

## *Change Management Coaching Spells Success for John's Island Club During Critical Upgrade*

Club brings in Charlotte-based O'Sullivan Wright to conduct leadership development during shift

In early 2007, Brian Kroh, general manager at John's Island Club (JIC) in Vero Beach, Florida, knew he was about to face some far-reaching challenges. The 40-year-old private club was about to tear down its beach club to make way for a new, expanded \$32-million facility on the same site – without any decline in the services offered to its 1,400 members during the 18-month demolition and construction period.

But Kroh and his staff -- consisting of about 550 during the height of the season – were committed, not only to maintain the types of services offered, but also to provide them at the same high-caliber level members were accustomed to.

Furthermore, Kroh was determined that when the new facility opened, everyone and everything would operate perfectly from day one – despite working in a new space with new equipment and new systems and 50 new employees. “I wanted our members to walk in and say, ‘Wow!’”

To help the JIC team achieve these daunting goals, Kroh turned to Charlotte-based Joan Wright, a master certified coach and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in leadership



*JIC's beach club before renovation.*

development and executive coaching. Her company, O'Sullivan Wright, Inc., has worked for such Fortune 500 firms as Wells Fargo, Yahoo, and Deloitte.

Wright worked with JIC during a two-year period, helping management and staff understand in advance the challenges they would face and then putting programs and systems in place that enabled them to rise above

these challenges. When the new beach club opened in November 2008, staff and members agreed that their expectations had been exceeded.

In order to design a change management process and facilitate a change initiative from the inside out, Wright used a variety of techniques blended together. That included coaching Kroh to enhance his leadership skills. “You can't inspire others if you are not inspired,” Wright says. “Identifying Brian's strengths and areas where he needed improvement was powerful and gave him the confidence to become better able to lead the way for change.

“Together, we designed a strategy and process to get the attention of the senior management team and helped them become better managers and leaders.”



**Brian Kroh**  
*General Manager, John's Island Club – Vero Beach, FL*



**O'Sullivan Wright, Inc.**  
• Executive Coaching  
• Leadership Development  
• Talent Management

O'Sullivan Wright

704-332-9263  
[www.osullivanwright.com](http://www.osullivanwright.com)

The vision they developed for the first year was 'To Play a Bigger Game.' Wright spent time with each of Kroh's 11 direct reports to get feedback about what was going on in their departments and determine what shifts they felt they had to make 'to play a bigger game.'

Explains Wright, "I became a thought partner on how each of them could lead in new and different ways to make the vision come to life."



Joan Wright

For example, Kroh changed the way he ran staff meetings. Instead of being just information exchanges, meetings became geared more towards the vision and to solving problems then and there. "Everyone came to expect that they would work through issues together for the larger shared goal," Wright says. "They realized they were interdependent and supported each other in places where they didn't connect."

"Joan spent time with my direct reports, developing their trust so they were willing to open up and talk honestly with her," Kroh says. "She used a variety of ways to pull out problems and then followed up with intermediary visits."

Wright's all-encompassing approach also meant involving employees at every level throughout JIC. In October 2007, an all-staff event was held with the theme of 'Having Fun with Change.' "This made the process a collaborative one," Wright notes. "Employees felt they owned the theme and understood the issues to be tackled."

To involve workers whose first language is Spanish or Creole, Wright brought in translators to ensure their voices were heard and that they felt valued.

"All this revealed classic tensions from the five restaurants front- and back-of-the-house teams and during peak seasons when master calendaring created conflicts between golf and tennis staffs," Wright says. "But it also broke down barriers and gave everyone reasons why they needed to work together as a team -- they had to have their act together, or they would fail. It was a matter of balancing what they needed for themselves with what the club needed."

In the second year while under construction, the vision evolved to making JIC 'The Best Place to Live, Work and Play.' To achieve that, everyone's main goal became creating personal connections among members, staff and vendor partners. Employees were told: "making a personal connection is an important part of our day-to-day activity, and ultimately our success at maintaining a satisfied membership."



JIC's beach club after renovation

To make this happen throughout the club, each department developed and committed to taking specific actions. “We were able to put systems in place for communicating within departments, but also across departments,” Wright says.

“For example, we learned that it was best to include the catering services department and golf maintenance department in the planning of golf tournaments. By having these two departments attend the golf staff’s planning meetings, tournament logistics became a smooth operation.”

Kroh adds that his management team keeps the top gap items out in front as a reminder. “Follow-up is important – you have to commit to that,” he says. “We actively use the tools Joan has provided us, and appreciate her ongoing encouragement over the phone.”

For Kroh, the program’s success was demonstrated by club membership remaining full during and after the construction. From the opening, the new beach club operated near capacity throughout the first season with accolades for both the facility and service. Kroh attributes the success of retaining staff and maintaining high member satisfaction during construction and throughout the first season to the work with Wright. Preparing both the staff and membership for change in advance set the expectation and desired results. When unexpected construction or operational surprises occurred, people knew how to react positively and productively. Kroh states, “Changes were coming so fast that change itself became the norm. I’m glad we were ready!”

This was the second time Wright had worked with an organization from the hospitality industry, but she says certain principles apply regardless of the field. “There are fundamental truths about leadership and how change management works that apply across industries.”

Kroh was interested in something even more fundamental. “Joan and I have the same values and ethics. I wanted someone who would speak to me honestly and who didn’t have a hidden agenda. And it helps to bring in someone with a different perspective who works from a successful business model from outside the industry.”

Wright says this comprehensive approach is a long-term commitment, lasting at least nine months – it’s not just presenting a one-day seminar and then leaving. And even though budgets are tight these days due to the sagging economy, it’s now more important than ever. “If you drop your commitment to your employees or to developing high-potential leaders, or you stop owning your vision and your relationship with customers, you’ll be in trouble when the economy comes back.

“You don’t want to lose your game or your ability to be inspirational, innovative and meet your customers’ needs,” she adds.

For more information about John’s Island Club, please visit [www.johnsislandclub.org](http://www.johnsislandclub.org). For information about O’Sullivan Wright leadership development and executive coaching, please visit [www.osullivanwright.com](http://www.osullivanwright.com).