



## DIRECTOR OF GUEST SERVICES

Grand Rapids, Michigan

**John Ball Zoo** is the one of the top five most attended cultural institutions in Michigan — a 100+ acre urban oasis in Grand Rapids welcoming more than 700,000 guests each year. With a culture defined by purpose and impact and tremendous growth opportunity ahead, including the prospect of a new aquarium, the Zoo is seeking a **Director of Guest Services** to architect its guest-facing commercial operations: leading the teams and strategies that drive revenue, deliver exceptional experiences, and fuel the mission.

- 700,000+ Annual Guests
- AZA-Accredited Institution
- 100 + Acre Urban Campus in Grand Rapids
- New Aquarium Potential
- Growing Organization — 140+ Full-Time Staff

- Reports to the Chief Operating Officer
- Departments: Food & Beverage, Admissions, Retail, Private Events, Membership, Guest Experiences
- Oversees 6 Managers + 300+ Seasonal Staff
- Key Member of the Zoo Leadership Team

### WHY THIS ROLE IS COMPELLING

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***This role is uniquely suited for a leader who values:***

- The chance to shape guest services operations during a defining period of growth — including a transformational aquarium
- Deep ownership of revenue strategy across food & beverage, retail, admissions, private events, and membership
- A voice with Zoo leadership in helping guide future strategic direction
- A mission-driven culture where purpose fuels engagement and people genuinely love where they work
- An affordable, welcoming community in Grand Rapids — one of the Midwest's fastest-growing cities

## ARE YOU ... ?

- **A Revenue Driver** – Data-savvy, commercially focused, P&L-minded
- **A People Leader** – Servant-hearted, clear communicator, team builder
- **An Operator** – Systems thinker, detail-oriented, accountable
- **A Mission Believer** – Customer-focused, community-oriented, conservation-aligned
- **A Change Agent** – Confident, entrepreneurial, not afraid to raise the bar

## ABOUT JOHN BALL ZOO

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Founded in 1891 on a scenic hillside in the heart of Grand Rapids, John Ball Zoo connects more than 700,000 guests annually to wildlife, conservation, and each other. Home to 220 animal species and a robust lineup of experiences and both public and private events, JBZ has undergone remarkable transformation in recent years — growing from a county-owned institution into a thriving nonprofit with 140+ full-time staff, national visibility, and a landmark aquarium expansion in development. The culture is built on impact, integrity, and a genuine sense of family.

## CANDIDATE STRENGTHS, SKILLS, AND QUALITIES

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The next **Director of Guest Services** will be a confident, commercially savvy leader energized by complexity, committed to people, and grounded in purpose. The Zoo seeks candidates who demonstrate:

- Strong food & beverage operations expertise — the most complex and highest-opportunity area in the department
- Proven ability to lead through growth and change, with experience scaling teams and systems
- Data fluency and financial acumen — the ability to drive P&L, set per-cap targets, forecast attendance, drive efficiency, and manage labor costs
- A collaborative, high-EQ leadership style that builds trust with a young, mission-motivated seasonal workforce
- Comfort with technology — POS systems, parking platforms, data analytics — and the ability to integrate multiple tools into a cohesive operation
- Strategic thinking balanced with hands-on execution and an organization-wide perspective
- An outgoing, confident presence and straight-talking communication style — this team benefits from candor and accountability
- Conservation mission alignment: a genuine understanding of why purpose-driven, nonprofit organizations operate differently than for-profit attractions

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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### ***Revenue, Operations & Guest Experience***

- Drive earned revenue across admissions, food & beverage, retail, private events, membership, and guest experiences
- Lead operational planning across all guest-facing revenue centers: staffing models, quality standards, and service delivery
- Analyze per-capita spending, labor costs, and attendance data to hit financial targets and inform Zoo-wide planning
- Develop menu engineering, merchandising, and experience strategies that maximize revenue and guest satisfaction
- Unlock untapped opportunities in corporate private events, a breathtaking treehouse event venue, and emerging guest experiences
- Oversee integration of POS, parking, and data systems into a cohesive operational infrastructure

### ***Team Leadership & Development***

- Lead and develop five department managers and a seasonal workforce of 300+ across peak operations
- Build a high-accountability culture where staff understand the Zoo's mission and find purpose in their work
- Foster communication and cross-team collaboration across zoo departments

### ***Strategic Leadership***

- Provide input to the Zoo's leadership team, participating in long-range planning, budgeting, and organizational decision-making
- Contribute to aquarium expansion planning, particularly around F&B strategy, guest experience design, and revenue modeling
- Collaborate with marketing to provide attendance forecasting and demand modeling that informs staffing and resource allocation Zoo-wide

## POSITION REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS

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### ***Required***

- 5+ years of progressive guest services or hospitality operations leadership, including meaningful food & beverage experience
- 3+ years managing multi-unit teams in high-volume, guest-facing environments
- Proven track record driving revenue growth, managing budgets, and delivering measurable operational results
- Strong financial acumen: P&L management, proformas, budget forecasting, and labor cost analysis

### ***Preferred***

- Background in zoos, aquariums, museums, science centers, or other mission-driven attractions or in the hospitality or guest-facing organizations
- Experience leading organizations through significant growth phases
- Familiarity with membership programs, private events, and experiential revenue models

## TO APPLY

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John Ball Zoo has partnered with Canopy Strategic Partners to manage this search. To be considered, please submit a letter of interest and resume in a single PDF to:

### ***Lauren David***

Canopy Strategic Partners

ldavid@canopysp.com

*All inquiries and applications will be held in strict confidence. We encourage candidates from zoos, aquariums, cultural institutions, and the broader hospitality and attractions industry to apply.*

## GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

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Outside the Detroit metro, Grand Rapids is the fastest-growing region in Michigan — attracting companies, creative talent, and families with an exceptional quality of life and a cost of living well below national averages.

### WHY GRAND RAPIDS?

- 1M+ greater metro population, growing fast
- Cost of living significantly below national average
- Vibrant food, arts, and craft beverage scene
- Excellent schools across the metro area
- Lake Michigan shoreline 30 minutes away
- Welcoming Midwest community — people come and stay