



# *Going for Custom*

AchieveGlobal's Ana Montalvo ran a 1/4-mile leg of the Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Torch Relay on December 8, 2001, in Miami, Florida.



The 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City will be remembered for record-breaking athletic prowess, electrifying competition, and the thrilling emergence of new superstars such as Apolo Anton Ohno and Sarah Hughes. But for people who attended the Games, another aspect of the events proves just as memorable: the customer service provided by Olympic volunteers.

Jamison Prime, a Washington, D.C. attorney who attended the Olympics for the first time, says, "The enthusiasm of the volunteers made the visit even more pleasant. I'm not sure what we were expecting, but everything was so well organized, and the people were so friendly. It far exceeded anything we anticipated."

Marlene Burchill of Bloomfield, Michigan, agrees: "Everywhere we went, we felt like royalty. I couldn't believe how many people were there to assist us in every way.... The United States should

be proud of how it put these Olympics together."

Such was the quality of service supplied by the volunteers in Salt Lake City—who served as parking lot attendants, ushers, ticket takers, and cleanup crews—that it became a story for the media. NBC's *Today* show aired a segment on the impact of customer service training at the Olympics, and the *Wall Street Journal* ran a story about the kindness and competency of Olympic volunteers. The headline cried, "Hey, You, Freeze! Pretty Please." Reporter Barry Newman wrote, "Post-terror Games are tense but 'niceness training' makes being here...nice.... Every last [volunteer] is as nice as nice can be."

But what happened in Utah during two weeks in February was about a lot more than just niceness. It was about preparing 35,000 Olympic volunteers to deliver efficient, considerate, culturally sensitive service to every spectator. Like most endeavors that appear almost effortless, it took a great deal of planning. And its success placed soft-skills training on the podium in the world arena.

# er Service Gold

The Olympic Winter Games' 35,000 volunteers from all walks of life needed training in customer service for visitors from around the world.

By Mary Patrick Walker

From the outset, Utah's Olympic organizers wanted spectators to remember the Games not only for the competition, but also as a positive total experience. So in October 1999, the Salt Lake Organizing Committee began talks about training Olympic volunteers with AchieveGlobal, a Tampa, Florida-based training and consulting company. AchieveGlobal was one of four training companies to submit a proposal to SLOC and make a presentation to its senior team. In March 2000, AchieveGlobal was named as the official staff and volunteer training supplier for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games and became the first company to ever hold such a position.

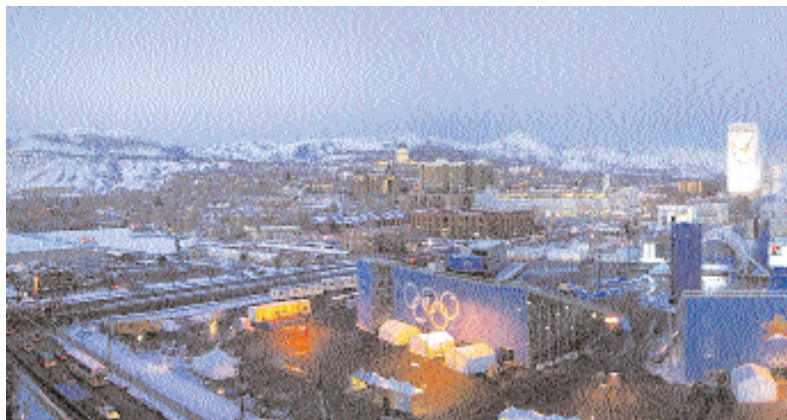
"This is an honor, of course, for AchieveGlobal," said CEO Dave Bornt at the time. "But more than that, it recognizes the importance of training and the permanent changes in behavior that it can bring about—changes that can be brought to any interpersonal interaction."

AchieveGlobal, experienced in understanding customer service within a global context, provides skills training and consulting services in customer service, leadership, teamwork, and sales performance in more than 70 countries, with programs in 40 different languages and dialects. The company also has experience working with large organizations, helping translate their visions and strategies so that employees understand how their roles are critical components of their companies' success.

"We've worked with organizations, starting with their vision and translating that into a lasting service legacy," says AchieveGlobal marketing director Colleen O'Sullivan, who managed all aspects of AchieveGlobal's relationship with SLOC.

"We already had the infrastructure and experience SLOC needed to put together a volunteer workforce. The proposal we drew up for them was based on work we'd done with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and United States Department of Agriculture, which focused on implementing large-scale training," says O'Sullivan.

Ed Eynon, senior vice president of human resources and international relations for SLOC, says that a professional skills development company proved a perfect fit with the Olympic Games. "The job of raising up a volunteer workforce almost



## Did You Know?

Number of all athletes who competed in the first Winter  
Number of athletes from the United States who com

Source/Time



overnight is a huge one, and AchieveGlobal shared our vision of what training could accomplish," says Eynon. "SLOC understood that volunteers' skill and attitude could make or break a visitor's experience [at the Games]."

CEO Bornt notes that AchieveGlobal aimed to provide volunteers with far more than customer service skills: "If they were to truly understand the overarching vision for the Games, each had to know how his or her individual contribution fit into the big picture, care about that vision, and then demonstrate the skill to deliver on it."

The volunteers would be critical in creating the environment in which the athletes could perform at their best, supporting the smooth operations of each venue, and welcoming and taking care of thousands of guests. The volunteer effort began with a massive recruiting drive in March 2000. In Salt Lake City, ads for volunteer opportunities were placed on television and radio, as well as in flyers



Olympic Games in Chamonix, France: **258**  
peted in this year's Winter Games: **211**



Collectible pins commemorating AchieveGlobal's role in the Olympic Games

and newspapers. SLOC also recruited volunteers worldwide from its Internet site. More than 68,000 people responded. All completed applications, then were interviewed by SLOC HR staff. The criteria for selection included the ability to work all 17 days of the Games as well as being personable and open in the job interview, a demonstration of good people skills. Volunteers also had to be at least 18 years old, speak and write English, and be either a United States citizen or have an appropriate U.S. Visa. Eventually, 35,000 volunteers were selected. The challenge then became how to train college students, business professionals, retirees, and teachers to provide effective and impressive customer service in jobs that most had never done before.

For example, Scott Dunkley, a tax manager from Salt Lake City, worked as an event services host at Utah Olympic Park, the venue for the bobsled, luge, and skeleton events. He did everything from security screening to ticket taking and more.

“The closest I’d ever come to that type of job or that type of atmosphere was in junior high when I sold soft drinks at college football games,” says Dunkley. “As an event services host, I had ample opportunities to practice my customer service skills—from warning visitors to watch their step on icy patches and helping disabled visitors in and out of their vehicles to checking bags and monitoring the crowds going through metal detectors. My goal was to help all visitors have an extraordinary experience.”

### Planning the work, working the plan

To meet the training challenge, AchieveGlobal and SLOC worked together to develop key service concepts. Together, they created two mnemonics—CHARGE and WARMTH—to help volunteers remember the key points of good service skills. O’Sullivan says the terms came out of collaboration efforts between AchieveGlobal and SLOC officials from May to September 2001. Regular meetings were held each month, but O’Sullivan says that “as with any creative project,” the two organizations usually communicated daily.

AchieveGlobal identified core competencies for the volunteers—such as listening and communication skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to separate their feelings from solutions—and then developed content with skill models to deliver on the competencies. Training on the latter competency proved especially helpful for volunteers.

For example, Rachel Gremillion, a college student from Colorado, was working as a hostess at the ski-jumping event when high winds forced it to be rescheduled. “Visitors had the choice of walking a mile down an icy path or waiting in a long line for a bus, and they were ticked off,” says Gremillion. She used her service skills to empathize with the visitors. “I acknowledged their frustration and tried to remain upbeat and positive, and I gave them a phone number to contact for information on the rescheduled event.”

AchieveGlobal helped SLOC select 33 facilitators who would conduct the training sessions with volunteers. Most facilitators weren’t professional trainers—the job was part-time for minimal pay—and they came from various professional back-



AchieveGlobal employees cheer on the sidelines for the Olympic Torch Relay. They posted banners signed by employees, customers, and attendees of the 2001 ASTD EXPO in support of the Olympic volunteers and U.S. athletes.

## Taking **CHARGE** of volunteer motivation; Responding to visitors with **WARMTH**

The mission of the Olympic volunteer team was to be the “best Games workforce ever.” As a motivator and reminder to volunteers of the traits needed to achieve that mission, AchieveGlobal, working with SLOC, coined the mnemonic CHARGE, which reminds volunteers to be

**C**ommitted in order to complete assignments, support team members, and follow through.

**H**elpful by proactively seeking opportunities to help, knowing information and resources, and resolving challenges.

**A**daptable enough to use common sense and logic, flexible and responsive to change and challenges, and willing to do whatever it takes.

**R**espectful by treating every individual with respect, honoring cultural differences, and respectfully hosting people with disabilities.

**G**racious enough to act as hosts to welcome the world, being friendly, reaching out and smiling, responding with warmth and genuine caring.

**E**njoy the Olympic experience by having fun, celebrating and laughing, using humor to overcome challenges; share joy, excitement, enthusiasm, pride, and passion.

A set of actions for resolving tough challenges, WARMTH helped volunteers serve visitors who were frustrated, angry, confused, disappointed, or upset.

**W**illing to help. Be willing to help guests regardless of the difficulty of the situations or people’s level of frustration.

**A**cknowledge and assure. Acknowledge guests’ concerns and assure them that you appreciate the importance of the situation by expressing empathy.

**R**estate to clarify. Restate guests’ concerns to clarify that you understand their issues prior to offering a solution.

**M**ee the need. Meet the need by directly resolving the challenge or by using all available resources to find the best resolution.

**T**Hank you. Thank guests for their patience, understanding, and participation in the solution.

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grounds. Because of their day jobs, the facilitators conducted the training on weekday evenings and Saturdays. Facilitator applicants were recruited through newspaper ads in Salt Lake City and on the SLOC Website. Each facilitator was interviewed, and those who showed enthusiasm, ability to teach, and willingness to work long hours were selected. “We took those with raw talent and shaped it,” says O’Sullivan. “We’re in the business of training professional and non-professional facilitators, offering skills to make training captivating.”

Each of the 33 trainers worked nine to 12 hours a week from February to August 2001, and then again in January 2002, concentrating on making the training high energy, suitable for adult learners, fun for the trainees, as well as about applying new skills. AchieveGlobal prepared and produced the training material, including information about Olympic history, event venues, and sports at the Games. The company also helped develop a customized video to assist with skill development, providing scripts for the part of the video that deals with customer service training, and produced three workbooks covering a wide variety of customer service topics (such as specifics on performing each job, how to keep a respectful attitude with rude visitors, and simple reminders to say *please* and *thank you*). A pocket guide served as a reinforcement tool that provided volunteers with information when they needed it so they could solve a visitor’s problem on the spot. The 34-page guide included maps of the venues, a schedule of sporting events, pictograms of all signage, and tips for cultural awareness.

During the training of the 35,000 volunteers, Jim Wilcox, a training coach with AchieveGlobal, stayed in contact via email with the 33 facilitators, providing coaching, as well as stories and energizers for the train-



The **pocket guides** carried by all volunteers reminded them to follow the **visitor’s lead**.

sessions of service training. Each volunteer spent roughly six to 10 hours in training in addition to putting their regular lives on hold for 17 days. That kind of dedication took effort, but volunteers say it was worth it. Volunteer Robert Wyss of Salt Lake City praises the instruction as “engaging, fun, and informative.” Patsy McNamara, a retiree from Salt Lake City, agrees: “The volunteer training was excellent, very motivating. And the staff showed so much enthusiasm. They knew how to run it so [that] everything came together in the end.” McNamara says the decision to volunteer was an easy one, calling her service at the Games a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Upon completion of training, volunteers worked test events, which served as trial runs to try out their new service skills. Those events demonstrated that the training was on target and also reinforced the value of the pocket guides.

Volunteer Dunkley says the training helped him understand cultural differences among spectators who traveled to Salt Lake City from around the world. “I never thought that what [I] would normally consider a friendly gesture might be offensive to some people,” he

ing. SLOC also hired a professional trainer based in Salt Lake City to work with AchieveGlobal on the project and provide classroom coaching to trainers during the sessions.

Because thousands of volunteers had to be trained, sessions were scheduled in waves. Occurring in February, May, and August of 2001, each wave consisted of approximately 10,000 trainees. Each facilitator taught about 20 classes per wave, with 15 volunteers in each class—translating to about 660 classes per wave. Each facilitator trained, on average, 900 volunteers.

In addition to job-specific and venue-specific training, volunteers were required to attend three two-hour

# Safety First

The security at the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City was tighter than at any other athletic event anytime, anywhere. Here are some fast facts:

- The U.S. Secret Service, FBI, and Federal Emergency Management Agency worked together to plan counter-terrorist security for the Olympics.
- More than US\$300 million went towards security, making up one in every six dollars spent on the Games.
- Security forces outnumbered athletes 6 to 1, with the number of federal, state, and local officials; military personnel; and volunteers working on security totaling about 15,000 people.
- The FAA created a 45-mile radius no-fly zone around Salt Lake City for commercial and private planes. Surveillance aircraft circled overhead, and F-16 fighter jets were on standby nearby.

- Counter-terrorist technology included fencing systems, electronic surveillance, x-ray equipment, contraband detection systems, and more.
- Any visitors entering the seven-block pedestrian zone were searched with x-ray equipment, and their bags were searched by hand.
- The 861 Olympic medals were stored in a secure vault protected by security cameras, infrared scanners, and facial-recognition technology like that used at the 2001 Super Bowl.
- The FBI and homeland security directors praised Utah's planning; Attorney General Ashcroft said the state was so well prepared for the Olympic Games that they could be held there regularly.

◀ Sources/ [SaltLake2002.com](#), [Deseret News](#), [USA Today](#), [eTime](#)

says, explaining how he learned not to point using one finger or wave hello to anyone at the Games. Those were two of the “more poignant examples of cultural sensitivity emphasized during training,” he says, “because [they] illustrated the notion that one size doesn't necessarily fit all.”

The cultural awareness training covered more than just hand waving. Because accepted practices for behavior with someone you've just met vary by country and even by region, the pocket guides carried by all volunteers reminded them to follow the visitor's lead regarding eye contact, handshakes, and personal space. It also reminded them to avoid slang, always speak to the person rather than to the interpreter, and never discuss religion, politics, or other controversial topics.

Everything was falling into place. And then came September 11.

## Security and spirit

The Olympic Games in Salt Lake City attracted 9,000 members of the press, 700 heads of state, 2,500 athletes, and a worldwide television audience of 2.5 billion. Most of those people would've watched, attended, and participated regardless of the terrorist attacks in the United States. But after

those events on 9-11, the Olympic Games fell under even more scrutiny. Says O'Sullivan, “What will always make these Games unique is that they came in the aftermath of 9-11. The United States and the world were focused on these Games because of the need for the highest level of security in Winter Games history.

“The media focused on the need to ensure that guests felt a sense of security and safety. In that environment, customer service skills became even more critical as volunteers tried to help spectators feel the spirit of the Games amid increased security and cautions.” The *Wall Street Journal* noted that though security was tight, workers made waiting in line for security checks pleasant and cordial. SLOC's Eynon comments that the attitude of the volunteers brushed off on the armed guards who checked his car each morning and then sent him off with a wave and a “Have a nice day.”

The volunteers' customer service skills played out in thousands of ways. For Games visitor Lisa Kircon from Little Rock, Arkansas, the volunteers were a constant help. “I was pregnant and couldn't do a lot of walking between venues,” she says. “The volunteers were very kind, offering me a place to rest when I needed it and just showing genuine concern for my well being.”

O'Sullivan credits a good training plan and perfect execution by the volunteers. "It's so gratifying to hear about how helpful and friendly the volunteers were during the Games," she says. "Most people don't realize that the majority of volunteers didn't have glamorous jobs. They worked long hours in tedious tasks under some very cold climate conditions but were still able to apply what they learned from the training because they understood how what they did connected to the overall impression of the Games." Says Dunkley, "I worked 13 days straight, either the morning shift from 5 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. or the afternoon shift from 1 to 8:30. One morning, it was -9 degrees fahrenheit; another day, it was 40 degrees." Yet, he calls his volunteer service "a chance in a lifetime."

O'Sullivan says the experience helped illustrate the importance of soft-skills training to a worldwide audience. "If it was important for the Olympic Games, which lasts for only 17 days, it's certainly important for businesses," she says.

AchieveGlobal Greece is currently in talks with the Athens Olympic Committee about the possibility of partnering to provide service training for the 2004 Summer Games.

SLOC's Eynon says the training helped achieve what the 2002 Winter Games organizers set out to accomplish. "We believe we are raising the standard of excellence for volunteers that will extend to future Olympic Games," he says. "The main goal was to ensure that volunteers received training that would enhance their ability to deal with visitors from around the globe. Based on the reactions we've received so far, I think we more than met the goal." TD

*Mary Patrick Walker is corporate communications manager for AchieveGlobal; [www.achieveglobe.com](http://www.achieveglobe.com).*