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ABSTRACT

This manuscript is from a previous issue of Visions that focused upon an interview with Bob Blundred. The comments identified in this manuscript are ones that have relevance not only from history, but for theme parks today. The context focuses upon the structure and function of park operations. The larger perspective is theme parks and their relationship to society.

INTRODUCTION

Bob Blundred was Executive Director of the International Amusement Park and Attractions Association during the golden era of park development. His leadership provided the necessary vision to develop theme parks into a societal institution that had a profound effect upon the society. He is recognized as a freethinker that had an eye on the present as well as on the future in terms of developing the Association to assist and aid Park owners the necessary perspective or growth of their businesses. The word owner includes all parks and themes as well as the suppliers.

AMUSEMENT PARKS (GENERAL)

Psychology of Amusement Parks

It is a wholesome entertainment that anyone can enjoy regardless of age, sex, etc. There is a basic human need for an entertainment form that is based upon fantasy and escape. (Future, p. 86)

Another important dimension is understanding the leisure experience as an intangible outcome such as escape, fantasy, etc. These types of experiences cannot be related to dollars and cents processes. (IAAPA, p. 62)

This drive for newness, in terms of the psychology, is what distinguishes the amusement parks and attractions from other personal service industries. (Operations, p. 70)

The basis of a psychological experience is primarily emotional and sensory. Parks have been designed to stimulate the five senses. A visit to an amusement park is a very sensory experience and each of the

senses is stimulated in a variety of ways. Many of the experiences are passive. An unusual feature of the amusement park is it involves active participation. What other form of leisure or recreation can say that they stimulate all the senses in one experience? The emotional aspect is development of a carefree attitude or fantasy. This allows you to explore through the area of fantasy and a world of make believe the emotions that would not be possible in another setting. Another important element of a park in this relationship is that the individual has a responsibility and an opportunity to answer how they want to be amused. In many cases the choices are made for the individual but in a park the individual has an active choice in how he or she wants to be amused. The primary function of a park is to expand the sensory experience. These experiences are not expanded for the sense of being the individual pleasure seekers but providing a lasting value in regard to long term benefits. (Operations, p. 79)

Some of the more important psychological outcomes are escape into a fantasy/make believe world, self-concept, family solidarity, getting away from stress, and a happy/uplifting environment. Many of those people who work in amusement parks or attractions usually comment that one of the very pleasant aspects of the job is the ability to help people become a little more satisfied or happy. An amusement park and attraction is a place that helps develop an attitude or frame of mind. In fact, tips seem to be larger in establishments that are associated with amusement parks and attractions. This is one of the external indicators that people are in a different frame of mind and it is this frame of mind that translates indirectly to dollars. (Trends, p. 66)

Industry Change

QUESTION 10: What is one of the primary elements that brought change in the industry?

ANSWER: The suppliers through their research and development. There is a competition each year to add new products and this pressure on the industry puts pressure on the suppliers for new ideas and has established the pattern for research and development. (Operations, p. 70)

QUESTION 11: What is one of the primary elements that has brought about this pressure?

ANSWER: The public's demand for change is the primary element. Another is that the taste of these consumers is always changing, based upon trends within the society. One of the important factors is that the amusement parks and attractions industry is more sensitive to change than other industries. The same pressures that have been on the industry in the past and present will be there in new products and services and the forms that they take. (Operations, p. 70)

Future of Amusement Parks

There are two major trends. One is the expansion of theme parks into specialty areas such as water parks. This is a form of entertainment that did not exist seven years ago. The other major trend is the greater diversification of the traditional park into one of greater emphasis upon entertainment and more diversity in types of entertainment presented. This diversity will allow the park to reach different audiences. Another major trend will be more spontaneous entertainment. Clowns, minstrels, etc., will circulate to alleviate pressure on lines. It is difficult to predict what changes will occur because the industry is directly tied to the demographic and societal changes. (Future, p. 86)

The basis of the future business may be group sales. Another major dimension will be repeat business. The primary dimension will still be accommodating the interests of the park visitor. (Future, p. 86)

There will be a greater emphasis on food, gift items, and entertainment. They will add to existing facilities to further diversify their base of attractions. I see the single purpose park only of a limited appeal because one of the strongest elements in the past and in the future will be diversity, which is, being able to fulfill the family needs at one site. (Trends, p. 65)

One factor that may be influencing the industry most now and in the future is real estate value. Many of the parks that were in urban areas have a greater profit potential for some other use other than an amusement park or attraction. As a result, many of these parks are disappearing based upon development for other uses. Even some of the movie sets in California that had a great nostalgic potential gave way to condominiums and high-rises because of the profit making potential. As land use values and patterns shift, this factor of real estate values and how it applies to amusement park and attractions may be a very important factor in shaping future development of the parks. (Trends, p. 66)

History of Amusement Parks

It is an American institution that has been developed and nurtured through American ingenuity. The ideas of the walk through gardens from England and the Punch and Judy show from France are some of the ideas that give rise to the initial ideas that allow the development of amusement parks and attractions. The first amusement park, or an amusement park and attraction like event, was on Manhattan Island in the year 1860. It consisted of hayrides, stands that sold food items, etc. An admission fee was charged for this event. The first ride was developed around 1900 in France and was brought to the United States. French people would not adopt such a ride, but the American people fell in love with it. The idea for the merry-go-round came from China and was a training device for their cavalry. In fact, the brass ring was originally conceived as a training device for those individuals in use of the lance. Many of the other rides that appeared in the first amusement parks were some form of transportation. The roller coaster is a Russian phenomenon. Literally translated, it means "Russian mountain." The idea was imported from Russia and a ride down a mountain on the basis of gravity was the original concept. It took American ingenuity to invent the chain-drive to raise it to the peak so that gravity could be utilized to bring it down the other side of the mountain. (IAAPA, p. 60)

Challenges

They are: 1) change because of greater sophistication of the consumer, 2) how to change a particular enterprise to meet the competition/change, and 3) the need for constant moderation. The thread through these three elements is that a park is never complete and that something new must always be added to remain competitive. (IAAPA, p. 60-61)

PARK OPERATION

Revenue

The most lucrative operations are food and games. (Operations, p. 68)

Most of the revenue is generated from what I would term admittance revenues which include the gate price and parking. Food services and games provide the next largest revenue source, and arcades and merchandising usually provide a third largest source of revenue for the park. Various operations utilize these revenue sources differently to sustain their profit line. There are usually other revenue sources, especially at the larger parks such as locker rental. These are usually minor in comparison to the other revenue sources. (Operations, p. 78)

Factors in Success of Amusement Parks

One has to realize that businessmen like to emphasize quality in an effective operation. The bottom line is profits. Therefore, the most effective technique through the years has been the introduction of new ideas that either will help them increase their profits through increasing the volume of business or the increasing of profits through becoming more effective in reducing costs. (IAAPA, p. 63)

Recruitment and selection are very important but placement is even more important to the operation because it is the essential ingredient to mixing and matching the job and the person's temperaments for successful operation. It is also very important that the individual be trained in understanding the nature of the clients and audience that he/she will be serving in the leisure setting. This has to all be done in a short period of time because the sometimes it is very difficult to hold seasonal staff due to the temporary nature of the work. Personnel are the primary element that directly interfaces with the public and, as a result, they represent the park's image and its successful operation. (Operations, p. 75)

There are five important factors: 1) time-when do the particular clients have the time to attend the amusement parks or attractions. This is usually when the weather is good, the kids are out of school, etc. 2) Income-how much the particular audience has as part of their disposable income to spend on entertainment. 3) Mobility-transportation to the park. It must be accessible by bus, automobile, air, and when visitors arrive, there must be adequate parking. Getting around inside the park is also of major concern. Traffic flow patterns are another extremely important element to success of a parks operation. 4) People-the population available within a particular stratification, especially within a 250 mile radius around the park. 5) Flash and flare-the attractiveness of the park. A park must have a certain reputation and that reputation must extend out to attract individuals into the park. (Operations, p. 77)

One can spend as much time at a park as necessary to feel that he/she has gotten his/her money's worth. This is not true of other forms of entertainment such as movies. I think one of the successes of the Industry has been the "pay one price" concept because it has kept the industry very viable and priced within the family budget. Once the individual is inside, and if the price has not been exorbitant, he/she has extra money to spend on food, games, etc. If the park is programmed correctly, the additional dollars can be extracted on an indirect basis and the individual is free to spend money. The base success

of money in regard to the park is the freedom of decisions and the expenditure of money based upon an individual's decision. (Operations, p. 78)

Each park has a characteristic or personality of its own and should have its own specialty. The key is development of a reputation for some particular aspect of their park. For example, the amusement park and attraction in Huntington, West Virginia is known for its food. Many of the members of the community come to the park to dine out in its formal restaurant. There are other parks that are known for their roller coasters and people will come from all over the country to ride a particular coaster. In fact, there are two organizations that have been formed based upon their interests in riding roller coasters. What I am really suggesting is that because of a quality aspect of the park, it gains a reputation. There are also psychological factors working because hot dogs often taste better at a park than they do at home. The primary philosophy is to gain extra dollars from the visitor through indirect methods and allow them the choice of how they spend their money on food, games, merchandising, etc., and give them something tangible for their dollars. (Operations, p. 78)

The indirect factors are just as important because they directly interface with the customer and the products of their work, which is, cleanliness, proper supplies, etc., are extremely important to providing the services needed. There are two types of indirect services, one is during the day and the other is during the evening. The night operations are most important because this is when much of the trash is removed, rides are lubricated, the supplies are replenished, and inventories are taken so that supplies can be reordered. This part of the operation must be very organized and be kept on a very strict schedule. Routine must be established so as to develop consistency. It is also important to understand all of the technical aspects of the operation and have someone who understands the technical aspects to set the schedules and develop the routine. For example, the type of equipment that you have will directly depend upon how often it needs to be lubricated. It is important to know how often it needs to be lubricated so that it can be operating at peak efficiency. Another example is that a roller coaster must be walked every day to inspect parts and you have to have someone who knows the technical aspects of the ride so that he/she will be able to spot any problems. One of the most amazing places to visit is Walt Disney operations. If you ever see the behind the scenes operation you will realize the complexity of the operation. Most individuals never think about these indirect services but they directly impact upon the customer. Another important dimension that has occurred during the past few years is the adoption of the computer for indirect systems operations. This helps with the inventory, accounting, keeps a record of maintenance schedules, etc. (Operations, p. 79-80)

Indirect services that are provided during the day must be less conspicuous so that they do not disturb the visitor's sense of continuity. Parks are usually so designed that the delivery areas and preparation areas are well away from the visitor. Most of these supplies and services are developed out of this central back door. Other indirect service such as security and parking are a very important part of the visible operation that an individual expects to see to develop confidence in the operation. Indirect services are essential to a smooth operation. (Operations, p. 80)

QUESTION 50: What are the most important elements of a feasibility study in park development?
ANSWER: The element that deals with the flash and flare is most important. Even if the other four elements are present, a park has to have a basic attractiveness as part of its characteristics. (p. 81)

The three marketing zones are fifty miles, fifty-one miles to one hundred miles and one hundred miles plus. These are the three regions most of the business directly depends upon. Most of the use of a park is day use. There are really two types of operations, those that are more local or regional and the other are those that are more tied to tourists areas such as Disney and Busch Gardens. There are two basic

considerations that make them different. One is that many operations relate to tourist areas, especially in Florida, and are open year round. This is a problem because it is during the off-season that many of the rides are maintained and the park is fully serviced. In year round operations, maintaining and servicing an area is more difficult. The only way to do it may be to close certain areas for periods of time and rotate the service or maintenance of these areas during low attendance seasons. Another basic difference is in the service provided. They represent more of a national perspective than a regional approach to design, rides, theme, etc. The techniques that are used by both parks are the same, just the emphasis is different and one represents a more generalized approach. (Operations, p. 81)

Success in the amusement parks and attractions industry is primarily focused upon gate attendance and customer satisfaction with return visits. (Trends, p. 67)

Park Development and Design

QUESTION 12: What are the basic processes you use to develop a park?

ANSWER: You find a location, take a map and put a two hour driving time circle on it and figure about 25% of the visits will come from this area. Make a two to four hour circle and 8-10% of your business will come from this area. Make a four hour plus circle and 2-3% of your business will fall in that area. Take the percentages and the population base in each of the areas identified and you will have an estimate of the number of individuals who will visit your park at least once. When you get the total, you will know the total size that your park must accommodate and you can build and plan you park accordingly. The season is about 110-120 days in most areas, and you can then figure out your daily attendance. You will need to know the patterns of the participation by hour and by day of the week and by month of the year. What I am suggesting is that you need to know the pattern of your traffic flow and the distribution of the visits in your season. You can then figure the number of hot dogs, hamburgers, etc., you must have on hand at any given time. The general concept is that you operate the park on size based upon the peak period and the number of individuals who will be visiting during the peak periods. Once you know the number of individuals who will be visiting during the peak period or anticipated peak period, then you can figure the square footage of your park on a more accurate basis. An example of how you might figure or do a calculation is that you estimate that your peak period is at 3:00 p.m., there will be approximately 2,000 people on the grounds and you know that there are approximately 4.1 visitors per car. Your average size parking lot will need accommodate about 500 cars. (Operations, p. 70-71)

We live in a right handed culture so most of the starting points for circulation of traffic, visual stimulation, etc., have been placed based upon the right handed principle. Another is that it is located in a circle and a variety of rides, food services, and restrooms, are provided on a decentralized basis within the circle so that the consumer can get services of any kind at any place in the park and that there is even distribution of individuals within sections. The third important aspects of design are the flare and flash so that it is very aesthetically appealing and will indeed attract the customer. These are the three design principles that most amusement park operations consider first when they have the opportunity to build the park. (Operations, p. 80)

Size at the present time at Epcot and Disney does not seem to be a problem because individuals take one or two days, leave and come back. The participant realizes the size and nature of the area and adjusts his/her use patterns to fit the type of area. Those who try to see the attraction all at one time

become exhausted and it influences the quality of the experience. Some type of educational program is needed to help the individual understand the use patterns of the park. (Trends, p. 67)

ASSOCIATION

Association Officers/Management

The role of an executive officer is keeping peace in the family. Within a membership there is great diversity, that is, rationality, suppliers versus operators, large versus small operations, different philosophical outlooks, etc. These differences in the membership give rise to many perspectives that in many cases may result in conflict if some type of leadership is not provided to help members understand their commonalities and how these differences translate into diversity which is a key element in the development of new ideas. Individualization of techniques to satisfy the diverse interests within an organization is essential. If one segment is served over another, conflict is the obvious result. (Association Management, p. 57)

One of the most important elements among skills of association management is the ability to stimulate cooperation among members so that there is a sharing of ideas and the responsibility for improvement of the profession can be shared among all of its members and they take part in the educational process. In the private sector, especially in the outdoor amusement industry, the amount of competitiveness has a direct influence upon the educational activities. The outdoor amusement industry tends to be less competitive because each of the attractions serve their own local market and even if there are different attractions in the same area they have their own personality and character and find their own niche in the marketplace. For example, a kiddie park can be beside an animal farm and both be highly successful because they have carved out a specialized marketplace for themselves. (Interview, p. 56)

The primary role of an executive director is to provide leadership through the motivation of the membership. Leadership, in this context, is being on the cutting edge of new trends and solutions to problems without interfering with individual operations. One of the frustrations may be being able to see patterns and trends but not having individuals to accept these ideas that would improve their operation. This is the reason why it is essential that members become part of the solution and be able to document and direct one member to another in terms of sharing a critical element to an organization. Many organizational managers who cannot provide leadership in the context outlined find themselves in a precarious situation and at odds with many members, which sometimes results in conflicts and does not allow them to effectively complete their job. (Interview, p. 56)

Association Purpose

The primary objective is growth and helping any industry establish its own identity. Growth in this context can be seen as the number of members attending workshops, the number of individuals participating in the organization, etc. One of the important items to achieving such growth is rechanneling the attitudes off the membership. It is important in dealing with members that you visit the individuals at the site of their operation. They are on their own turf, feel more at ease and are willing to give you the understanding that is important and necessary for the functioning of the

organization. One of the methods that I used as I was visiting members at the sites was that I would ask those questions about suppliers and I would write these suppliers' names down and when I got back to the office I would write these individuals a little invitation to participate as an exhibitor at our national convention. The perspective in the profession once was that it was patronage oriented but as these ideas from the suppliers began to infuse into the profession and there were greater interactions, individuals in the profession began to see the importance of merchandising, food, and arcades to develop a greater balanced operation. (Association Management, p. 57)

The IAAPA's primary purpose is the exchange of information among its members to improve the industry. This interchange of ideas is what keeps the profession current and revitalizes and stimulates growth. (Future, p. 85)

Events

One of the most important things is a well-planned conference or professional workshop and excellent exhibition show for the exchange of ideas among manufacturers, suppliers, owners and operators. (IAAPA, p. 63)

Owners and operators are looking for three basic elements when they go on a trade show floor. One is the longevity of the product or service. Another is the maintenance records. And the third is the basic appeal that the product of service will have to the customer. Successful suppliers are those who have developed products and services that meet these three requirements. (Operations, p. 69)

One has been through the organization-the conducting of workshops in terms of an idea sharing period. The organization has sought out progressive owners that have tried new ideas, been successful with them and tried to bring them to the national conferences to share with others. An example of this was about six years ago, we had someone making a presentation on waterslides and even more recently, about three years ago, someone making a presentation on the soft-play areas. These topics were both well explored at the national conference and it was an excellent opportunity for owners and operators to hear about new ideas that had a potential application to their operation. A second component is the trying out of new products on an audience in a laboratory setting. The Texas State Fair, in September, is where many food and merchandising people in the industry try out new products for the following season. This is a laboratory in which they can see how a sample population will react to new products, materials and techniques. The Oktoberfest, held in Germany, is a similar event for those in the European markets. A third way is that suppliers will visit clients during the winter months to show their new products. The suppliers, in this instance, give the owners and operators new ideas and usually use some kind of market data to sell their products, based upon consumer demands. Individuals in the amusement parks and attractions industry have an ability or an insight to anticipate trends because of their experience of working with people. They also have the ability to take an idea and adapt it to their own situation in order to improve upon the basic product through some type of programming. An example that I have cited earlier is the gentleman who was a restaurateur and was not doing a very good business but decided to open for the lunch hour and focus his complete restaurant operation around soap operas. What I am pinpointing is the innovative ability of the owners and operators as the primary dimension that has kept our industry viable through the years. (Operations, p. 71-72)

Association Education

There are four primary methods that we have used: 1) workshops, 2) informal meetings, 3) summer meetings, and 4) the trade show. Each year at our annual conference we sponsor workshops by experts in 35 to 40 subject matter areas that are practically oriented. Such topics include: information on games, rides, arcades, maintenance, merchandising, food and operations, soft-play areas, media, computer use, accounting procedures, financial development, office procedures, etc. The primary focus of each of these sessions is to discuss common problems and share operational information to solve these problems. There are also informal meeting times during our conference so that individuals can get together in groups of 8 to 10 to exchange ideas and to talk about many of the sessions and information that has been obtained at the conference. These sessions are usually associated with breakfast, lunch, dinner or a social event. It has been a very successful method over the years to reinforce information presented at the conference. During the summer, the association also sponsors what is titled "summer meetings or backyard tours." The back door of a selected park is opened and individuals associated with each of the departments makes a presentation of approximately 30 minutes with questions and answers. Within a two day period an individual visiting this type of seminar can hear from all of the various departments and is able to share information using this particular operation as an example. Another major dimension for the free exchange of information from the suppliers side is to show their wares for next season. These suppliers are always interested in adding more ideas to operation and trying to sell their products and services. (Future, p. 85)

Educational materials and efforts have a significant impact upon an organization because it helps to mold the organizational position and allows them to explore new ideas and techniques. (Interview, p. 55)

History

In the winter of 1870 a small group of 12 amusement parks and attractions operators, primarily from the eastern United States, met and decided to form the association. The reason for the meeting was that this was a post-war (World War I) period, the baby boom had started and there was a demand for entertainment and amusement types of attractions. As a result, there were many individuals who were exploiters who were traveling around the country selling bogus services and products. As a result, the association was formed to counterbalance this movement and to help maintain the image of amusement parks and attractions. (IAAPA, p. 62)

As the association evolved, managers and operators began to realize that they were in a non-competitive business and the sharing of ideas and problems with one another was a positive developmental step to the industry. They were able to address such common problems as safety codes, promotion, and fire insurance. These were some of the initial problems addressed by the association. (IAAPA, p. 62)

Suppliers vs. Owners/Operators

The operating policy of the philosophy of the organization has been open door. The suppliers have been on an equal footing with the owners and operators and they have not been treated as second-class citizens. The open, free exchange of ideas among suppliers and owners and operators is the primary focus of the sharing. The suppliers, many times, are the primary presenters at the workshops. The service phases of the business are treated as family members. It is this family atmosphere that brings about the free exchange of ideas. Most people do not realize the importance of the service industry. There are five to six suppliers to each person in operations and ownership. (Operations, p. 68-69)

MISCELLANEOUS

Cultural Differences in Parks

The above observations are not meant to dichotomize, just to point out that the amusement parks and attractions occupy different positions culturally and have many different expressions as would be expected. (Trends, p. 67)

Bob's Accomplishments

Membership more than doubled from 521 to 1,172.

Gross income increased by 900 percent from \$124,000 to \$1,076,000 in 1982.

The IAAPA 's annual convention and trade show--long considered among the best in any industry--expanded from attendance of about 1,900 in a 16,000 square foot area in 1964 to almost 7,500 in attendance and more than 93,000 square feet when Bob retired.

A corresponding growth occurred in the IAAPA's staff as the association's size and scope expanded. The staff of three in 1964 grew to 10 in 1983. This included a new Washington office with the Association becoming increasingly active in the area of government relations. (Summary, p. 88)

CONCLUSION

Theme parks are worldwide phenomena. Their impact upon society has many outcomes. One of the most important is that of children. These entities have become an institution that socializes children into the culture of fantasy. These theme parks and associated movies have become an element that has had an educational influence upon the society. Whether this influence is authentic or not is an important question that must be answered now and in the future. It is a social institution that attracts adults as well as children. Many of the adults remember their experiences and want their families to have similar

experiences. The themes of the parks become familiar stories from generation to generation. If theme parks are going to become an important part of society and the future, they are going to have to develop new approaches as society evolves. They are a driving force within the current culture, but with the current environmental and virus crises, new mechanisms have to be found to continue the development of their popularity.