

A Possible Solution to Many Problems

There are a number of serious problems among the staff and interpretive programs at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island:

1. **Too many rangers and guides are tired, bored, or just “burned out.”** For years many have been conducting the same tours, answering the same questions, and introducing the same movies. Consequently, there is a high rate of absenteeism, interpretive contacts are shunned, informal interpretive opportunities are avoided; and worst of all, visitors often are treated brusquely, and even rudely. In addition, interpretive programs are frequently cancelled and assigned roving duties are ignored.
2. **At the Battery Park and Liberty State Park screening sites, informal interpretation is inadequate at best and usually non-existent. Simply stated, there is little, if any, effort being made at the screening sites to educate our visitors or help them plan their visit to either the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island.**

Part of the problem is that many of the guides at the screening sites are young people who have never worked at the Statue of Liberty or on Ellis Island, know little about what is offered at each site, and often view their job as an extension of the security activities at the sites (e.g. the Park Police and the Paragon Security staff) instead of as the park’s first effort at interpretation and education. In addition, they have not been instructed to distribute or make available our English and foreign language pamphlets about the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Consequently, many if not most of our visitors to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island come unprepared for how to spend their time and how to plan their day; and many don’t know what’s available on either of the two islands.

3. **There are substantial and indefensible inequities in the working conditions and work schedules among the four sites: Liberty Island, Ellis Island, and the screening sites at Battery Park, and Liberty State Park.**
 - For example, every day the rangers and guides who work at the screening sites have **no** project time or free time other than an hour for lunch. The rangers and guides at the Statue of Liberty may get one hour a week of “project time.” And meanwhile, the rangers and guides at Ellis Island often get hours and hours of free time every day. (See attached analysis comparing the “project time” scheduled at the Statue of Liberty vis-à-vis Ellis Island.)
 - The Battery Park screening site is virtually unheated and has no air conditioning; Liberty State Park is both heated and air conditioned. Parts of Liberty Island can be extremely cold in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer while Ellis Island is heated and air conditioned virtually all the time.
 - Among most of the rangers and guides, the assumption is that those who have been assigned to work at the screening sites are either very young, or they are being punished. And it is believed people who are switched between Liberty and Ellis are not moved just to balance staffing requirements or the talents of different people, but because people are being punished, disciplined, or banished.

To solve these specific problems, I believe the park should consider treating all the interpretive rangers and guides as members of one interpretive effort, and begin rotating them from site to site on a regular, predictable schedule.

There are two ways in which staff could be rotated:

- a. Everyone could be placed on a “team” of co-workers, and the entire team would rotate together from site to site on a regular basis. For example, if there was an average of 20 rangers needed at Liberty Island, 10 at Ellis Island, and 10 at the two screening sites, then teams of 10 people would rotate perhaps every month or every two months from site to site. Every six months or every year the make-up of each team could be changed --- which would defuse any concerns about who was being placed on which team and for how long.
- b. Another option would be to have every person rotated on a regular basisbut not necessarily as part of a “team”. The goal might be to have everyone work two months on Liberty Island, followed by two months on Ellis Island, and then one month at the Battery followed by one month at Liberty State Park. During the course of a year, everyone would have worked in each site three times, and would have been exposed to all the seasons in virtually every site.

Some Possible Conclusions, Problems and Issues:

- **Rotating all the rangers and guides on a regular basis might solve many problems:**
 - There might be less “burn out” among the staff since everyone would have exposure to different sites with different requirements and different interpretive challenges.
 - There would be the ongoing stimulation of adjusting to different locations, different issues, and the challenge of telling different interpretive stories.
 - Rangers and guides would feel they were being treated more fairly and equitably; they would know everyone was being rotated regularly with no favoritism or discrimination; no one could complain about being “stuck” at some particular work site; and no one would feel they were being unfairly disciplined or punished by being sent to any one, particular site.
 - Everyone would become comfortably cross trained, enabling them to be shifted from location to location at a moments notice to resolve temporary staffing problems.
 - Visitors would be exposed to experienced, knowledgeable rangers and guides from the very beginning of their visit to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island until the very end, and they would benefit from being able to talk with skilled and experienced rangers and guides throughout their visit---from when they waited in security screening lines until they left for the last ferry.

- **Rotating everyone regularly and treating everyone in the same way, would defuse most individual complaints and any possible union concerns.**
- **Some will argue that the most highly paid and most experienced rangers should not have to work at the screening sites and that this might be a waste of resources.** On the other hand, currently many of the highest paid rangers at Ellis Island are working less than five hours a day. And by rotating the higher paid rangers among all the sites, it would place some of the most experienced and highest paid rangers in contact with far more visitors and in a position to do what they have been trained to do---namely to interpret and educate.

Bruce E. Schundler
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