



INSIDER EXCLUSIVES

Why Everyone Benefits from Motorcoach Driver Training

By Ted Bravos

Everyone in the motorcoach industry knows that motorcoach drivers must pass rigorous safety and performance tests, yet there is much more to being a successful motorcoach driver than safe driving. Drivers are a fundamental part of a successful group tour. Their professionalism, attitude, and critical-thinking skills are essential to ensuring that every tour guest enjoys the experience and feels safe.

If you are an executive at a motorcoach company, you know that your drivers are the face of your company. You want tour guests to remember your brand and to speak favorably about it to the tour operator at the end of the trip in the tour questionnaire.

It's clear that a driver-training program will be of tremendous value to motorcoach operators, drivers, other employees, and customers. Such a program will also help boost driver morale, retention, and gratuities.

Whether on the coach or off, everything the driver does is a reflection of the culture and philosophy of his or her employer and the employer's desire to build long-term relationships with tour operators, tour directors, guides, and suppliers.

Driver training "helps our drivers better understand the dynamics between the tour guide and the driver and helps create the best possible customer experience," says John Busskohl, CEO, of Silverado Stages. His company requires his drivers to participate in training every year.

Any sound motorcoach driver-training program should teach a broad spectrum of valuable skills. The lessons should include but not be limited to the following:

- The psychology of group travel to help the driver understand his or her important role in a group tour's success
- Challenges in the dynamics between driver, tour director,

- guests, and suppliers that can "make or break" a tour and interpersonal techniques to build rapport
- Discussing driver "likes and dislikes" versus tour director "likes and dislikes"
- How to work with people when they are angry, frightened, or upset
- Problem-solving tools that can be applied immediately in any situation
- Subtle ways to handle various emergencies without alarming passengers
- How to turn problems into opportunities and maintain a positive attitude when logistical issues or emergencies occur
- How to brand the company so tour guests remember the name of the company, not just the name of its driver
- Identifying areas that need improvement and building on established motorcoach company standards and ethics to ensure passenger safety and satisfaction
- How to assist disabled guests in compliance with ADA
- Effective communications through eye contact, voice, body language, facial expression, and attitude

All in all, attending training will help drivers immediately get more enjoyment and satisfaction from their work and ultimately generate an increase in business for their employer.

Ted Bravos is CEO and cofounder of the International Tour Management Institute (ITMI). He helped to develop the first state-approved school designed specifically to train tour directors and guides. Since 1976 ITMI has trained travel and tourism professionals and has partnered with many ABA member motorcoach operators. To learn more, call (415) 957-9489, email travel@itmisf.com, or visit www.itmisf.com.