

Ministry with Seasonal Employees

Tom Moore

Seasonal employees are the short-term people who are part of almost every resort community. They usually work from one month to one year. Most often, their term of employment lasts through a summer or winter. If your resort is near an agricultural region, many seasonal employees may be migrants harvesting nearby agricultural products.

In many resort areas, seasonal employees are a large majority of the population with whom we minister. Very few people are actually employed by one business or resort as a year-round employee. Many work four to six months and change jobs when the season changes.

Seasonal employees are usually the second level of management (office managers, cashiers, secretaries, retail clerks, sales and marketing people). They are the extra people year-round businesses (i.e., restaurants, grocery stores, retail stores, hotels/motels, fast food chains, maintenance, and cleaning) hire to help through the busy season.

Seasonal employees are the folks resort ministers should get to know in order to have any kind of success in developing and maintaining a ministry in a resort area. They are usually in the area year-round, shifting to other jobs in the “off season.” Many of them hold two to three jobs to maintain their lives and families. Many choose to live in a beautiful place where they can enjoy nature and the benefits of a resort community. Some take huge cuts in income elsewhere in order to be in a resort community. They are the people who enthusiastically welcome help from resort ministers if they perceive them as being from reputable, trustworthy, caring organizations, with dedicated volunteers and staff. If we develop caring, nurturing relationships with these seasonal workers, we must try to be available to them year-round, even though they are not a part of our lives in the off season. Maintaining communication and contact with them and their families so as to be sensitive to their ongoing need will be important. These individuals are the backbone of any business, and taking care of them as ministers will be some of our most challenging and rewarding work.

Discovering the seasons they are in the resort area and developing relationships with them quickly is essential. Also determining any age differences will help develop ministries. Informal gatherings for coffee or desserts at area businesses may be an effective tool to start a ministry group. If the folks are mid-adults with children, their needs will more likely be geared to child care facilities, Backyard Bible Clubs, day camps, or church-related programs geared to families. Local congregations can be encouraged and trained to minister to these folks.

Many resort areas attract people traveling with carnivals and/or fairs. Befriending these people with casual, informal get togethers will lay foundations for ministries. Inviting them

to ice cream fellowships at a local business or church may help develop conversations and provide much needed Christian fellowship.

Discovering any special needs will also be important for the resort ministers. Migrants, either visiting the area for a day of fun or working nearby, will have language and cultural barriers. Many local congregations have or are developing ministries with migrant families. Bible study, fellowships, and recreation get them involved in a ministry. Informing them of resources in the area may be the greatest gift you can give these folks. Many have other needs, i.e., employment, food, shelter, and so forth. Knowing your local community social services network may be critical for some person you come in contact with in your area.

Finding employment for the next season is a critical need for most seasonal employees. While some are giving up a summer or winter between college and career and have their financial needs under control, many are low-income, job-to-job type people. Helping those in need find what is available in your area may be a great ministry for you. Knowing the agencies dealing with employment (Employment Security Commission, job opportunity centers, usually through social service agencies in your area) is important.

Reaching seasonal employees with ministries in a resort area requires a sensitivity on the part of the faith community. Staff and volunteers for winter or summer ministries should be trained to be aware of and empathetic to the short-term folks. There may be a tendency for “us” to turn “them” off because we know they are short-term and we want to avoid any hurt or disappointment when they leave. However, being open with seasonal employees can be rewarding. Since they do not know anyone or the resources in the area, the resort minister can become their one positive experience while in your area.

Not only area pastors, but also Christian businesses, community service organizations (i.e., Kiwanis, Jaycees, Rotary, etc.) and people who operate shops in the area can be trained to be sensitive and caring of short-term employees--both their own and those visiting their businesses. Sharing resources or giving out phone numbers of the resort ministers could be a great service. A card with programs listed in the area along with local churches may be just what some lonely folks need to help them become involved in the Christian community.

Specific programs each week with time, date, and meeting place may draw seasonal employees your way. Some ideas would be: ice cream fellowships after work on Friday or Saturday night, potluck dinners on a weekday evening, recreation (indoor/outdoor games), bus trips to nearby resorts, pizza party for college students and singles, watermelon party, picnics at local parks (with playground equipment for children). The activities are endless. The point is to have something informal and inexpensive, at an easy-to-get-to location, with some fun activity. The ministry will develop as you get to know each person and discover his/her needs.

Adapted from an article by Tom Moore in the 1993 National Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission.