



Post (Busy) Season Review:

Celebrating Success & Seeking Improvement

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As the calendar year draws to a close, rehabilitators often reflect on the past season. Finalizing annual rehab reports for state and federal wildlife agencies is one way they review the rehab year, since these reports include information such as: species admitted, number of intakes, disposition, and so forth. Rehabilitators may recount the amount of time spent on rehab tasks including intakes, feedings, cleaning, releasing, hotlines, talking with and/or educating the public, etc. Others may examine expenses, funds available, budget needs, and how these compare to previous years. While these considerations are useful, it may be helpful to do more than ‘run the numbers.’ For example, organizations such as sports teams and businesses often implement a ‘post season/annual review’ or ‘retrospective.’ They may utilize these analyses to highlight accomplishments or setbacks and to address items that may need to be addressed or modified to prepare for the following year. Rehabilitators may find post-season reviews helpful as well!

Post-season reviews are different from the frequent problem-solving and assessment rehabilitators do on a daily basis with general practices throughout the year. While daily problem solving is essential ‘in the moment,’ those observations and long-term ideas can be forgotten after hectic busy seasons wind down. It may be hard to find the energy to conduct a broad post-season review after an exhausting season, even knowing it could be of benefit for subsequent years.

It helps to conduct these broader reviews while the insights are still fresh in the mind, but also to permit some passage of time to allow for perspective. Notes taken during or promptly after the situation or case, including solutions and remaining questions/options, can help after rushed (and possibly emotional) situations are in the rear-view mirror. The post-season review often considers tangible results, processes, time, costs, and productivity. It can also include various ‘intangibles,’ such as how we felt about what we did, whether or not we were prepared, and if and how much we need to change for the next year. Finally, it can examine what else we can do better – for the wildlife in care, the public, ourselves, and others involved (i.e., volunteers, interns, staff).

Post-season reviews can be conducted by an individual rehabilitator, team, or organization, which decides on which topics or questions they want to explore. The review can be first prepared individually, then expanded to others as desired. The information may be compiled and shared as a list, without identifying 'who said what.' The next step is trying to identify and understand possible causes of difficulties - without 'laying blame.' If several people are involved in the review, they may choose to have a meeting to discuss the issues, identify causes, and then develop strategies to remedy issues that need improvement. Involving a team can increase understanding, identify possible solutions, as well as develop 'ownership' and commitment to future solutions.

It helps to reflect about the reasons and causes of the issues and make notes over several weeks, rather than assuming key items will be remembered. Consider sharing or brainstorming a privately prepared list of possible strategies or solutions with another rehabilitator – or repeating the exercise with a small team. Selecting a limited number of topics helps the review stay within a set time frame and makes it less likely to become overwhelming.

Following are ten sample questions that could provide insight when included in a post season review. You might decide to pick just a couple of topics of special interest, or work through many of them – or add others. The topics can include accomplishments or setbacks – and how to prepare for those.

- 1) **Effectiveness.** What were the most effective things I/we did this year?
- 2) **Surprises.** What curve balls occurred in rehab this year? Did they impact my/our rehab care or operations, and if yes, how? Any changes I/we would consider based on those surprises?
- 3) **New practices or techniques.** What did I/we learn this year that helped improve our rehab activities in some of the following? (list 5 minimum)
 - A. Native species admitted to rehab (e.g., natural history, typical reasons for admission, common health conditions)
 - B. Preventing and reducing situations resulting wildlife needing rehab
 - C. Arranging effective and timely renesting or reunions with young wildlife or for 'surrender' of wildlife being kept the public
 - D. Arranging effective and timely transfer of wildlife to rehab facilities, or referring if needed
 - E. Caging or facilities
 - F. Nutritional needs, diets, food preparation methods (e.g., weighing, reconstitution), microbiota support
 - G. Feeding practices, instruments, timing, sanitation, food quality and storage
 - H. Methods to prevent or reduce health problems or medical conditions develop during animal's time in rehab
 1. Injuries during care
 2. Aspiration
 3. Diet selection, preparation,
 4. Overfeeding or underfeeding
 5. Infections
 6. Parasites or diseases
 7. Slow or stunted growth
 8. Others?
- 4) **Challenges faced.** What were some of the difficulties, frustrations, pressure points faced with rehab operations this year?

- A. Did capacity pressures (time, space, people) affect my/our operations, care, results, emotions, energy?
 - B. Did I/we have enough help to get the work done at the right time and in the best way to benefit the animals in present and future? Or was it 'too much' at times? If so, why and what are options for next year?
 - C. Recruiting, training, coaching and monitoring people involved in the rehab activities? Did we have enough people? Were they prepared? Did I/we have time to prepare them?
 - D. Did we have the funds and other resources to get the job done before a crisis event? If not, what are some options?
 - E. Were we adequately prepared for 'surprises' and 'unexpected situations', especially large scale and affecting many (e.g., weather events, disease outbreaks, toxins, economic strains, vet limitations/unavailability, workload pressures [personal changes], supply chain disruptions) with possible backup plans 'just in case'.
 - F. Did we have enough and appropriate facilities, equipment, supplies, medical first aid supplies, food and diets before they were urgently needed.
 - G. Were we adequately prepared in case of 'workload surges', such as personal 'life' changes (e.g., health, jobs, housing, environmental conditions), availability of rehab facilities (e.g., closures, 'downsizing', regulations), with effective backup plans 'just in case.'
- 5) **Release.** How were preparations for release? Were the animals ready in size, development, health, behavior, wildness, etc. to survive independently in the wild? How about release locations? Protocols? Anything to change for next year?
- 6) **Fatalities and euthanasia.** What contributed to fatalities? Euthanasia methods, timing? Decision making process?
- 7) **Administration.** How was my/our recordkeeping, such as timeliness, accuracy, completeness, effectiveness – and did it help us at the time with care, decision-making, problem-solving and later analyzing and improvements?
- 8) **Caregiver health/well-being.** Did I/we take honor self care during the year, including good diet, sleep, exercise, personal health, time with family, friends, in nature. That is, did we take care of ourselves as we were caring for wildlife? What if anything needs to be addressed for next year?
- 9) **Anything else?** Other topics or questions you or your team choose.
- 10) **Take a deep breath.** How did I/we feel at the 'end of busy season,' in terms of energy, commitment, sense of accomplishment, etc.? Am I looking forward to the next rehab season. If not, why? What might change?

Plan the post-season review at a location away from the rehab to avoid interruptions. Set a time frame and try to stay on point, with time for supporting and learning. Try to not get overly serious or overwhelming. Consider ways to make such sessions energizing, fun and not just another chore, perhaps by including food, 'awards', or upbeat stories from the year. Some people prefer to hold such review meetings in person. It may be more convenient to hold a virtual meeting, though it may not have as much spontaneous 'connecting' as in person. Regardless, make notes about the insights, concerns, discussion. Identify and make notes of possible actions, responsibilities, timing. Keep the notes and plans for several years to guide actions and identify further adjustments (don't just get rid of them).

A post-season review certainly can help identify and celebrate many accomplishments and successes – which we all need! It also can help identify items we want to change – so we don't let them slide and be forgotten. A review can help us plan for things to improve upon, as well as make preparations before the next 'busy season,' to minimize scrambling to respond to the unexpected. Working on such 'reviews' with others can help build on their insights and enhance teams to help wildlife and the rehab community.

Author

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