

5 exciting careers in the pool industry you never thought of before

Insights from WhiteWater's
CXO Franceen Gonzales

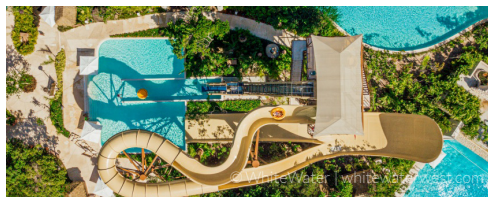


Gonzales talks roles fit for new and experienced pros alike ready to make a splash in the business

As a teen, Franceen Gonzales thought she was going to be a doctor. What she couldn't know then was that her first summer job at a water park in Anthony, Texas was going to lead her to an international corporate leadership role in the pool industry.

A straight-A student, she turned her love of science into a biology degree from Stanford University and a 25-year career in aquatics. "I think I just fell too much in love with aquatics, too much in love with water parks. And I thought, 'Can I make this a career?' And I went to my first World Waterpark Association Show, and I said, 'Oh my gosh, these are all over the world—I think I can make this a career!'" she recalls.

Gonzales has never been a "by-the-book" thinker or doer. In many cases, she has taken her passion for water parks and created entirely new roles for herself and those who came behind her, including her most recent promotion to Chief Experience Officer with WhiteWater, the Canada-based development company. Whether you're a student or young professional looking to get into the pool industry or an experienced professional ready for a career overhaul, you can follow the trail blazed by Gonzales to your next adventure.



#1. New pro: Water quality technician

Hourly seasonal roles and salaried career roles in maintaining pool cleanliness abound right now as a labor shortage puts pressure on amusement companies and recreation departments alike. Gonzales got her start cleaning pools in the summer and eventually added lifeguard to her resume (one of the highest demand jobs right now, and one that can become a career in instruction and training/management).

"[My career] kind of started by saying, I want a fun job that's outside and where I have a lot of friends," Gonzales explains. "I didn't realize I was going to use my science background until later."

The work she did at a small regional water park led her to larger chains, and the work she did in cleanliness led to her career in water science.

#2. New or Mid-career pro: Water scientist

When Gonzales pictured her future as a doctor — indoors, same hospital day-in and day-out—it didn't match what brought her joy. A few years later, she'd be putting her desire to help people into her role with Great Wolf Lodge, where she helped to open several resorts and focused on improving water quality, air quality, and customer safety industry wide.

"The air quality was not good in any indoor water park anywhere," she recalls.

She read existing studies, and then began interviewing academics and experts. Her work showed if you can reduce the chlorine at indoor water parks, since there's less UV exposure to combat, you can reduce the chloramines that cause skin and eye irritation in the pool and respiratory inflammation from the air.

"It wasn't until I was able to meet with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and meet with the health department and talk about what I knew not only as an operator, but with a science background, to actually bring some real data that started to change things. They were listening," recalls Gonzales, who never saw herself working with the CDC on pool safety issues. "If you love science, that's what you can do. This is a fantastic industry to be in."

#3. Mid-career pro: Performance services or product development manager

Working for some of the largest water park companies has given Gonzales something she always craved: A chance to combine the many areas of the industry she loves. Roles in the complementary fields of product development, which you can enter from engineering, marketing, or design backgrounds, or performance services, which you can enter from the analytical fields or customer service and sales experience, offer that.

The largest brands "open up a lot of career paths" she says, pointing to Disney, Universal, and SeaWorld as examples. In her career, she used her step into a product role to also begin traveling internationally.

"Building a water park in China is very different from a water park in the U.S. And same thing with Europe. We have to be mindful and understanding of that. We have an architecture group that master plans. We have a slide path group that just designs these awesome rides. We've got our engineering group that has to not only deliver product engineering, but project engineering. Every ride is custom-made for the site and that takes a specialized skill to design, manufacture, and install them," she says, adding that WhiteWater has 65 team members out in the field making sure each are built to specification.

#4. Experienced leader: Director or VP of Business Development

Growing the aquatics industry will require more out-of-the-box thinkers who can develop business in unconventional places.

"[We] used to see just all these massive water parks, 40-acre parks that had all these attractions that were built for volume. We're seeing that shift to a more boutique experience, higher end, very immersive experience, very relaxing, very private, personalized. And that's really migrating into the hotel side of the business," Gonzales explains.

Business development professionals have to look for these opportunities and identify ways to pitch unique water parks to compact properties with specific client demands. The pandemic turned more families onto staycations or driving-distance

vacations using their "COVID cash" and spending time together with family to build memories became paramount.

That led to demand for new experiences like surf pools and surf parks in all areas of the country, and new locations like Cancun became major destinations. Gonzales says there's still untapped opportunities in developing business for location-based entertainment centers, shopping centers, and cruise ships.

#5. Experienced leader: Chief Experience Officer (CXO)

Recently Gonzales moved from business development into the entirely new role of Chief Experience Officer, which takes the sales and marketing around project development and makes sure "we're delivering to our customers what we promised."

"We want to make sure that every bit of the experience is positive," she says. "After their project is done, we're there to take care of them. We're there to take care of their service, any tech support, and anything that they need throughout the life of their product."

Gonzales credits the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance with making sure opportunities continue to exist in the industry — from encouraging more children to take swim lessons through the Step Into Swim initiative to creating safety standards that make families feel comfortable at parks and advocating for loans and support for upstart pool and water park businesses. All of that creates a win-win for professionals and customers alike.

"In the pool business, you can be a chemist. You can be a physicist. You can be a biologist and have a job. In this business, you can be an engineer and have a job. In this business, you can be a salesperson and have a job. In this business, you can be in marketing," Gonzales says. "The world is yours."

