

# SO YOU WANT TO WORK AT CLUB MED.....

observations by a first time Gentile Organizer

It's pouring rain. Pouring. Coming down in buckets where moments before there had been nothing but blazing sunshine. The first van load of guests - GM's in Club Med Speak ('Gentile Membres' in French; 'nice people' in English) - is just arriving.

I'm a bit nervous, for this is my first Club Med assignment as a GO - more Club Med speak for 'worker bee': the coolest job on earth. The GOs all start clapping and hooting as the van doors swing open and ten very confused looking faces stare out at us, the rain instantly drenching them as they rush towards our smiling faces. My job is to be happy, to make them happy and keep them that way. I press an icy glass of punch into the hand of the first GM as calypso disco music permeates the air.

Welcome to Club Med - year round summer camp for adults.

When I applied for the job I had asked Howard, the GO director, "What kind of people go to Turquoise (my assigned island paradise in the Caribbean) anyway?". He leaned back and thought for a moment.

"Uh.... mostly 40ish east coast females going through their first divorce. And a few couples and groups... not too many families since we have so many other Clubs which cater specifically to them. No, Turquoise is pretty much a singles destination."

Ahhhh - classic Club Med - exactly the image I had in mind.

Gretchen, a makeup-laden blond from... New York, is the first one out of the van. She stumbles slightly as her high heel slips into a crack in the tile entryway and as I grab her arm she looks deeply into my eyes and says, "Hey, does it always rain here?"

I desperately want to say, "Yup, pretty much the entire time I've been here. Never stopped once. Why, didn't they tell you that?" But instead I say, "You know, this is the first time I've ever seen it rain here!" I think the truth is important in these sorts of situations.

As over four hundred new GM's unload, get in line for their room assignments and look around in various states of confusion, fascination and excitement, several are greeted by GOs who recognize them from previous visits. There's Barbara, 46, single, and 'still looking' from... New York, who's been here three times before; Rachael from... New York who was just here three months ago with her soon to be ex-husband but has come back to

“see if she can make it on her own...”; Sherry, dark-haired and slender with matching lipstick, nails and brand new navel ring, from..... New York who just broke up with her fiancé of..... nine years?; and Noel, 41 going on 21, from.... New Jersey(!) who got talked into it by her travel agent who had never been here but wanted to send someone so that they could give her a full report.

Glancing around I'd have to say that Howard is pretty close in his assessment of the client base. The first week of my six month tour of duty is about to begin. The sun is now shining brightly. Oh boy.

Right in the thick of it are Kevin and Hammer, the Chef de Village and his assistant. Watching the bosses of this giant operation slinging luggage, greeting guests, organizing and generally helping all the other GOs handle the mass of GM's is truly inspiring to us underlings. I think back on all my previous bosses who would get down in the trenches and actually do some manual labor with the workers whenever a green pig flew by.

Each GM is tagged with a color coded plastic hospital band on their wrist. I'm not sure if this is to identify them for quality control or sort them for the mental institution they will be trucked to when its time to return home to their jobs.

As the GM's get settled, Marcy rounds up the first few out by the pool as the disco is cranked up full volume with the Club Med theme music. She is leading a few dozen energetic singles in a rousing dance at poolside when Philip, a jovial three-hundred-pounder from.... New York, decides to improvise. Spinning daintily on his toes he spins one to many times, tries to stop himself (like stopping a Moose during mating season) and with a terrific splash goes careening into the pool.

Everyone around the pool applauds, figuring this is some sort of prearranged GO skit they have heard so much about. An excited Philip continues break dancing underwater like a whale on acid.

I latch onto a group of six ladies from.... New York and begin showing them around. Here's the scuba center... do you dive?... here's the bar... do you drink?... here's our little store in case you forgot anything... do you shop?... here are the phones... do you talk?... here's the fitness room.... oh, never mind. Then we tour down to the beach. One slightly... *round* woman is huffing and puffing by the time we reach the water. “Boy, how high are we here?” she asks.

“Well, see all that water? That’s the ocean. So we’re at sea level,” I carefully explain.

“Oh, no wonder I’m out of breath,” she pants in relief.

Charlene and Wanda from.... Yonkers, are standing by the tennis courts, rackets in hand. They are the spitting image of Lavern & Shirley: thick New York accents, 40ish, and white as bleached sheets. Come to think of it, so are most of the women here.... “You ladies better put on some sunscreen, ”Mr. Helpful”(a.k.a., me) tells them cheerfully. Wanda points to a large keg of Baby Oil on the bench: “Yeah thanks, we got lots. We wanna tan ya know. Howz anyone gonna know we wuz on vacation?” Two days later there is no doubt that they are on vacation thanks to the second degree burns on 80% of their ample bodies. Now I understand why there are fire extinguishers by the pool.

After dinner we do a rousing Kareoke session and our full production stage show. Then it’s off to the disco till 1am, a little moonlight schmoozing to make sure all the GM’s are safe and happy, and finally to bed around 2am.

My second day. Up at 6:30. At this pace I’ll last... a week?

I’m having breakfast at a table with two couples from.... New York, when suddenly the still, warm, peaceful Caribbean air is shattered by a piercing scream. “I jump up and run towards to noise, assuming someone has been bitten by a Cobra or had their hair set on fire.

Instead I find Kevin trying to coax his thirty-five pound male pot bellied pig which has engaged Lucy’s leg from behind as a potential sex partner. Hey, maybe he’s nearsighted or something. Lucy assumes she is being attacked by a wild boar from the jungle and is hysterical. Whew! Too much more of *that* kind of excitement and I’m going to need some R&R.

My assignment for this week is to teach watersports. Ben and Brad from.... Manhattan, decide to try windsurfing. It looks easy. It is easy. After a brief lesson they both hop on boards and head out into the ocean as their proud and talented instructor (me) looks on. Hey, this is fun!

A few hundred yards from shore Ben falls in. But not all the way. Before his hands hit the water he bounds back on the board like he was shot from a canon and starts

screaming and waving his hands around wildly. “Shark! Shark! SHARK!” he shrieks as he looks for somewhere to hide on the twelve-foot board.

Sure enough total panic instantly ensues on the water as a large gray fin breaks the surface a few feet away from him. Since I’m on shore I can’t explain to the twenty-five terrified GM’s in the water that their “shark” is actually just JoJo the friendly dolphin who hangs around Club Med. By dinner that night the episode has exploded into a frenzied attack of several dozen man-eating great whites who attacked Ben and his windsurfer. He tells the story to nine different women before he convinces one to accompany him back to his room so he can show her his scars.

Most of us GOs get to teach lots of different activities so my third day is spent on the water-ski dock. Vinny is from... New Jersey and he’s down here for one thing. Well, two but one of them is water skiing. He’s first on the sign-up sheet every morning and by his third day he has actually managed to break both skis in a high speed crash as well as manage not to break his neck when he hit the dock on the way in. “Vinny,” his instructor keeps telling him, “you gotta let go of that rope *before* you get to the dock.”

This particular morning Vinny is sitting on the dock, skis on, waiting for his turn. The boat comes around for him and Scott, the driver, signals for him to jump in the water. The beautiful, warm, crystal clear Caribbean water which is directly above a five foot Barracuda which has just swum under him. As he hits the water someone yells out, “Hey, look at that *huge* fish.... hey.... it’s a Barracuda!!!”

Now the only thing that Vinny from New Jersey knows about Barracuda is that they are the size of Moby Dick, have several thousand razor sharp teeth, and will attack anything in the water and eat it. Vinny decides to attack first.

As the harmless Barracuda dashes away Vinny takes off one of his water skis and whacks the water surface with it. On the third whack it slips from his hands as he brings it back, hits him squarely on the head and knocks him out. Vinny just lies by the pool for the rest of the week, telling any fascinated female (... from New York) he can entice about how he fended off a vicious Barracuda attack.

The next night Hammer organizes a festival of “adult” games before dinner. The first entails putting a balloon on the lap of a confused looking male GM (plucked from the audience) while an eager looking female GM (similarly plucked) tries to hop on him and

break it as fast as possible. Or is it the other way around....? It's like having sex with your clothes on in front of four-hundred people you don't know.

Gloria, a 'full figured' redhead from... New York, is first. She jumps on a very surprised Lester and finally breaks their balloon after forty-one seconds. Rebecca.... from New York, is not to be outdone. She throws herself on Scott and launches herself into wild convulsions. After two minutes she's still going at it and the crowd is going wild. At the five minute mark they peel the sweaty pair apart to find that the balloon had long since been broken—probably in the first ten seconds. Both couples head off to the bar to pursue their newfound relationship, based on a solid foundation of balloon squeezing. Classic Club Med. I love this place!

Day five finds me helping out with snorkeling lessons. Which is similar, I assume, to teaching someone to tie their shoes. I mean, how hard can it be to stick a snorkel in your mouth and breath?

Pretty hard, especially if you have the wrong end in your mouth like Victor.... from Lon Geye-land. [Don't worry, it's still New York.] "So Victor," I ask, "have you ever snorkeled before?"

"Who me? You tawking to me?"

"Yes, I am Victor. Listen carefully: have-you-ever-snorkeled-be-fore?"

Victor looks around at the twelve admiring women in his class who are hanging on his every word and says confidently, "Who me? Course I snorkeled before. Wha jew think - I doan know how?" And with that he pulls the mask down on his face and inserts the snorkel into his mouth. Upside down. Both the mask and snorkel. He chews confidently on the wrong end of the snorkel as the mouthpiece dangles over his head.

"Good Victor, very nice. That's just perfect. Let's all give Victor a nice round of applause." I was told it's very important to encourage the guests and compliment them frequently.

By the end of my first week our crew of 564 GMs, 115 GOs and 168 'other' staff have melded into a finely oiled (read: pickled) fun machine. Virtually everyone knows each other and many women start crying at the thought of leaving as they sing the rousing Hands Up song on their last night. *Hands up!, baby hands up! Gimme your love gimme gimme your love gimme gimme.....*

I too have tears in my eyes as the last van load leaves and the new GM's start arriving. Only twenty-five more weeks to go. Imagine the stories I'll have by then.....

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