

Interview with a Manager

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### Abstract

This interview was a great opportunity to interview a woman in an aspiring field of mine, with similar educational background, interests, and motivations. The following pages will describe the context of the interview, an introduction, summary of select interview questions, reflection of our interaction and the attitudes and opinions discussed, and the final takeaways. The interview summary section includes direct and indirect quotes from Wendy Wilson, for reader awareness. The interview reflection is my own thoughts, opinions, and reflections.

*Keywords:* management, leadership, Katz model, motivation, recruitment, employees, performance, mission, vision, values

### **Context**

Interview with Wendy Wilson, Assistant Manager of Antelope Island State Park

October 6<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm, duration 45:25, at Park Headquarters in Antelope Island State Park, UT

Mission Statement of Antelope Island State Park:

*“To provide a variety of recreational, educational, and interpretive, wildlife viewing and cultural opportunities, while conserving a unique island setting.”*

### **Introduction**

I started this assignment with a desire to interview, specifically a woman, from a non-profit organization. Ideally, I would like to find myself as part of a non-profit or government agency, with a strong force of powerful women as my squad (aka team). I pin-pointed the Salt Lake chapter of the Red Cross, who employs several women, especially in management roles. However, getting ahold of anyone through phone or e-mail proved to be a hassle, so I gave up that dream and began to look elsewhere. Perhaps for the better, because their clear lack in organization could be due to poor managerial presence. As I moved on, I couldn't have been happier with who I found! Wendy Wilson, Assistant Manager at the biggest state park in Utah. My rationale for choosing her over the Park Manager was because I feel that assistant manager is the closest I'd ever want to be to a management position, so I tried keeping that in line with my future goals. I also got free entrance into the park, win-win!

Wendy (yes, we are on a first name basis now), asked me to meet her at Park Headquarters, and after a most beautiful drive through the park, I arrive to see a tall, tan woman in the customary government attire with a short, sweeping haircut, escorting a volunteer out of the building. She informs me that she'll be back soon, as she hops into a truck with the young lady not in uniform. I am left completely alone to sit in their headquarter office comfortably, the

atmosphere not at all office-like. The small building is unassuming with a large wooden table (clearly not from an office supply warehouse), a coffee maker from the 1980s, two side offices, and a bathroom. It is wallpapered with maps and the crackly sound of radios transmits park business back and forth it's 28,000-acre span. I hear what must be Wendy's voice on one transmission informing Jeremy (the Park Manager) that she is dropping a volunteer at the Visitor Center. I don't mind this small prelude before the interview because it helps calm my nerves and makes the formality melt away into oblivion. As Wendy walks back into the building she gives me a slight smile and says, "Sorry...late volunteer!" To which I was able to respond, "Good, we can jump right into the interview then, let's talk about that!" Laughing, she immediately makes me feel at ease and we proceed with the interview...recorder on and everything.

### **Interview Summary**

I start by introducing myself as a PRT student at the U, emphasizing in Sustainable Tourism. She immediately brightens and exclaims that she too, was a PRT student with emphasis in Resource Management! Being able to relate on other levels that didn't have to do with the pre-meditated expectation of an interview, helped us both talk more freely and openly. With that in mind, the organizational structure of the interview turned more fluid. This meant that things would easily merge into other areas of discussion, and being this fluid helped me realize that the material in class has been sticking because I didn't have to follow my strict outline, but used it more as a guideline. I relied mainly on my phone recorder so that my attention wouldn't be diverted and I could maintain good eye contact and engage with her and digest what she was saying. I only used my paper (which had my outline of questions) and pen to check off the questions that she answered, directly and indirectly, so I could save time by

avoiding redundancy. Overall, the forty-five minutes went by quickly and I learned about Wendy's professional history and her transition into a management role.

### **Background**

Wendy's management position has been fairly recent, for a little over one year. She came into the position with no formal management experience and had been working as Antelope Island's naturalist for three years, before the position became available. She was prompted to apply along with others from inside the park. I was pleased to find out that she was a newbie because she still had some nervousness around some of my questions or didn't have much to offer on some points of experience. We were able to discuss fears and hopes that came with such a drastic change from her fifteen-year background as a park naturalist in other state parks in Utah. Wendy did say she missed her old job as a naturalist because it included "the fun stuff" such as guided hiking tours, natural resource interpretation, kayak tours, and developing programs for the public. Her autonomy in designing and creating programs as the naturalist director for years is what helped her get an insight into management techniques and the differences she could make.

Wendy oversees the day-to-day operations of the park, which include a diversity of facilities and programs such as: campgrounds, hiking trails, historic sites and structures, divvying out permits, maintenance, as well as private business concessions that operate within the park. There a lot of permits to handle for the park's common special events that range from weddings to film production to triathlons.

She is directly in charge of two employees, and assists in direct supervision of nine others. I liked this small section of management much better, which was especially interesting to compare with the example provided on canvas who managed four-hundred and twenty! She also

has a direct manager, the park manager, but who does “more political needs, and works outside with the community while trying to source funding.” Upon asking her if she would ever try to work up to Park Manager, her response was “not necessarily in this park, it’s more political than what I’d prefer to deal with, and I wouldn’t like to go hob-knob with people. But, I might want to seek that out in other parks.”

### **Organizational Structure**

Antelope Island State Park is a public governmental organization that is, according to Edginton (2008), “concerned with community welfare, improving quality of life, service to the public, enriched community life, wide use of leisure, and protection and conservation of the environment” (p. 16). This state park uses a mix of departmentalization and hierarchy that is broken down from Park Manager → Assistant Manager → Operating Directors for various departments in the park. Wendy herself seemed to take on more of a supervisor role and is halfway to taking on a manager role as well. From the sounds of it, the park manager sounds like the bureaucrat role.

### **Management and Leadership**

Upon asking her opinions on the definition of management, she summed up that anyone can be a manager, but not all managers can be leaders. That management, is overseeing the aspects of operations, budgets, programs, and people. Whereas leaders can move things forward and people can look up to them. She has great respect for her own manager, Jeremy (park manager), who doesn’t use a “go and do” approach but rather a “let’s go and do.” The Park Manager has only been there for four years, and initiated a turnover in the management system and style that had been in place for a long time (the previous park manager had retired), which was “you do it and I’ll take the credit for it.” It was restrictive and unmotivating, so Jeremy

came in with a philosophy that “if it happened before July 1, 2011, then there’s nothing I can do.” This has helped employees realize they need to focus on the future and they can’t change the things beyond their control and can instead focus their energy on moving forward. Morale started to improve but for others it was a hard change in trust that the management was genuine. Allowing them to act with autonomy and openly share ideas and get the proper recognition they deserved.

### **Katz Model**

A majority of Wendy’s job required the technical skills and human skills. Even though her supervision is over a low number of employees, they are all different and require those human skills to make connections and exercise empathy and patience. The technical aspect of the job is simply running the technology while having general knowledge of the details and interconnectedness of the park and its many departments.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

In this aspect from class, Wendy kept speaking to my heart as she said that being good with people is a big strength, in order to be good with your staff by helping them feel supported listened to. Another strength she listed is being able to see the big picture, and working with all the departments to show how everyone and everything fits in. While aiming for a big picture she mentioned it was still good having a realistic boundary, by knowing the goals that you can and can’t achieve. Wendy elaborated on her own managerial weaknesses, which were in part due to her short-term managerial status, such as being able to make important decisions without a lot of notice, and a little unsure of the correct course of action.

I think Wendy’s biggest strength during our interview was the way she referred to her staff. She truly valued individuality and seeing them as people, not lumps. “The more you know

your staff and see them as who they are and recognize them, you can help them to be more successful. It's my job to help them be successful." She put their success on her shoulders, knowing that she is needed in both a management position and a leadership position. In relation to delegation vs showing them the way, she admitted to the difficulty of delegating a task that you have specifically conceptualized in your mind, but that it's important to do that and "I try to do that as much as possible." By doing this, she says it provides learning and growth opportunities for the staff.

### **Mission, Vision, and Values**

They don't state the mission statement directly, but try to frame it for staff in a way that is customer centered by providing great facilities, friendly staff, accessibility, etc. Wendy tries to lead by example, but also prompts staff to look at the park through the customer's eyes to really see what's needed and what could make the park even greater.

### **Motivation**

Wendy is motivated intrinsically. We spoke frankly about the low payment of state government workers, hardly even getting a high 5-figure salary. But, it's enough to live on and that was all that was needed. Motivation is loving the resources and wanting to share that enjoyment with the community. Grounding people with such an identity of place that it offers them a genuine connection to the land and changes their perspectives. Helping people connect to the land was handed down from Wendy's experience as a naturalist, which would've given her a different perspective if she had come from a ranger position, who are generally more regulated. Her way is not just following rules because they're rules, but an attitude of patience that says, 'let me teach you why those rules are in place, why you should have your dog on a leash and



how that protects the land that we are trying to conserve and why those rules are in place to benefit the resources we are trying to protect.”

Employee motivation is much more complex, sometimes there are things out of our control. “We help them by coaching them what they have control over, talking through it, and how to only focus on the things you can change.” At the park they try to encourage staff to “job share,” which means they get to have some change in scenery by moving around to different departments occasionally to give a sense of variety in their work day and which ultimately helps reinforce the big picture of the park. By moving them around the park like this and letting them try working in those areas for a bit increases motivation.

### **Interviewing and Recruitment**

Wendy isn't always a part of the interviewing and deciding process, but the times that she is she provided valuable information. “We look at their motivation for the job. We try to get out why they're here, what is their pre-existing vision of the job they are seeking, and we try to get a feel for their personality. Can they click with the staff and the purpose of the park?” She also expressed that a desire to work, learn, and get dirty were other integral attributes for park workers.

They see very little turnover in the positions at Antelope Island. The only positions that have high turnover are the two seasonal maintenance positions, which are hard to fill and hard to keep. Other positions, including seasonal positions, see the same people year after year. They haven't had the need to find new gate staff since “almost never.” The easiest positions to fill are the wildlife positions. This is a good example of a position that is easily misunderstood by prospective employees with their own preconceived notions of what the job means, “it's not petting the bison, but more of pulling up weeds.” This information spoke a lot to the motivations

we talked about in class, because if needs were being neglected and people were unhappy then we'd see more turnover with their staff.

### **Discipline, Appreciation, and Evaluation**

Wendy only has two direct employees that she evaluates and disciplines. Even though she is a direct supervisor to other employees, she would send them to the park manager to be disciplined, because she knows what it's like to be disciplined by someone who isn't your manager. Wendy is the type of manager and leader who always has the door open and is more than willing to talk it out with others if it meant helping them improve their work performance. She's the friendly ear that listens while Jeremy does all the dirty work, if there is a need. She said there wasn't much need for that because they have a pretty good pool of employees.

Appreciation was simple...recognition. Daily thank-you, both verbal and written, are small but go a long way. There isn't enough funding to do bonuses, but they'll reward people with jackets at the end of the year to show their appreciation if there is extra funding, or sometimes even a \$100 reward on a paycheck. Also, day-to-day consultation of their input and opinion is huge, because then they feel like they are valued and could potentially implement some positive change. Communication is key. Volunteers get two appreciation parties throughout the year, and employees are welcome to go if they wish.

Evaluation is simple for Wendy; she sticks with her two directors. Using an online goal setting contract, she'll write up one for each person that includes: tasks for the year to complete, deadlines, and measurable objectives. They are able to review and comment on it and can correct Wendy on certain aspects of their goals, in order to make them as achievable as possible. She meets with them quarterly to go over the sheet and see where they're at, how they are doing, what needs to change, if anything needs adjustment, or if they're struggling with anything in

particular. Then, at the end of the year they are compiled and can tangibly see the goals they've accomplished. It's been effective, but she said it'd be more effective with a struggling employee so that it would provide that documentation and track their progression.

Wendy doesn't do a self-evaluation and instead meets with Jeremy, the park manager, and they go through the exact same process. He is just as open as Wendy from the sounds of it, and makes the process painless and easy.

### **Interview Reflection**

Interviewing Wendy was a good experience for me because I felt like her management style is what I would like to have mine be. She also possessed some leadership qualities that became apparent throughout the interview. According to Edginton (2008) Table 6.1, the aspects of leadership she possesses are: creating a vision, clarifying the big picture, setting strategies for employee and park success, communicating goals, building teams, empower subordinates by recognizing their achievements and listening to them (p. 107). I was pleased to see that leaders do sometimes make it into management positions and are able to make a difference, not just for their customers but for their employees.

I hope that Wendy continues to see success in many more years to come as assistant manager. Her time spent as manager seems to have equal percentages of influencing just as much as planning and organizing, according to Edginton (2008), (p. 114). I'd say her styles of management are closely related to the trait theory and situational theory. She has all the traits and skills needed, the only thing I noticed was that during our talk of the Katz model, she seemed unsure of conceptualizing as a manager, which I think she will develop in time. She possesses everything else: organization, tactfulness, knowledge of the task, situational awareness, flexibility, and the ability to speak well. She seems to have a handle on employee motivation

and operates on a performance-based reward system. By setting up the annual goals evaluation and expectation, she sets them up to reach their peak performance and recognizes their efforts and helps when needed. I think that Wendy's motivation is much like my own and can be drawn from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. She doesn't have a desire to be in control or be at the top, she spent 15 years doing something she loved and then just one day, when she's still on the fence, decides to just go for it. It was a nonchalant approach, but she realized it was a greater opportunity that was needed for a higher level towards ones' full potential, or self-actualization.

### **Takeaways**

I still don't have much motivation to be in a management position myself, I like the idea of being the friendly face around the workplace that keeps the social connections strong and accomplishing humanitarian and conservation works amongst a group of friends. But, you never know...I might be like Wendy, who after fifteen years of working a job she loved in the Utah state parks system, she decided to take the leap and apply for assistant manager at 11:30 the night the application was due (at midnight...much like my own habits.) Assistant manager would be more ideal for me than overall manager, because then I still have the much needed oversight to keep me going, with enough autonomy to manage my own team. I enjoy small tight networks, like the one Wendy works with and manages, so who knows! Overall, Wendy seemed like an older version of me (or what I hope to be.)

### **Questions**

A lot of questions were indirectly answered. Others she didn't have much insight to offer. \*Questions on the same line are more of follow-up questions in case she didn't answer them in her response.

What does your job entail? What are your specific duties, average day-to-day, special event days?

How long have you been at Antelope Island State Park?

Did you start as Assistant Manager?

How long have you been a manager?

How many people do you oversee directly? Indirectly?

How did you get your management position? Were you promoted from within? Did you apply?

Do you have a manager?

Would you ever want to work your way up into Jeremy's position (Park Manager)?

Were you inspired by anyone in particular (someone in a management position or a natural leader)?

What was the management style like before you and Jeremy (Park Manager) came into 'power' (for lack of a better word)?

How do you define management?

Do you lead as well as manage? Do you think they are one in the same?

Explain Katz model first.

Does your job require that you use more technical, human, or conceptual skills?

What are some experiences that have taught you to think more conceptually within the parks system?

If human skills are the most used in your position, were there ever times when you had to take more of an approach with technical or conceptual skills?

What are some of your managerial skills that you see as strengths or weaknesses?

How do you know when you can delegate, and when you need to coach them along?

How do you adapt to your employees?

Do you have friendships with your employees?

Do you think it's important to know the personalities of employees?

Has anyone here ever had to take a personality test as part of training?

How do you feel about the mission, vision, and goals of Antelope Island State Park?

How do you involve your employees and volunteers with the mission, vision, and goals?

What motivates you? Extrinsic or Intrinsic?

Is motivating volunteers vs employees different? How so?

What do you do to motivate an unmotivated employee? Do you use the same method for everyone?

How do you motivate yourself on the days when you feel less motivated?

Will you tell me about a success story that you have had in relation to motivation?

What are some things that you have to plan as an assistant manager? Obstacles?

Are you a part of the interviewing process?

What do you do to try and pull from a strong applicant pool?

What are things you look for in an applicant?

What makes a good employee?

Are certain positions hard to fill? Does seasonal work affect this?

Do you discipline your employees?

How do you address concerns?

How do you show your employees appreciation? What about volunteer appreciation?

Tell me about the employee evaluation process.

Do you have a self-evaluation?

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