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My husband and I moved to Orlando, Florida in 2005. I worked for a national non-profit organization from my home office, and after three months in front of my computer without much human interaction, I decided to seek a weekend position at Walt Disney World.

My previous careers had included registered nurse, high school teacher, and state supervisor for health science programs. I had a master's degree and 28 years of work experience. I was pretty sure I knew everything there was to know about quality service and would instantly fit in at Walt Disney World.

Turned out I didn't know as much as I thought I did...

It's hard to put into words. Something was missing in my prior work experience. Yes, I did care about my patients, teachers and clients. And yes, I did strive to provide quality service. But with Disney, there really was a difference.

At Walt Disney World, the well-being of the guest comes first. At Disney, everyone in every role has the same purpose. And our purpose was crystal clear. We create happiness. In addition to creating happiness, Cast Members at all levels of the organization are trained, encouraged, supported, and recognized for achieving that purpose.

For me it was the little things in training that made a big difference. We were taught to treat children with the same respect and attention we show adult guests. We were taught that safety is number one - and courtesy is a close second. We understood that little things like offering to take a photo for a family is part of the Disney difference. We felt proud to help keep the park clean by picking up a bit of trash as we walked by. And we were encouraged and recognized for going above and beyond for a guest in need.

Once I was delivering an educational program to a group of students in a Disney park, when suddenly Mary Poppins walked by. Would you interrupt your educational objectives for a photo op with Mary Poppins? Absolutely. You let the magic happen.

As my Disney experience continued, so did my awareness of quality service in my daily interactions. At my grocery store, the cashiers regularly ask me if I found everything I was looking for. They interact with me as though they genuinely care about my shopping experience. At another grocery store, the cashier scans my purchases, charges my credit card, and barely even knows I was there.





But where I really notice a difference is in my interaction with the health care community. Although quality service matters when buying groceries, it takes on much greater significance for the consumer of health care.

Health care is different. People seeking health care are often sick, scared, and emotional. The expense may be daunting. And, frequently, it's uncomfortable or downright painful. With healthcare comes a fear of the unknown that can change the way a person normally feels or reacts.

The result? While quality service matters in buying groceries, it matters even more for someone on the receiving end of health care.

Recently I went to a "radiologic services" clinic for a mammogram. After waiting in line to check in for 15 minutes and then sitting in a waiting room with the rest of the cattle, I was herded to another room and directed to put my things in a locker and put on a short, little, scratchy shirt that opened in the front. After waiting in another tiny waiting room reserved for women in scratchy little shirts, I was escorted to the mammography room. My radiographer was very professional, but the room was cold, and the mammogram pain took my breath away. Then I stood there for five minutes waiting to be told to get dressed and leave.

About a month later I received a letter saying I needed a needle biopsy. (No phone call. It's a good thing I didn't mistake that envelope for junk mail.) This time I went to a women's breast health center, and the experience was totally different.

I felt like I had arrived at a spa and not an imaging center. The receptionist sat at a lovely writing desk with a lamp. She greeted me as though she was expecting me, and quickly ushered me to the radiologist's office, who explained the procedure and answered my questions. Then I was escorted to a private changing room and donned a soft, full length robe. Minutes later the needle aspiration was over. Throughout the procedure the radiologist explained what he was doing and turned the imaging screen so that I could watch what he was seeing. The needle puncturing the cyst in my breast was like popping a balloon. And the technician at my side quietly cheered the results. Apparently, if the big white bubble on the screen pops and disappears, that's a good thing.

Why was a simple screening mammogram so traumatic and being poked by a needle so easy?





For me, it was information and individualization. Patients need to be well and clearly informed. Clinical procedures and processes should inspire confidence. Patients must be treated with respect. Everyone in the healthcare delivery system, at all levels, should understand that the delivery of quality service can make all the difference in the world for someone who is sick, injured, concerned or confused, and in need of any type of health care.

What Walt Disney said about Disneyland is true for every hospital, clinic, and healthcare organization today: “You can design, create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.” It takes dedicated healthcare providers and patient-centered processes to put the “care” in healthcare, and to assure that quality service is driving the future of healthcare delivery.

