

THE ART OF MANAGING PLANETARIUM ASSISTANTS

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When hiring or finding assistants to help operate the planetarium, don't hesitate to be picky. Finding someone who is dedicated, available, responsible, and talented is a must! Anyone who is lacking in any of these characteristics will cost you valuable time in training and rescheduling.

Talent comes in many different forms. It may not be necessary to hire someone who is knowledgeable about astronomy, as long as there is an interest in science and a passion for sharing it with others. Show presenters who have skill in communicating with the public and a flair for drama can be taught the information that they will need to give a good show. It is not always possible, on the other hand, to teach a soft-spoken amateur astronomer to give a good show. In addition, someone who has an elementary knowledge of astronomy and has been adequately trained by you may be less likely to “wing it,” and less likely to present information with mistakes or misleading statements.

You may pick up good volunteers and employees from local colleges, astronomy clubs, theatre acting groups, or even high schools. You may have to advertise. Unless there are already very talented eager individuals applying for a position, it may be best to get a good pool of applicants. If you know someone in a theater, technical, or astronomy department at a local university, you may ask them for help and recommendations.

Obviously, the commitment you spend in training your valuable employees and volunteers will pay off in the long run. After you have your array of show presenters trained, it may be tempting to start getting other work done and leave your trusted employees on their own. This may result in deterioration in the quality of your shows. Operators can pick up bad habits and bad information from each other; additionally, they may not think to tell you that “the star projector sometimes doesn't move” or other important matters. You should check in regularly with them, and plan on sitting in on their shows often. One way to manage an ongoing training process is to hold regular “meetings” with your staff. This not only provides an opportunity to set work schedules, but a time to review techniques, conduct technical training, answer questions, and the like. Positive and constructive communication is the key to acquiring and holding good help.

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