

## **Urban hospital system achieves dramatic reduction in employee turnover through adapting Disney best practices in service quality**

Hospitals can sometimes be notorious for employee turnover. Many customer service studies have documented the bottom-line implications of losing a loyal customer due to an attitude of indifference on the part of one employee, the inefficiency and “hassle factor” of doing business, and sometimes, even neglect. The amount of money and time spent trying to recruit that same customer to come back to an organization can be enormous.

In 1992, the University of Chicago Hospital (UCH) system was no different in its struggles with turnover. It was evident that organizational success — and bottom-line profit — could best be attained if employee pride and affiliation to UCH was so strong that it would inevitably drive patient satisfaction and loyalty.

To build a culture where employee pride and loyalty could flourish, UCH moved to create a new vision for preparing its workforce for the future. This vision would require breaking away from the traditional notion of conducting one-time training events and mandating education solely for the purpose of regulatory compliance. Instead, the organization’s chief focus became seeking ways to build employee pride and a welcome feeling for employees, patients, and visitors alike.

As part of the ongoing effort to enhance the patient experience, UCH spent seven years benchmarking with many notable, service-based organizations including *Walt Disney World*® Resort. On the surface, theme park entertainment and academic medicine may seem worlds apart. But UCH found much in common with *Walt Disney World*® Resort. Both organizations share a commitment to service excellence and customer satisfaction. Both serve a diverse audience with high expectations.

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A variety of team representatives attended programming at *Disney Institute* with three learning objectives in mind:

- To learn new non-healthcare-focused methods of customer service from a recognized customer service leader;
  - To understand how an organization as large as *Walt Disney World*® Resort applies customer service principles so well; and
  - To learn how to keep a balance between providing customer service excellence and having fun on the job.
- From there, UCH partnered with *Disney Institute* to create a customized learning experience for its people that has helped to revolutionize the culture of the hospitals.

The new UCH strategy focused on building a culture of continuous learning within the organization. Particular emphasis was placed on developing learning systems and effective partnerships with both internal and external entities. The cultural change initiative UCH inaugurated in partnership with *Disney Institute* resulted in a dramatic 33% reduction in employee turnover.

### **The UCH Academy**

Through the establishment of a learning resource network, today University of Chicago Hospital employees participate in a variety of learning opportunities designed to improve individual and organizational performance. The vehicle for transforming organizational culture through learning initiatives at the University of Chicago Hospitals is the UCH Academy.

The UCH Academy models a corporate quality university concept in a healthcare setting. Since its inception

in January 1993, the UCH Academy has dramatically increased employee participation in learning initiatives.

Says Judy Schueler, Executive Director of the UCH Academy, "A major attribute of the Academy is the alignment of employee learning directly with the key business issues of the organization. That provides for a much more targeted approach to learning."

Since that time, the UCH Academy has created an ongoing partnership with *Disney Institute* to send selected improvement team leaders and team members to *Walt Disney World*® Resort with specific assignments in mind.

Says Ms. Schueler, "We use the *Disney Institute* experience as a means to strategically link employee recognition with individual and team performance. As such, we send staff to *Disney Institute* to benchmark around specific focus areas that match up with our own service challenges at the hospitals. By providing a framework for their learning, our people are better positioned to transfer and apply what they've learned to their service quality team assignments."

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### Learning that Gets Results

Each year, 20-25 "Service Heroes" scholars are selected for participation in the three-day, high-impact *Disney Institute* program. The customized program provides a structured opportunity for UCH employees to benchmark an excellent service model in action through field experiences and case studies. The program culminates with staff exploring methods to enhance the service delivery system at the University of Chicago Hospitals.

To date, more than 35 new improvement teams have been launched just from the ongoing *Disney Institute* program. Areas of performance have included improving the quality of food in the Children's Hospital, reducing wait times, improving the quality of patient education materials for children's radiology treatments, and improving appointment scheduling processing times. For example, participants from UCH launched several

service improvement initiatives in the children's hospital focusing on reducing wait times in pediatric clinics, reducing attrition of registered nurses in pediatric critical care units, improving overall cleanliness of the children's hospital, improving patient satisfaction ratings relative to the quality of food, and enhancing the sibling visitation experience.

In one case, learning about the *Walt Disney World*® Resort "Casting" (hiring) experience led to an improvement program at the hospitals called "Right Person, Right Role" that focused on screening new employees for critical success factors including service orientation, critical thinking, and situational judgment. As a result, the employee attrition rate dropped from 25 percent to 16 percent in six years, thus increasing employee productivity and overall loyalty to the organization. At the same time, patient satisfaction ratings increased

from 84 percent to 91 percent in the ambulatory care facility. The hospital system also changed its traditional one-day orientation to a three-day program that integrates the mission, purpose, and

values of the healthcare system as well as skills training on communicating with patients, families, and fellow employees.

"The off-site experience at *Disney Institute* also accelerates the development of relationships. Now graduates of the program even have reunions — there is a camaraderie that doesn't diminish when people return back to work. We are a relationship organization where work only gets done well through good relationships. The *Disney Institute* experience enables that to happen — we can't create that here; that's part of the Disney magic!" says Ms. Schueler.

### Building Service-Based Behaviors

In addressing service-based behaviors, the Academy has employed a variety of actions, including:

- *Training that incorporates physician communication as a risk management issue.* Much litigation in healthcare institutions is not due to

clinical error; it involves failure to provide consistent communication to patients and their families, and the coordination of that communication among multiple care providers. The organization wanted to develop behaviors that would reduce the risk of litigation associated with communication. Now some physicians participate actively in the Disney Institute program.

- *Identifying the “ideal patient encounter.”* The ideal patient encounter involves every person and process the patient touches — the doorman, the clinical coordinator, nurses, and physicians. “We wanted to be certain that our processes were efficient and addressed wait times and other patient-voiced issues. But we also needed to ensure that every person the patient came in contact with exhibited service behaviors,” says Jeff Finesilver, Vice President and Director of the Center for Advanced Medicine. “We flowcharted the ideal patient care experience — even with details like what signs were on the expressway and what kind of support materials were provided in advance. We also created a valet parking experience — The Center for Advanced Medicine now operates the busiest valet parking facility in the entire City of Chicago. We also paid attention to architectural features, from airport signage to elevator and hall signage — all the on stage and backstage areas — to maintain décor and facilitate a smooth experience for visitors.”

- *The addition of a greeter (security officer) who sets the tone for the Guest experience at the hospital.* He offers assistance from visitors’ cars, answers questions for first-time visitors, and offers such services as hailing a cab, helping someone in a wheelchair, or directing people to the water fountain. The greeter has a keen sense for identifying the assistance people need; he has become a real hallmark of the hospital’s friendliness.

- *A process for “rapid feedback/rapid response.”* This facilitates the patient’s ability to provide feedback about his or her care on a daily basis. Patient feedback is transmitted electronically every morning to caregivers, prompting an accelerated response for improvement. For example, if someone said people were rude, there was an extraordinary wait time, or there was confusion about treatment times, the next day provides an opportunity to improve the service level to others.

### “Servant Leaders” Create “Service Heroes”

“We provide a continued focus on the role of leadership in creating what we call ‘service heroes’,” continues Ms. Schueler. “We can select and hire differently than we have in the past. We can orient people to a service-based culture, performance and accountability systems. But the role of leadership here is *servant leadership* — it requires leaders to remove obstacles in a way that enables front-line contributors

to be service heroes.” “This initiative stemmed from the *Disney Institute* experience. When people come out of the parks at the end of the day and can’t find their car, within an hour attendants can identify, within three rows, exactly where they are parked. Providing the systems to enable this process to work enables the parking lot attendant to look like a hero 20 times a day to Guests. Seeing this for ourselves really drove home the critical importance of leadership development — the leader’s role in supporting front-line staff to be heroes,” she says.

“From a healthcare standpoint, consider the role of the clinical coordinator. This person greets patients, schedules appointments, confirms appointments, orders tests, faxes prescriptions to the pharmacist, pulls medical records — in other words, he or she is multi-tasking all day long. If the manager says to the clinical coordinator, ‘I need you to confirm these 56 appointments for tomorrow,’ and doesn’t remove him or her from the patient greeter area to do the project,

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the coordinator has been set up to fail. The servant leadership concept helps leaders think through that when they need someone to accomplish highly focused tasks, then they need to be moved backstage to a non-patient area,” asserts Ms. Schueler.

The commitment to excellence at University of Chicago Hospitals has earned many accolades. Several of these include being ranked among the top hospitals in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report Magazine* ; being named a “best practice” in healthcare education and training by the American Society for Healthcare Human Resource Administrators (ASHHRA), an affiliate of the American Hospital Association; and being named as a “best practice” in service excellence by the University HealthSystem Consortium (UHC). In 1998, *Disney Institute* presented University of Chicago

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Hospitals with its coveted Mousker Award” for delivering outstanding service to patients and customers.

“It’s always a challenge to keep the learning fresh,” says Ms. Schueler. “For example, if our processes for employee recognition and patient feedback remain the same, everything just becomes robotic. That’s one reason why our partnership with *Disney Institute* is so important.

By sending our star team leaders and team members there, we recognize them for their current contributions and we invest in them for their future with UCH. They come back bursting with ideas for ways to enhance the service we provide to our patient and to streamline our internal processes. Our ongoing partnership with *Disney Institute* has been an invaluable component of the success of the Academy at the University of Chicago Hospitals,” she says.