

Interview with Gary Caron

Gary Caron is the Athletics Director / Head Professional at the Granite Club and is a certified USPTA Professional 1, USPTR Professional and Tennis Canada Coach 3. Gary has been in the tennis profession for 22 years.

Q: You started out as a Teaching professional and have worked your way to a managerial position. What are some of the challenges teaching professionals face on a daily basis?

A: One of the biggest challenges is time management. When you teach your time is your students and when you are not on-court it seems everyone wants to grab you when they see you. Because we are in the service business it is hard to manage staff and member expectations with your administration responsibilities.

Q: How much of your time is dedicated daily to on-court and off-court activities?

A: Currently my daily responsibilities consist of about 25% of my time on-court and I tend to teach a lot of early morning lessons each day and then assume other off-court responsibilities. Typically I'm at the Club a minimum of 60 hours per week and sometimes 7 days a week.

Q: How do you ensure that all the necessary things are completed in a timely manner?

A: In order to complete tasks on a timely manner I rely on my day timer with reminders of upcoming deadlines. I try to spend some time on the big projects such as budgets daily and get rid of a lot of little items on-going. It's very important that I work with a to-do list in order to ensure all daily tasks are accomplished. I also try to educate the members and staff to e-mail me as I find I can respond in a more timely manner as telephone messages tend to pile up.

Q: Managers are always at their pros to do the small things like follow up, what is the incentive for your pros to make sure this happens?

A: We try to have our staff organize their time at the Granite as if they were running a small business and every interaction with the members and fellow staff will impact their business. By having this culture our professionals are very good at following up with calls, promoting events, running tournaments because at the end of the day they have a more prosperous lifestyle due to being part of a successful program.

Q: You started out at a public club and now at a private club. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of both?

A: Advantage of a public club is that you can do things very quickly, such as set up a special event, without having to get approval from various levels of management, committee's or directors. A home made sign can be posted and members can register right there and the event is ready to go within a relatively short timeframe.

A private Club requires more steps such as parking issues, communication work-orders for promotion, notification to members through various vehicles such as bulletin boards, e-mails, telephone, web-site,

plasma screens, billing statements. For every event that you run there is a checklist of steps involved which at the end guarantee a better product. Private Clubs are also difficult to obtain sponsorships because commercialism is restricted and promotions such as banners, media, and non-member spectators are not allowed where at a Public facility this would be the norm for an event.

Q: What are the main benefits that you associate with at The Granite Club?

A: The biggest benefit of working in a private club is the support system and resources that are available. Those range from a full-time court maintenance staff, communications team, Pro-Shop Managers and staff, on-line court booking a program registration system that is in-house, I.T. department, as well as accounting team that manages member accounts generated through Sports Desk staff. Professional Development is encouraged and supported in a culture where change is embraced and encouraged to make the Granite Club a better place to work.

Q: Are there differences in how you have to manage the membership?

A: The membership is well-travelled and well educated so the level of service they expect is very high. We strive to continually respond to member feedback and offer 7 day professional services in instruction from 6:30 am until 9:00 pm daily. Scheduled activities such as house leagues or clinic/round robins are very successful and help members with the social component which makes a club successful. Tennis Ladders and Social Mixers organized by the Professional Staff have helped integrate members into a regular routine of playing and utilizing the club.

Q: We've discussed some of the advantages. Are there any disadvantages at a private facility?

A: Disadvantage to being at a Private Club is the restrictions on non-member access which limit the events that can be held and also the sponsorship that could be obtained. Without being able to market to sponsors or media it is hard to have fundraisers or charity events through tennis.

Q: How do you feel the new Club Professional stream at Tennis Canada can enhance your career as a Tennis Professional?

A: The new certification stream designed by Tennis Canada is outstanding for the individual who wants to make a career as a Tennis Professional. The expectations of a Club Professional currently is that they can do more than conduct a good Private Lesson. The Club Pro 2 on-court will help the Professional with their private lesson instruction but even more importantly with group instruction which is important for higher member satisfaction while also having the Professional impact more members.

The Off-court portion of the Club-Pro will educate the Professional on all the aspects of the position administratively and help them understand how their actions impact the club. The Professional learns to understand Budgets, Programming, Food and Beverage, Pro Shop and Marketing in their role as a Club Pro in general.