**Headguard & Manager Training Slide Notes**

**Slide 2:** Coming to work late, starting rotations late, not enforcing rules: traits that coworkers dislike, therefore traits that headguards shouldn’t portray those traits

* + When looking at promotions to head guard or manager what qualities do we like in that person and what do we not like in that person?
  + What are the things that other people do that annoy you? Try to eliminate those tendencies from yourself. What are the opposite of those things? Try to emulate that. (ex. coming on time to shifts vs. late)
  + “Treat others how you would want to be treated,” and have empathy, remember what it was like before you became a headguard and what challenges you may have faced in order to best support the lifeguarding staff

**Slide 3:** Make sure that even when you are on your breaks you are glancing out at the pool deck

* + Being a headguard is more than just making more money during shifts, be sure to notice any lifeguards:
    - not looking at their zone
    - talking to someone else
    - have a cell phone or airpods on their person at the stand
  + Similarly, don’t be afraid to ask lifeguards in their stand if they need anything while you are doing a sweep of the deck to pick up trash on your way down from the stand
* Be an **advocate** for the lifeguards, ask them their frustrations because you can represent them in leadership meetings
  + Head guards work with the lifeguards closer than anyone else on the leadership team
  + Lifeguards are often intimidated by the idea of a manager, aquatics coordinator, or aquatics director
  + Decide what complaints or feedback need representation and give credit where credit is due
  + You are a mentor for other lifeguards, get them involved when you can, like showing them how to do the chemicals if they show an interest or even just answering any questions a new hire may have
* When asking someone to do something, make sure that you have a reason why they are doing that task.
  + The purpose of a headguard is not to strong arm other guards using the power that comes with the title or to shirk lifeguard duties, but to be a role model for newer guards, and an advocate
  + Never leverage your leadership position to coerce someone into doing something. Ex. “Why do I need to clean the bathroom?” Bad: “Because I am the Headguard and I am telling you to.” Good: “We had complaints of ringworm and we want to make sure that the locker rooms are as sanitary as possible.”

**Slide 4:** Incorporating questions from the lifeguard certification test into trainings (maybe even if someone fails a timmy and they need to have their skills fixed)

* + Be aware of the plan for in-services that you are participating in or leading
  + Use skill charts/guides from the Red Cross book at stations during in-services (match the language it uses) in order to prepare for audit
  + Don’t be afraid to ask for help or clarification on a skill if someone asks you a question that you are unsure about
  + It is better to ask for clarification than to spread false information

**Slide 5:** Have **headguards play a bigger role in all trainings**, giving them a chance to teach new guards what they think will be the most important

* + Have headguards lead training stations with the managers, but are designated to be in the water to demonstrate the skills at the training, because they are the "experts" at lifeguarding
  + Get in the water, don’t sit on the side
  + Be aware of the plan for inservices or look for opportunities to help in the planning of an inservice

**Slide 6:** Communication techniques:

* + - Allow communication in both directions
    - Ask open ended questions
    - Be ready to explain things many times in different ways
    - Say what you mean
    - Get right to the point
    - Be specific
    - When you are explaining something to another guard whether on shift or at a training make sure to use a strong confident voice - it is often hard to hear when there are many patrons and the music is blasting

**Slide 7:** Assign lifeguards who earn guard of the week or month a section with a head guard or manager at the next week's inservice: give up to two hours of planning time outside of their regular schedule

**Slide 8: Document everything**

* + Incident reports are very important (create a map of where the incidents occurred and how many times in order to assess urgency or problem areas)
  + Even if you are just giving out a bandaid, it is important that you or another life guard fill out a PDRMA incident report
  + Laziness in this section can possibly lead to legal troubles
  + There is one break in particular that is in charge of any First Aid that is needed specify one break that is dedicated to any First Aid situations that may arise in order to ensure that atleast one person is always present in the office to take care of patrons or point them to the manager
  + During or after an incident lifeguards should refer the press to the media spokesperson and should avoid discussing the emergency with anyone who is not staff or EMS
  + Use direct quotes when possible when filling out an incident report

**Slide 9:** Be sure to familiarize yourself with pool **EAPs**

* + Included on sharepoint:
  + Facility evacuation map
  + In the event of a critical emergency: if a person says that they are a medical professional, do not let them take over the scene or touch the victim unless they are with EMS
  + Familiarize yourself with statutes of IL and the national swimming pool website
    - Timed response drill →standard for IL
  + ⅛ pools close after not passing the health inspections, but 300 mil ppl in US enjoy going to pools

**Slide 10:** Sometimes a lifeguard will arrive at work in a bad mood, or work until burnout. It is important to remember that they:

* + Don’t have the luxury of having a bad day, because lives are always on the line, so if there is a lifeguard who seems distracted and distressed inquire about the issue and if it is causing too much distraction, send them home
  + Can exercising during a break to help combat fatigue

**Slide 11: Critical Incident stress** - stress experienced after a major incident, can increase if someone believes that they made a mistake

* + Symptoms may include: Confusion, shortened attention span, denial, guilt, depression, anger, changes in interactions, changes in appetite, other uncharacteristic behavior
  + Keep debrief positive
  + Emphasise that it is not a sign of weakness
  + Ways to avoid: slow deep breathing, nutritious meals, low amts of caffeine, exercise

**Slide 12: Parties:** Chaperone-party goer ratio, you can require chaperones at pool parties so that they don’t get out of hand

* + Offer to help out the party organizers with bringing things in from the car
  + Be courteous, lifeguards will follow your lead
  + Rules also need to be enforced during a party, and there will likely be patrons who are not “regulars” at the pool who need courteous correction

**Slide 13: Informing, Educating, Enforcing**

* + Feet first please rather than no diving →positive rather than negative
  + How to deal with an unruly patron:
    - Know how to stay calm to defuse the situation, take deep breaths because they are not mad at you, but at the situation
    - Restate their frustration so that they feel seen and explain what will happen next
    - Don’t overreact
    - Find neutral ground and maintain nonthreatening posture
    - Focus on behavior, not the individual
    - Show respect for the patron
    - Be firm and friendly
    - Use suspension or dismissal as last resort
    - Recognize situation as a learning experience

**Slide 14:** Remember what it is like to be an excited patron at the pool

* + Kids run in because they are excited, not to get on your nerves
  + Patrons are excited to get fresh air and light to intense exercise
  + Remember the wonder that is associated with a trip to the pool for younger kids

Hello, I am CC Brubaker and I am a headguard at the Deerfield Park District. I recently completed the American Red Cross Lifeguard Management course and am going to share some actionable takeaways with you, so that you do not also have to go through that training.

**Slide 2: Leadership Starts with You**

Let’s talk about leadership by looking at what *not* to do.

Imagine this, it is a hot day and you have worked the morning shift and are now working the afternoon shift. The refrigerator is all out of icee pops, and it is time to go up for fourty minutes. You begin to get ready to go up at 17 and complete your rotation at the 20 minute mark.

Now imagine that you are on the second half of your 40 minute up rotation. You have worked the morning shift and are now on the afternoon shift and it is a very hot day. You notice that the guard who is supposed to take you down begins to get ready to come up at 17 and takes down the person at the station before you at the 20 minute mark.

How do you feel?

When we show up late, start rotations late, or fail to enforce rules, we’re showing traits that people dislike—and those aren’t qualities we want in headguards.

So ask yourself: when you think about someone being promoted to head guard or manager, what qualities do you admire in a candidate—and what traits do you not like? Keep a mental or physical note of people who emulate the traits that you like in a candidate so that when it comes time to promote someone, there are ample examples of the traits that you admire in the candidate.

Think about the things that annoy you when others do them… For example, someone starting a rotation late. Make sure you’re not doing those things yourself. Then flip that: what’s the opposite of that annoying behavior? Do *that*.  
 For example—being on time instead of running late. Simple, but powerful.

And don’t forget the golden rule: *Treat others how you’d want to be treated.* Lead with empathy. Remember what it was like when *you* were just starting out. That perspective will help you support the team better.

**Slide 3: Leading by Example on the Pool Deck**

Even when you’re on break, keep your eyes on the deck.  
 Being a headguard isn’t just about getting paid more—it’s about responsibility. So look out for guards who aren’t watching their zones, who are chatting, or who have phones or AirPods out at the stand.

And don’t be afraid to *check in*. Ask guards if they need water, or anything else, when you’re walking the deck or coming off a stand.

You’re an advocate for the team. When you are on break with other lifeguards, ask them what’s frustrating them, or what they think could be improved. You’re in the best position to bring those concerns to leadership, and give credit where credit is due.

Because let’s be real—managers, coordinators, and directors can be intimidating. But you? You’re in the trenches with them.

Mentor others. If a guard is curious about something—like checking chemicals—invite them to shadow you while you do it. And when you assign tasks, explain *why* it matters.

When someone asks why the bathroom isn’t clean enough after inspection, don’t lead with “Because I’m the headguard and I said so.”  
 Try something like: “We’ve had complaints of ringworm. Let’s make sure the bathrooms are extra clean today.”

The role is about setting an example—not using your title as leverage.

**Slide 4: Training is a Team Effort**

Especially if someone misses a skill or fails a rescue scenario like a “Timmy.”  
 Also—if you’re helping lead in-service, know the plan ahead of time.

Have you ever had this experience? You tell a guard to change the way they do a certain skill. You explain that one detail of what they are doing is wrong, and you correct the skill. However, then they say that another head guard or manager said that the original way they were doing the skill was correct.

That is why it is important to use the Red Cross skill charts at stations so everyone’s using the correct language. If someone asks you a question about a skill and you do not know the answer, don’t make up an answer that makes sense to you. Don’t be afraid to say “I’m not sure, let me double-check.”  
 It’s way better to ask for help than to spread misinformation.

**Slide 5: Headguards in the Water**

Headguards may have days where they do not want to get into the water to demonstrate a skill at an inservice. However, it is important that a head guard is always ready to jump into the water to help the lifeguards understand a skill.

Headguards should be active participants in training.  
 You’re the expert in lifeguarding—so lead from the front.  
 Get in the water. Demonstrate the skills. Don’t just sit on the side.

Help managers run stations, and if you have the opportunity, offer to help *plan* the in-service too. Your insight matters, because you are the only members of the leadership team who lifeguard regularly.

**Slide 6: Clear, Confident Communication**

Have you ever been in a situation where you don’t understand a concept? You sit there trying to puzzle out the answer before giving up and asking your teacher. Your teacher explains the concept in a different way and suddenly it all makes sense!

Good communication goes both ways. Ask open-ended questions. Be willing to explain things in multiple ways.

Say what you mean—clearly and confidently. Be direct and specific.

And remember—pools are noisy. Patrons, music, echoes… all of it. So speak *up*. Use a strong, confident voice whether you're on shift or at a training.

**Slide 7: Recognizing Excellence**

Winning “Guard of the Month” is a huge deal for a lifeguard. They are honored for their excellence in skills, customer service, or helpfulness.

When a guard is named “Guard of the Week” or “Guard of the Month,” recognize that.  
We will assign them a topic or skill that will be practiced at the next inservice, and assign them to shadow a headguard or manager at the next in-service

They will have up to two hours of planning time outside of their regular schedule to plan the activity for their station.  
This allows them a chance to step up and exhibit the leadership that had them voted “Guard of the Month.” It is important to give them a chance to do this because G.O.M. or G.O.W. is often the pool that we pull from for promotion.

**Slide 8: Documentation Matters**

If there is a recurring issue, like multiple slips in the same area, creating a map of those incidents like the one shown on screen can help us take action.

As you can see, the map makes it easy to determine what changes need to be made, whether in infrastructure or in Guard Stand positioning.

**Slide 9: Document Everything**

Document everything. Incident reports are crucial.  
 Even if someone just asks for a Band-Aid—log it. It protects us legally and helps us track problems. Lazy reports could cause us legal problems, so be sure to log a detailed report.

Always try to use direct quotes when filling out reports when you can.

And in the event of a real incident, remind guards: *do not talk to the press*. Direct them to the media spokesperson.

**Slide 10: Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)**

Know your pool’s EAPs inside and out. These are on SharePoint.  
 There’s the evacuation map, emergency response procedures, and more.

Assign one break each shift to handle First Aid. That ensures there’s always someone in the office ready to help or call for backup.

In a serious emergency, if a bystander says they’re a medical professional—*do not* let them take over unless they are with EMS.

Understand Illinois laws and national pool safety standards. They are linked in this presentation. The most important one that we follow is that timed response drills are required.  
1 in 8 pools fail inspections, but 300 million people in the U.S. go swimming every year. We are the first line of defense against drownings and other incidents.

**Slide 11: Guard Wellness and Burnout**

Imagine you are driving to work one day when your car breaks down. You call your parents and a tow truck, and arrive to work late. You go up to the stand and rather than thinking about the patrons in the pool, you are distracted by imagining the possible fate of your car.

Lifeguards don’t have the luxury of a bad day. But sometimes, it happens.

If someone comes in clearly upset or distracted—check in with them. If they’re too distressed or out of focus, send them home. They could be a liability up in the lifeguard station if aren’t able to pay full attention to the pool

Have you ever had to wake up for a five a.m. shift or worked a full day at the pool? You are tired and are having trouble keeping your eyes open in the lifeguard stand or focusing on the water.

This is a problem that many guards may experience. If this situation occurs, encourage them to move on breaks, maybe even jump in the pool and swim a couple of laps. A little exercise can help fight off fatigue.

**Slide 12: Critical Incident Stress**

Have you ever been in an incident or had a conversation or argument that you can’t get out of your head? You find yourself thinking about it days after it occurred and imagining what you could have said or done differently.

After a serious rescue or incident, lifeguards may deal with critical incident stress. Especially if they think they messed up.

Signs include confusion, denial, depression, anger, changes in appetite, and can lead to burnout or uncharacteristic behavior.

During a debrief after an incident, keep things positive. Emphasize that stress reactions aren’t weakness—they’re human.  
 Encourage good habits such as deep breathing, healthy meals, low caffeine, and exercise.

**Slide 13: Parties and Pool Events**

Pool parties can get hectic, so enforce a chaperone-to-kid ratio of 1-7.

Be helpful—offer to carry supplies in for party organizers. Be friendly. Lifeguards will take your lead.

Even at a party, rules still apply. You may need to enforce them with people who aren’t regular patrons, so be courteous but clear.

**Slide 14: Positive Enforcement**

When correcting a patron’s behavior, shift your language from negative to positive. For example, say, “Feet first, please,” instead of “No diving” or “Walk please!” instead of “Don’t run!”

Imagine that it is the weekend of Lollapalooza at Deerspring. You are many guards short and you have been trying to configure the rotation in a way that will allow guards breaks, but not upset the patrons too much. One lifeguard shift is ending and the next one is beginning, you will have one less guard on the next shift than you have now. Finally, you arrive at the conclusion that you will have to keep the slide closed and that you will have to close either the kiddie pool or the splash pad. You decide to close the kiddie pool because there are more people who are using the splash pad. A woman complains that she came to the pool just for the kiddie pool, and now it is closed. However, now her family is using the splash pad. She asks for a refund.

If you’re dealing with an unruly patron, stay calm. Take a breath. They’re upset about the *situation*, not *you*.

Restate their concern so they feel heard, then explain what will happen next. Stay neutral, keep your posture relaxed, and focus on the *behavior*, not the person.

Say to the woman who doesn’t want the kiddie pool closed, “I understand that you are frustrated that the kiddie pool is closed. Unfortunately, we are understaffed today as many of our employees are at Lollapalooza this weekend. You are welcome to continue to use the splash pad with your family. You have already been using the pool for an hour and are now in the splash pad, so unfortunately I cannot give you a refund.”

Be respectful, firm, and friendly. Use suspensions, removals, or pool coupons only as a last resort—and always try to learn from the experience.

**Slide 15: Reconnect with the Magic of the Pool**

Last but not least—remember what it’s like to be a kid at the pool.  
 They’re not running to be annoying—they’re just excited. This place is magical to them.

Many patrons come for fresh air, exercise, and joy. So when you interact with them, bring that same positive energy.