minimum of instruction at these points when the station is closed. A small sign referring the visitor to the next open information station may suffice. If it is an entrance station closed for the night, there should be information in visible form which will meet the visitor's immediate requirements, particularly as to where he can find food and lodging, and that will tell him when and where he can obtain further information. If it is an information station closed only for a few minutes or hours, then some sign or bulletin board on the outside of the building should direct the visitor to the points of scenic interest or show him the highway routings to the next station. People are still going to have questions even if you aren't there to receive them.

FOR THE SERVICE'S REPUTATION

Off the Job but in the Public Eye. The public is not familiar with your duty schedule. As long as you wear the uniform the public considers you to be on duty, and you remain a representative of the National Park Service. Conduct yourself accordingly, with the same dignity, sincerity and friendliness that you display when on a specific assignment.

Avoid Congregations of Uniforms. Be businesslike in your contacts with other uniformed personnel. Avoid situations in which several rangers or naturalists stand or sit around with apparently nothing to do. Go into a back room, or apart from the public, to conduct conferences or off-duty discussions or small talk. This situation is most likely to occur when changing shifts and the man going off duty has certain information to relay to his successor. This often takes time and it should not be done in the presence of the visitor, if at all possible to do otherwise.

IMPROVE ON YOUR JOB

Seasonal and permanent employees alike should study ways and means to improve information service to park visitors. Coming into an area for the first time, or from some outside endeavor entirely unrelated to the park, you may have more of the visitor viewpoint than the older employee who may sometimes take things for granted. One of the greatest contributions you can make to your job may be a suggestion for its improvement. Never hesitate to pass your ideas on to your supervisor.

As an employee of the National Park Service you can join us in the pride that comes from the custodianship of the most priceless scenic, scientific, and historic areas of the Nation. Those of you who meet the visiting public over the counters of entrance and information stations have an exceptional opportunity for public service of the highest order--helping to make the visits of these people an occasion never to be forgotten.

