

## Looking to increase its patient and employee satisfaction levels, as well as improve its competitiveness, Grant Regional Health Center turns to *Disney Institute* for assistance.

### SUMMARY

Grant Regional Health Center, a 25-bed hospital in rural Wisconsin, had long neglected its customer care, employee satisfaction and even its physical plant. Faced with increasing competition from nearby hospitals, administrators realized they needed help in correcting these deficiencies and approached Disney Institute for help. After implementing many of the lessons learned during a three-day customized program at the Walt Disney Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., the 164-employee hospital saw its customer satisfaction scores soar to over 90%, its employee turnover drop nearly by half as well as increased revenues.

### “A LOT OF CHALLENGES”

For a small hospital, Wisconsin’s Grant Regional Health Center had some big problems. The 25-bed, 164-employee facility was suffering from low employee morale and high turnover. Customer satisfaction ratings were poor. The facility’s physical plant had long been ignored and needed attention. Known derisively as “a band-aid station,” where patients would be treated and then transferred to a more prestigious health facility, Grant Regional also had a low market share.

With five other small hospitals within 45 minutes, Grant Regional’s administrators knew they needed to change to survive. “We were aware we had a lot of challenges to overcome,” says Nicole Clapp, now the hospital’s president and CEO. “We were taking our customers for granted and had to overhaul our entire culture.”

### CUSTOMIZED PRESENTATION

Clapp, who was then the hospital’s vice president of professional services, was given the job of, as she explains, “turning things around.” After attending a one-day Disney Institute open-enrollment presentation on quality service in nearby Dubuque, Iowa, she felt confident that Disney could help Grant Regional.

“Disney Institute emphasized how important customer

service was to any company’s success,” she explains. “And they were experts at pleasing their guests. That really hit home with us.”

Clapp contacted Disney Institute for more customized help. A few months later, a Disney Institute consultant came to Grant Regional to conduct a cultural assessment.

The consultant interviewed 29 of the hospital’s employees, medical staff and board members to help give him a picture of the organization’s culture, including its strengths and weaknesses.

The consultant looked at everything from the management’s hiring practices to the appearance of the building. Clapp recalls the consultant walking into the hospital and spotting a group of

healthy plants in the lobby. “Your plants are alive. That’s good,” he told Clapp. When she seemed puzzled, he told her, “If you can’t take care of a plant how can you take care of your patients?” Says Clapp, “I immediately understood how important details are. Also, I saw how necessary it is to see us through our customers’ eyes.”

A Disney Institute consultant used all the information he gathered to customize a multi-day program for hospital staffers that would take place at the Walt Disney World Resort. “Having a Disney Institute program tailored to our specific situation really appealed to us,” explains Clapp. “This wasn’t a cookie cutter program. It addressed our unique needs and wants.”

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Two months later Clapp and 14 hospital employees, both clinical and non-clinical, went to Florida for a three-day series of Disney Institute health service seminars, presentations and site visits. Topics included quality service, leadership, people management and more.

“The consultants explained that they weren’t going to simply tell us what to do,” says Clapp. “They showed us how Disney achieved excellence and asked us to figure out how we could adapt those practices to our small, rural hospital.”

Grant Regional employees also went behind the scenes at Walt Disney World to see how Disney puts theory into practice. “This was invaluable,” says Clapp. At Wilderness Lodge, for example, the hospital employees learned how the Disney hotel’s different departments, from housekeeping to laundry to materials, worked together. “Disney showed us that our departments have to be interlinked. The consultants explained that we are all customers of one another,” explains Clapp.

### OUR ACTION PLAN

Back in Wisconsin the hard work continued. Clapp and her team spent six months, assisted by Disney consultants, drawing up a program that adapted Disney’s best practices to Grant Regional Health Center. They produced a manual entitled “Creating Customer Service for Grant Regional Health Center.” On one page was a Disney principle; the facing page included an adaptation that the staff would institute at the hospital. “It was our action plan,” says Clapp.

For example, a Disney practice is to engage the customer into the surroundings. Hospital staffers adapted that by deciding to decorate rooms with different themes; there’s a “fishing” room, a “country” room and more. Even the CT scanner is decorated with a nautical “Under the Sea” theme. “We want our guests to relax and feel as much at home as possible,” says Clapp. (The hospital also adopted Disney’s practice of referring to customers as “guests.”)

Other small touches helped set Grant Regional apart. When a baby is born, the paging system plays Brahms lullaby. Employees are empowered, like those at Disney,

to “go above and beyond.” Once, a nurse volunteered to arrange a wedding for a hospice guest and his fiancée, just hours before he passed away.

Taking another page out of the Disney playbook, Clapp explains that the hospital now “hires for attitude, not aptitude.” Patients notice. A patient had earlier complained about the level of customer service in the hospital, noting, “Nurses are very good mechanics but nursing care is deplorable.” After another stay six months later she wrote, “The care has improved 99%. I was well satisfied and thrilled with the change. Keep it up!”

### SUSTAINING THE MAGIC

Today, no one refers to Grant Regional as a “band aid station” any more. Since implementing a range of Disney-inspired practices:

- Patient satisfaction scores have soared to the 90th percentile
- Employee satisfaction scores are in the top seven of 74 regional hospitals
- Market share has increased by 13 percent
- Employee turnover dropped by nearly half, to 9.2 percent from 17.9 percent.
- Other hospitals, many larger, have been so impressed by Grant Regional’s results that they have come for on-site tours.
- Revenues have increased; the hospital has made a profit every year.

Clapp and her team are proud of their accomplishments but admit that maintaining excellence is an ongoing effort. “We have never forgotten what we learned at Disney Institute,” she says. “The entire staff knows it has to keep working, to keep trying new things, to sustain that magic.”