

1982

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David L. Groves

Bowling Green State University

Gina Cardi

Bowling Green State University

Nancy Becker

Bowling Green State University

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Recommended Citation

Groves, David L.; Cardi, Gina; and Becker, Nancy (1982) "The Leisure Industry - A Perspective," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 1 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol1/iss1/2>

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THE LEISURE INDUSTRY - A PERSPECTIVE

BY

DAVID L. GROVES, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

SCHOOL OF HPER
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO 43403

GINA CARDI, GRADUATE STUDENT

NANCY BECKER, STUDENT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify major issues facing the leisure industry in the 80's. The important element isolated to improving products, services, programs, and/or facilities is quality.

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INTRODUCTION

The leisure field is expanding at an unprecedented rate. This expansion is the result of the society moving toward a leisure ethic. More products and services have been purchased in the last ten years. Questions are being raised about the future of the profession and its impact upon the general public. These questions focus upon quality of the experience being provided in relation to dollar expenditures. The faculty and students at Bowling Green State University developed a workshop to explore issues facing the leisure industry in the 1980's. The conference format was based upon practitioners' presentations and interactive discussions about resolutions to present and future problems.

A report on the status of the profession prepared by the National Personnel Advisory Committee chaired by Bill McKenzie presented a report to National Park and Recreation Meeting on October 29, 1979. The Personnel Committee conducted a survey of all major resort recreation directors and theme park managers and solicited comments about course titles offered by institutions of higher education from practitioners currently in the field. Findings indicate that practitioners feel that there is a need for administration and public relations courses. The conference agenda was formulated from major topics identified in the McKenzie study. Outstanding practitioners from Ohio and southern Michigan were invited to participate in a regional conference. Each presenter was assigned a topic to discuss in relation to problems and solutions that will affect the profession in the future. An open exchange among professionals was held. Out of this interaction, several issues were identified.

ISSUES

Business Skills

Practitioners stressed the importance of administration and public relations skills. The leisure industry is profit oriented and, therefore, must be managed on a sound basis using business principles appropriate to the leisure field. A key element is customer satisfaction so that he/she will return.

An important business skill is marketing. Marketing gives an idea about customer satisfaction and how to develop new programs. Market segmentation is among the most important skills. It is the ability to identify audiences and look at them in terms of differences in services, programs, and facilities. The audience is multi-dimensional and the facility and program has to be used to its capacity to sustain a maximum profit margin. Much of the leisure depends upon diversity instead of products, services, programs, and/or facilities' quality. Much effort has been put into development of facilities, rather than improving the quality of programming.

Communication Skills

Leisure is a people industry and to work in it effectively the professional must be trained in communication techniques. Much diversity of backgrounds can be found in the leisure industry: food services, hotel management, etc. Individuals from each agency are always trying to develop their own uniqueness and define themselves in terms of their profession so that they can attract customers. The primary programming aspect with uniqueness and diversity is that there must be a consistent market that returns for your product or service and different markets that will sustain your loss in returnees.

Job Opportunities

The job opportunities in the private sector are good, but it will take the proper preparation to obtain employment. The best preparation, in this instance, is one of flexibility and obtaining a business background or at least obtaining these skills through experience. It is also good to specialize in one phase, such as management, marketing, accounting, personnel, sales, or data processing. These specialties will increase the employment opportunities by two or three times.

Personnel Issues

Supervisors and managers make decisions but personnel specialists help in the training and movement of employees through an organization. Money is not as strong a motivational device as it used to be. Time off is no longer an effective means of discipline. Work must be challenging and provide for self-esteem. While on the job, the intrinsic factors are more important. Many of the individuals hired represent the industry and must be very satisfied with their employment and express their satisfaction. One of the most common factors in personnel work in leisure is boredom, because of its repetitive nature, especially at the people contact level. Some of the more important characteristics in people are flexibility,

loyalty, ability to keep records, and an ability to deal with people on a variety of levels.

Outcomes

Leisure has a potential for long-term change. Many current programs are based upon the immediate satisfaction of customers and not long-term change. Those establishments that focus more upon the long-term change tend to get more return visits because of the quality products, services, programs, and/or facilities.

The impact of leisure upon society is just being felt. With the current economic crunch, the private sector has to fulfill the needs that used to be provided in the public sector.

Leisure service industry is a complex of food services, lodgings, entertainment, etc. It is the combination of these services and the way they are programmed that makes the difference in terms of the profit margin. A very important aspect in the success of the leisure sector is the combining of these factors to meet the changing needs of the public. One, therefore, must be very adept at reading trends, so that he is a leader and not a follower in the industry. Most of those individuals who are innovators make the greatest profits.

The two extremes in the service industry are: entertainment and culture. Their difference is in programming one toward the immediate satisfaction and the other toward long-term outcomes. Both of these types of organizations are needed in the field. Some of the basic differences between them are: (1) education is first in one and enjoyment is first in the other; (2) one is people first and the other is service first; (3) one is appreciative skill and the other is technical skill; (4) one emphasizes facilities and the other emphasizes programming; and (5) one's organization is built for a generalist while the other for a specialist.

Fiscal Management

Another important dimension is fiscal management. Fiscal management is those processes related to the development of funding sources for operations. The primary focus in fiscal management is accountability, that is, the need to illustrate where dollars have been spent in relation to outcomes. A way to achieve accountability is follow the rules and keep the investors informed. Participant input in the decision making process is important. This is more important in the public sector. In the private sector, accountability is still very important because the investors are always going to want to know about product outcomes. The primary emphasis on raising money in both the public and private sectors seems to be the ability to sell an idea that is different and illustrate this idea in terms of how it will benefit the lender or public involved.

Ingenuity

An important dimension for success is being able to utilize resources and mix and match these resources within a community or organization to bring about customer satisfaction. Ingenuity is an important dimension in isolating a different approach to sell products, programs, services, and/or facilities. Another important factor is to improve the quality and diversity of services in the program to maintain an adequate profit margin. When

Programs become grooved and stale and only serve a static audience, profits begin to dip.

Quality vs. Quantity

The leisure industry must move from a qualitative to a quantitative science by looking at futuristic patterns and lifestyles and how they will change. Present texts deal with the value of leisure, but they should encompass more of the satisfactions and benefits which occur in participation. The individual and his total contribution must be viewed in terms of society. At present, leisure is a form of escape from routine and it must be viewed in a broader perspective to maintain and find out how it positively impacts upon society. Professionals must be open and responsive to trends. Presently leisure is on the defensive, however, it needs to become more offensive to illustrate benefits and outcomes. The primary outcome of leisure programs should relate to the quality of life.

SUMMARY

After lengthy discussions and research with the participants, the theme that has emerged as one of the most important needs is "where does a leisure professional fit into the industry". At present, most of the individuals who are in the industry do not have such a background. The only way for leisure professionals to gain employment is to specialize while having a background in a leisure science. No doubt, combining a leisure degree with personnel or some other field like marketing is the appropriate preparation, but even with this preparation, what does an individual with a leisure philosophy bring to the industry that is unique? The identity of the leisure specialist seems to be lost in the maze of business, food services, etc. The two uniquenesses that most leisure professionals seem to bring to a job are a deepening of understandings of people and how they use their leisure and an ability to program to meet these needs. These two characteristics seem to combine to improve program quality and the experience of the participant. Another dimension that the specialist brings to this type of endeavor is the sharpening of the ability to read trends and respond innovatively with programming to meet the changing needs of society. The basic outcome is continuity in services from one part of the operation to another and the ability to better integrate the services into a theme that has a consistent leisure impact. Leisure, in most cases, will help serve as a bridge to know how to better sell and satisfy people in terms of a leisure component. It will help take the experience out of the escape category and make the experience have a greater potential for long term types of change or outcomes. Leisure is also an element that can be programmed within an organization to improve its status. Quality is the key point to customer satisfaction, which in turn, is a key to higher profits for an organization. A theme that seems to be running through most of the uniquenesses is based upon greater understanding about trends and markets and the ability to use these dimensions in programming. Another factor is diversity of programming with current facilities, so that uniquenesses can be added through programs and not necessarily through adding of new facilities each year at a greater capital investment. Multi-level programming can be sustained and the individual helped to better understand the resources and the use of these resources in terms of participation. The primary help that an individual with a leisure background adds is the dimension of effectiveness through greater focusing upon more understandings about programming and people.