

## Barton Healthcare Boosts Satisfaction Scores, Slashes Employee Turnover with Help from *Disney Institute*

### SUMMARY

California's Barton Memorial Hospital suffered from higher than average employee turnover, low to average patient satisfaction scores and the threat of a new competitor. Management enlisted *Disney Institute* to help create a new employee and customer service program to address these problems. After attending training seminars at the *Walt Disney World*® Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., and implementing a new company-wide employee and patient excellence program, the hospital reported a jump in both patient and staff satisfaction scores and enjoyed annual savings of more than \$200,000 due to a drop in employee turnover.

### FULL STORY

#### "We Needed Help"

Even hospitals can get sick. Several years ago, 47-year-old Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., was suffering from average patient satisfaction scores, high employee turnover and a decline in patient volumes. Says Kathy Cocking, vice president of operations for the Barton Healthcare System, "As if that wasn't bad enough, a \$123 million, state-of-the-art hospital was about to open close to us. We needed help."

That help arrived in the form of *Disney Institute* Consultant Chris Caracci, who flew to the 75-bed hospital to conduct a site visit or, as he calls it, "a cultural audit." Caracci, himself a former healthcare worker and administrator, says "Kathy told me that Barton's management wanted to change the hospital's culture. Before we did anything, I spent several days there exploring the property, poring over patient satisfaction data and examining employee survey results."

It didn't take him long to discover shortcomings. For example, at the front desk, the hospital's staffers failed to greet him. "Chris stood there alone until I came out to greet him," remembers Cocking. "He told me patients and guests would also share this poor first impression of Barton."

Caracci kept investigating. He conducted numerous interviews and held focus groups with a wide range of the hospital's 950 employees, from sanitation workers to medical staff to administrators.

"This was invaluable," says Cocking. "Chris got an up-close and personal look at our employees, our practices, our culture and, most importantly, our problems."

On his return to Orlando, Fla., home base for *Disney Institute*, Caracci used the knowledge he gained from his cultural audit, and input from Cocking, to design a unique training program that addressed Barton's major problems.

**"Barton Healthcare began the journey towards reclaiming their reputation by looking at three customer service experts. Among them was Disney Institute ."**

"I put together a tailored, multi-day presentation for Barton's managers from *Disney Institute*'s large arsenal of content, incorporating everything from Disney's Approach to People Management and Leadership Excellence to Quality Service," says Caracci.

#### Guest Expectations

The first step in the tailored program was for Cocking and 37 other healthcare managers to fly to the *Walt Disney World*® Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., for three days of intensive, on-site *Disney Institute* training sessions, conducted by Caracci and other facilitators. It's not always necessary for a *Disney Institute* client to attend training at a Disney park, but Carracci felt it was an important step for the Barton team.

“When guests come to *Walt Disney World*® Resort, they have an expectation that it will be clean, safe and friendly,” said Caracci. “Patients and visitors to a hospital have those exact same expectations. If either of us doesn’t meet their expectations, our business suffers.”

During the site visits and behind-the-scenes experiences at *Walt Disney World*® Resort, Cocking and the hospital managers were able to see first-hand some of the principles Caracci had been explaining put into practice.

“We were all amazed to see Disney staffers in the *Magic Kingdom*® Park who, no matter what their job description or their rank, picked up any bit of litter they spotted,” recalls Cocking. “It was a great example of everyone pitching in together to create a great guest experience.”

The Barton managers even noticed that same team spirit in the name badges Disney cast members wore. “They only had their first names and no titles on their badges,” says Cocking. That sends a message that everyone is on the same team; there’s no hierarchy. We liked that.”

Small details like these make an impression. Back in the seminar room, Caracci reminded the managers that *Disney Institute* training does not attempt to impose change upon an organization. “We’d rather show by example,” said Caracci. That’s the way you get commitment. Likewise, you have to bring out the passion in your employees to get them to change the culture.”

### **Innovations Paying Off**

Today, after Cocking and others have instituted many of *Disney Institute*’s management lessons, Barton Memorial Hospital is no longer ill. Indeed, it’s flourishing.

“We implemented what we call The Barton Way, our service standards program that is largely based on *Disney Institute* concepts,” says Cocking. The hospital also created a video that details the history of Barton to new hires. Taking another cue from Disney, the hospital ordered new uniforms for their employees and improved their signage and landscaping. “From Disney we learned that first impressions are important,” says Cocking.

An Employee Excellence Coordinator, a newly created position, now teaches new-hire orientation classes, writes an employee newsletter and implements many of the

new developments Barton instituted after its experience with *Disney Institute*. (He also mans the front desk where Caracci was left waiting.)

The innovations are paying off:

- Employee turnover has dropped from 14 percent to nine percent.
- Barton saves more than \$200,000 a year by not needing to hire contract nurses.
- Patient satisfaction scores have improved and compliment letters have increased by 300 percent
- The number of patients who would recommend Barton has jumped by 10 percent.

Barton Healthcare is so pleased with the results of its Disney-inspired solutions that it is sending another group of managers to *Disney Institute*. Says Cocking, “Addressing patient perceptions and staff satisfaction is a journey without end. Our goal is similar to Disney’s—to strive for perfection but settle for excellence.”