



SKILLS NEEDED FOR EMPLOYMENT IN A THEATRE

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For years, I thought that the teenagers working as ushers, ticket takers, concession operators and box office attendants had really easy jobs. They were relatively busy for short periods of time just before the movie started and when the movie was over, but they had little to do most of the time and their work required little training and no sophisticated skills. Today, I know that these same teenagers working in a movie theatre need significant training, as they must comply with a series of diverse and complicated legal requirements. Let us take a look at the skills that all theatre employees should have.

1. Food Handling

If the employee is working at the concession counter, the employee must be trained on proper food handling techniques to comply with local laws. These laws will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Employees may be required to wear gloves, use hair nets, wash hands, keep counters clean, and perform certain clean up functions on closing.

2. Fire Laws

Local fire laws will require exits to be accessible. The exit doors must open easily and not be blocked. Nothing can be stored in the aisles. Safety warnings, emergency lighting, signage, fire hoses,

sprinkler systems, alarm boxes, fire extinguishers etc., all must be present and maintained as required by the local code.

3. OSHA

Hazardous materials, such as cleaning compounds, must be properly stored and labeled. Employees must be provided with material safety data sheets describing the hazardous materials present in the workplace and what to do if exposed to these substances. Employee work areas and public use areas must be maintained in a safe manner, i.e., no loose electrical cords can be placed across an aisle even as a temporary measure without appropriate safeguards.

4. Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Supervisors must be trained to implement the company anti-discrimination and sexual harassment policies. All employees must be trained on these policies and must fully understand their implication with regard to other employees and to patrons.

5. Anti-Piracy Policy

Employees must be trained to watch for camcorders and other devices that are used to record a movie. Employees must

understand the exhibitor's policy and know when to call the police to stop piracy.

6. The Rating System

Movies are rated in accord with the MPAA/NATO rating system. Theatre employees must understand what the ratings mean and enforce the system to prevent underage patrons from attending films that they are not entitled to attend.

7. Disruptive Patrons

Occasionally a patron will be disruptive. Whether the patron is constantly using a cell phone, just being loud or otherwise disruptive, the theatre employee must understand the company policy of dealing with such patrons and know how to apply the policy and when to seek police intervention.

8. ADA Compliance

Employees must be trained to deal with patrons who are disabled. Employees must know where the wheel chair spaces are located; when companion seats can be used by patrons who are not with a disabled person; how the assistive listening systems operate; when guide dogs and service animals are required to be admitted to the theatre, and more.

9. Emergency Preparedness

There are occasions where a patron will have a medical emergency in a theatre. Employees must be trained to deal with such situations. Employees must also be prepared to deal with electrical failures, smoke and fire in an auditorium.

10. Terrorist Attacks

In the post 9/11 era, employees must be trained on how to respond to terrorist attacks. Assume it is Saturday night and there are 3000 people sitting in a 14 screen theatre. A bomb goes off in a building a block away and the Office of Homeland Security issues a code red alert. What should the theatre employee do?

These are ten examples of situations that every theatre employee may be faced with, any day of the year. To deal with these situations, exhibitors must train and retrain their employees. New employees must be given a thorough training program and the training should be updated on a regular basis. Are your employees trained to deal with the issues outlined above? If not, the bad news is that you have a real problem. The good news is that with proper training, your employees can be taught to deal with these problems in a meaningful manner.