

4.5 Things Magic Mountain Taught Me About Your Business

I still remember the smile on Steve Cunningham's face. High School summer vacation. Thoughts of sand, sun, and surf.

Yet back to reality. We were applying for jobs at Magic Mountain, an amusement park. Employees got free passes to the park.

Out from the interview he came. "Ride operator!"

Now it was my turn! What job would I get? Roller coaster? Spinning bucket?

Fifteen minutes later, due to my "valuable experience" at McDonald's the previous summer, it was "cook."

Apparently, anyone (or so I told myself) could put someone in a roller coaster car, but few could cook hamburgers and fries, and, thanks to my mom's training, could also make tacos, burritos and pizza.

Yet that summer was a petri dish of customer service and other business education. Here are 4.5 of the lessons that I learned:

1. If you hire right, people don't need to be "managed." They are not horses. They need to understand what it is they are supposed to do. They need initial training. Then they need to know that their supervisor has their back, assuming they're doing the job within acceptable parameters. If they stray, guide and repeat.
2. Customers can be rude and make messes (like stomping on ketchup packets). Yet without customers there is no business. So smile and be kind. But if they're drunk and throwing things, call for security.
3. Employees will screw with one another. One guy had the habit of throwing ice cubes into the fryer. Get rid of the troublemakers before someone is burned by flying grease. You have failed at #1 above, but at least you can succeed at #3. It is very easy.
4. Ice machines make cool water not ice cubes when the temperature inside a restaurant approaches that of the sun. Things break and go wrong. You need to learn to expect it and must have plans to deal with it.

Oh, and number 4.5: Free isn't always free. A free pass to someplace that you spend 40 hours a week at isn't free. It's a reminder of broken ice machines, scorching heat and rubberized blobs of ketchup. Think how you are motivating your employees.

After that summer, I went to Magic Mountain two or three times. It wasn't too much fun. ■

Why the Hospital's Idea of Physician Leader Means Follower

It was the time that I almost died. The car was out of control and I was headed for a cliff.

Then I awoke from the dream in a sweat. The smell of pancakes wafted in from the kitchen.

I recently read an article about hospitals training physicians for "leadership" roles.

What those hospitals are really doing is training more physicians to become hospital-employed or hospital-controlled managers in order to monitor, cajole and threaten the members of the medical staff to follow mandated cost cutting measures. Oh, excuse me, they called them "quality goals."

Don't get me wrong, I am all in favor of better quality. I am in favor of doing things the right way. But who should decide what the right way is for Ms. Betty Bobson, age 47, or Mr. Bob Beatty, age 74, the hospital or that patient's physician?

I have dealt with instances in which a surgeon's orders were changed, without consultation, by a hospitalist engaged by the hospital. When the surgeon complained, she found herself subject to a medical staff investigation. Oops! Just a coincidence!

So, if you are the hospital CEO, why not put that situation on steroids?

Instead of the sole hospitalist changing orders, the hospital can now instruct all of its employed or controlled physician "leaders" to enforce what the hospital deems to be evidence-based best practices or protocols or whatever the name of the week is for cookie cutter behavior or for using only those products or pharmaceuticals on which the hospital gets the best deal. But the bottom line is the same: Who is making the decision, Ms. Betty Bobson's physician or the system?

Don't get me wrong, I am all in favor of physician leaders. In fact, I wonder if an all physician board and all physician top leadership should be requirements for a hospital's Medicare participation? Think about that for a while.

But in the politically correct patois of Orwellian hospital double-speak, "leader" now means follower.

Is following orders best for patient care? Is it really best for your career?

Your career is in a car and it is heading over a cliff. Ms. Betty Bobson or Mr. Bob Beatty is in the passenger seat. No, it is not a dream. No one is in the kitchen making pancakes. Grab the wheel and do something before it is too late. ■

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