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David Luchsinger
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Dear Dave:

First let me say that Sara and I thoroughly enjoyed working this past summer as seasonal Park Guides at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island!

For us, working for the National Park Service is a privilege; it's the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams of what to do in our retirement; and it gives us a sense of fulfillment and achievement not possible in many other activities.

During the summer, we did notice a few things where some changes could make significant improvements. And having been the President/CEO of a company for 27 years, I recognize the need for feedback. And so in the spirit of trying to offer some basic feedback to you---essentially the President/CEO of the STLI/ELIS National Monument---I've compiled a few suggestions and recommendations.

I hope you don't mind, and I hope you will read these suggestions and recommendations for what they are---namely, no more than some thoughts from a temporary, summer worker who doesn't know everything, who hasn't worked at Ellis Island for very long, and who can't begin to appreciate the challenges of managing workers and programs within the public sector.

Take care, good luck, and best wishes in all you do!

Bruce E. Schundler

cc: Frank Mills
Danni Brown

2010 Suggestions and Recommendations for The Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island National Monument

The Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island National Monument is doing many things very well, and many programs are functioning far better than at other parks, and most visitors are very happy with their experiences here. There is, however, always room for improvement.

1. There are times, for instance, when it seems STLI/ELIS has forgotten its commitment to visitor enjoyment and satisfaction. We may say visitor enjoyment and satisfaction are important, but
 - compared to other goals and objectives we don't reinforce visitor enjoyment and satisfaction regularly and continually;
 - daily work schedules are established that don't encourage and promote visitor enjoyment and satisfaction;
 - rangers have been promoted and rewarded who are known to be unfriendly, mean-spirited, and unhelpful with visitors; and
 - our successes and/or failures in visitor enjoyment and satisfaction are not being measured or evaluated on a regular basisother than through the annual National Park Service evaluations.

A. Compared to other goals and objectives we don't reinforce visitor enjoyment and satisfaction regularly and continually:

Among new rangers and guides, for instance, basic safety was preached and taught; throughout the summer we were reminded again and again to be safe; and other rangers will comment if they think you are doing something that is physically unsafe. But seldom was I reminded how important visitor enjoyment and satisfaction were, and no one seemed to care if a program had to be cancelled. No one seemed to care if visitors were greeted as they entered the main building, if they knew where to go or what to do, or if visitors were treated with respect and a friendly attitude at the Information Desk. And at the end of the day or on an annual basis, we keep records on how many accidents happen, but not how many tours or movies have been cancelled.

Similarly, few seem concerned that we limit visitor access to so much of Ellis Island. This year, for instance, there was construction on the south islands and so access had to be limited; but at other times why aren't regular daily tours allowed on the south side---around the outside of the buildings or even in some of them? Visitors often ask about tours to the hospital buildings, and among many people, there's a strong interest in the medical history of Ellis Island. And yet, in spite of this interest, we limited access to special groups and special occasions. Why? Some would argue it would be unsafe---but would hiking around the buildings on the south islands, or even in one or two buildings be any riskier than having visitors climb 32 foot ladders at parks like Mesa Verde NP, or hiking down to Phantom Ranch at the Grand Canyon, or doing what visitors do regularly at many of our national parks?

B. Daily work schedules at Ellis Island are not developed to maximize and promote visitor enjoyment and satisfaction:

Our commitment to visitor enjoyment and satisfaction is compromised when we don't work to maximize the amount of time park rangers and guides are spending with visitors; and that is a management problem---a weakness in how our supervisors and managers are scheduling the daily

work schedules, and a weakness in how those who are supervising the supervisors are reviewing the work of the supervisors and the schedules of the rangers and guides.

For instance, whereas the rangers and guides at the Statue of Liberty and screening sites are scheduled very carefully with everyone always in an assigned post or location throughout most of the day, the rangers and guides at Ellis Island have hours and hours of so-called “project time.” This summer, for example, there often were days when there are more rangers idly working on “projects” in the break room than rangers working with and helping visitors. And even when there were plenty of available rangers, there were many days when only one ranger would be assigned to the front desk to help hundreds of visitors, and days when no rangers would be assigned to rove in the Great Hall or to rove outside or to stand on the front ramp welcoming visitors. And there were days when for almost any excuse, movies, tours, and Board of Special Inquiry programs would be cancelled.

Quite frankly, there doesn't seem to be any logic to how “projects” are assigned. There doesn't seem to be any kind of evaluation of whether each and every project makes sense, of whether the time spent on a project is justifiable, or of how long a project should take; and there is very little checking on the progress of “projects.” Consequently, instead of being assigned to work with visitors, and to spend time with visitors, and to be available to visitors, many rangers spend hours in the break room working on projects that don't exist, on projects that aren't necessary, or on projects that simply are not progressing.

To be sure, some “down time” ---maybe an hour a day to rest, study, and recharge--- might be appropriate for every ranger working at Ellis Island. Rangers and guides are “bombarded” with literally thousands of visitors every day, they answer some of the same questions hundreds of times a week, and they deal with some cranky, tired, and stubborn visitors every day. And leading tours and answering questions in the Great Hall or working at the Information Desk can be a challenge because of the constant noise levels. But during this past summer, some rangers were regularly given hours and hours of project time every day; there were days when I would have three, four, and five hours of “project time”; and there were rangers who were given three and four hours of project time regularly to work on “projects” that were not defined, not supervised, and not evaluated regularly.

Simply stated, the rangers and guides at Ellis Island were not scheduled in ways which maximized visitor contact and assistance or in ways which demonstrated our commitment to visitor enjoyment and satisfaction.

And the experiences of visitors are important: they are prescribed by our Mission Statement and more recently by the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island's statement of its core objectives. And in the end, our visitors are our customers, they pay our salaries, and they make everything we do possible.

C. Rangers have been promoted and rewarded who are known to be unfriendly, mean-spirited, and unhelpful with visitors:

When and how staff are treated and promoted speaks a lot about a park's goals and objectives. For instance, when rangers who are known to be unfriendly, mean-spirited, and unhelpful with visitors are promoted and rewarded, it sends a message to every ranger on the staff---and the message is that customer satisfaction is not important and that visitor enjoyment and satisfaction are fairly low in the park's stated goals and objectives. And when rangers who are helpful and pleasant and industrious are not nurtured or mentored, when they are not promoted when the opportunities arise or when they are not encouraged to apply to better positions or encouraged to stay with the Park Service, it sends another message.

To be sure, one of the goals to which the park seems committed is “diversity.” And the development of a diverse staff with representatives from many ethnic and cultural groups is important. But should

goals of diversity “trump” those of competency? And should the effort to create more diversity result in the rewarding of rangers who are known to be unfriendly, mean-spirited, and/or unhelpful with visitors and co-workers?

To be sure, what standards are being used in the promotion and rewarding of the rangers and guides at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty? And how important are the attributes and qualities that lead to visitor satisfaction and enjoyment being used in evaluating rangers?

D. Our successes or failures in visitor enjoyment and satisfaction are not measured or evaluated on a regular basis.....other than through the annual National Park Service evaluations.

How are we evaluating visitor enjoyment and satisfaction? Is anyone trying to evaluate how we are doing? Are we doing anything to constantly review and re-evaluate?

There are regular evaluations, I believe, of permanent and term rangers and guides, but are there regular evaluations of how we are doing as a staff or as a park? Do we ask how we could improve on a regular basis? Upon leaving, do we ask seasonal rangers to offer suggestions and recommendations? Do our supervisors and/or the Chief of Interpretation regularly sit down and talk with the rangers and guides about their jobs, or ask how we could do better? How often are we asking: what more could we do?

2. I can't comment on how decisions are made for the entire park, or in other departments of the park, but in the part of the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island that I experienced, I saw decisions being made which followed an old militaristic, top down management style, or which tried to emulate a misunderstanding of how corporations actually make decisions. There were decisions made by supervisors who seem to think good decisions have to come from the top, that collaboration and consensus building is a sign of weakness, and that decisiveness—even if based on little or no feedback—is to be admired.

To be sure, there was a time when both the military and many major corporations functioned with a top down management style, but those days are over. For instance, in a recent speech at Princeton University, General Petraeus spoke on Strategic Leadership---during which he outlined how major decisions and policies are being developed by the military today. He talked about the importance of developing good ideas and policies, and then on how good ideas are communicated and implemented...with a focus on the need for feedback on best and worse practices and on lessons learned, and on the need for constant re-evaluation. (If you would like to hear this speech, go to:

http://bc.princeton.edu/flash/4x3.html?videofile=StreamAS/flash/alumni/20100220_alumni_day_petraeus.mp4)

Or looking at the corporate world.....in a recent interview, John Thain, the former president of Goldman Sacks who became CEO of the New York Stock Exchange, was asked whether the era of top down management was over. To this he answered:

“I think the idea that any one person can be so all-knowing and simply say, “I’m the CEO, I know the answer, and simply do what I tell you”----doesn’t work in business anymore. The need to listen to all the different constituents and to really make sure you understand what their demands and concerns are, really requires a consensus-driven approach.”

In contrast to the approach being advocated by these two men, I’ve seen decisions, for instance, about the park’s Ellis Island website made based on how just one person wanted it, I’ve seen decisions about what we

offer and how we schedule rangers based on one opinion, and I've seen a management style at Ellis Island that communicates---"I'm the CEO, I know the answer, and simply do what I tell you."

Perhaps far more telling is the park's failure to ask for and to seek feedback from rangers and guides who work with our visitors every day, from rangers with particular experiences and training pertinent to certain decisions and operations, and from seasonal rangers who often come with a variety of experiences from other parks. For instance, after months of working as a seasonal ranger, I was never asked for feedback or suggestions on how the park could improve what it was doing.

If the current commander in Chief of US military forces in Afghanistan (and former USCENTCOM Commander) and the former president of a companies as large as Goldman Sacks and the New York Stock Exchange feel a consensus-driven approach makes sense, maybe it's time for a more consensus-driven or collaborative approach to be considered by the National Park Service in general and by every department of the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island National Monument in particular.

3- Finally, some quick recommendations:

- Why not hire summer seasonals to start earlier in May or maybe even in April, instead of waiting to have them start at the end of May? Ellis Island is very busy during the end of the school year, and many groups visit during April and May---and that's when the park could use some extra help. But instead of hiring seasonals to start in April and/or in early May when the park is very busy and could use some extra help, summer interpretive seasonals are hired to start just before Memorial Day and to work until the middle of November ---even though the attendance drops off significantly after Labor Day. And so, why not hire summer seasons to start earlier when you need them, instead of hiring them later and then having them work until the middle of November---especially since attendance is so slow after Labor Day?
- Why not consider using qualified, well trained "Intermittent Rangers"? The park does get busy around Thanksgiving or during the Christmas/New Year's week, and often could use some extra help. So why not use rangers like Sara and me to work during those busy weeks?
- Why not develop a more formalized process for assigning projects, evaluating them, and assessing progress? Needless to say, there are some "projects" or assignments that are never-ending and clearly defined---such as being in charge of "lost and found," or being responsible for literature and basic supplies, or being responsible for responding to teachers and outside inquiries. But other "projects" should be carefully considered, evaluated, and assigned. They should offer some clear benefit to the park and/or to visitors; they should be projects which justify funds being spent on them in terms of time and/or supplies; they should have a beginning and an anticipated end; and they should be subject to regular progress reports, occasional peer review and supervisory evaluation.
- When changes in assignments are necessary or when rangers and guides have to be reassigned from one site to another (as in reassignments from the Statue or Ellis to one of the screening sites), why not ask who would like to be reassigned or changed? Why not ask if rangers or guides would like to be rotated occasionally? Why not seek some input to what people would like to do or where they would like to work? Obviously, everyone will not always be satisfied, and everyone would have to understand there are no promises and no guarantees. Nevertheless, why not consider each person's preferences as part of the reassignment process?

- Improve signage throughout the park. As a “World Heritage Site” and as an attraction to visitors from around the world, there are not enough signs, there are not enough signs in foreign languages or with universal icons, and there are not enough signs to help visitors locate basic facilities like bathrooms.
- Hire a full-time, qualified Educational Specialist, or hire a ranger who with the proper qualifications and training can double as the park’s official Educational Specialist. Currently contacts with teachers and schools, and the development of curriculum materials and educational programs, and the educational portions of the web site are not being managed very well. Teachers and schools have difficulty knowing who to contact to arrange programs, and phone calls and emails are getting ignored and/or confused. And usually educational decisions are not being coordinated, and the educational portion of the park’s web site has virtually nothing for junior high and high school students.

Bruce E. Schundler
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