

Whitney Reid Pennell

RECOGNIZED AS BOARDROOM'S EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR FOR 2018

By Kevin Fry



When Whitney Pennell stands in front of a group of private club employees to present one of her popular, award-winning training sessions, she sees sitting in front of her the past, the present and the future.

She sees the past because she recognizes herself in the group. She was once an employee in the hospitality industry herself. Beginning as a server, Whitney put herself through college working at various jobs in hotels and restaurants.

As fate would have it, while working as a catering manager for a hotel company, a friend's father invited her to the country club, where he was a member, for a round of golf. Coincidentally, she met the club manager that day, and six months later he recruited her to join the staff. Then, 10 years later, after a successful management career in hotels, clubs and with Troon Golf, she took the plunge into the unknown and formed Reid Consulting Services, now known as RCS Hospitality Group.

She sees the present because she knows that the women and men in the room are the keystone not only to their clubs, but to the industry as a whole. Whitney's strong belief is that the long and storied tradition of private club service is as relevant today as it was in earlier eras. A clear message she always conveys to employees and management alike is that methods may change, but values are eternal.

The future

And she sees the future because preparing the world of private clubs for the dramatic changes that are on the horizon is her most urgent and important task. Whitney helps her clients understand that two things are undergoing significant transformations simultaneously: the nature and needs of new generations of club members and the nature and needs of new generations of employees.

Managers who have worked with her have learned that in order to understand what is happening inside the gates of the club, you first have to understand what's happening outside them.

Whitney believes that employee training is the key to unlocking that future. Whitney, and the trainers on her team, reinforce the value of every person, letting them know they are not alone, that they can do anything they put their mind to, that they are capable and appreciated.

Whitney has said, "I try to be mindful of the people in the room – that they have struggles, dreams, questions, limitations, hope, and aspirations of their own and if I can show them empathy, care, compassion and help them stretch their skills or mindset however slightly, it may motivate them to be the best version of themselves."

RCS emphasizes that training is not something you **did**, but something you **do**. The learning process is most effective with the communication of clear messages, presented consistently and repeatedly.

In the past, training was delivered either in person, on the job, or via a VHS tape or DVD, sometimes with a moderator. But that old approach no longer applies.

Whitney is pioneering the use of full-motion, interactive virtual training to help managers train faster, more frequently and provide a consistent training message. At the same time, RCS has brought training manuals into the 21st century, using more blended learning techniques, an approach, which is crucial for reaching young employees.

The flip side to getting new generations of **employees** ready to provide superior service is getting the club ready for a new generation of **members**.

That's been Whitney's focus for many years. RCS was founded with **the purpose** of responding to clubs needs in service; developing in people the understanding of club culture, service, best practices, and club traditions.

Whitney recognizes the importance of human connections and nothing highlights that value more than how she has touched her RCS team. RCS Chef Mary Howley describes Whitney as having a work ethic that doesn't quit and describes her as a true subject matter expert.

"When I first met Whitney several years ago, I was a chef in a club she was helping. A member of her team told me, 'understand that Whitney is kind and thoughtful and truly cares about this business and the people in it. She is an expert.' An expert? Quite a declaration, I thought. It did not take me years to realize how true a statement this is," Chef Mary related.

Chef Mary joined the RCS team a few years later and described how Whitney has developed the team of caring, engaged experts that she has.

Whitney asks each of us of each situation:

- What am I communicating?
- Is the content of what I am communicating accurate, relatable, and engaging?
- How can I better meet the needs of those we are training/coaching/mentoring?
- What are the best tools to achieve our goals and what options are available?
- Have I considered my own abilities, experience, and perspectives as a professional and my comfort level acting on that experience?
- What conscious choices can I make (outward attitude, body language, active listening) to make a difference to those we are training/mentoring/coaching?

That kind of impact has long been the hallmark of RCS, which is anchored in core values of honesty, transparency and open communication. It's why Whitney's work

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is respected by so many. Whitney has transformed RCS into one of the industry's leaders by applying those values to the wide range of services offered.

But perhaps Whitney's own words are the best way to explain why she's being honored here:

"We strive to become a partner with our customers using the hospitality principles we teach: empathy, compassion, understanding, helpfulness, and building trust.

"When I talk with the team at RCS, I tell them that we build trust by being honest. We won't steer the club wrong just to make a buck. If we can't help, we won't do the job. If we can't be effective, we won't take the job. If the club has unrealistic expectations, we tell them. We have been called the 'consulting company that cares' by our customers and trainees, and for that, I am very proud."

So many outstanding reasons why **Whitney Reid Pennell is BoardRoom's Educator of the Year for 2018.** **BR**

Kevin Fry, a family friend, (with contributions from the RCS team) is the author of this story about Whitney Reid Pennell.