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## The Hidden Benefit of Observation

It's amazing how much can be learned from the most unusual or obscure situations yet 80% of the time, we miss it! We are not trained to keep our eyes open for examples and trends in everyday life. Trust me, you would not be alone; however, if you can develop the skill of observation, you will stand out in the crowd.

As I spent a significant amount of time in the hospital the last few days as my Dad recovers from a stroke, I didn't have technical topics on my mind aside from anything critical that had to be done for clients, and so I thought it would be interesting to discuss what business lessons can be learned from these trying times. A few that pop to mind include: 1) Be clear on your objective. 2) Environment matters. 3) Questions matter. 4) Customer service trumps!

**1. Be clear on your objective:** Of course my Dad's unspoken objective is to get better (and I think to get decent food)! He's none-too-thrilled with the thickening agent added into his coffee. I can't blame him! However, it seemed apparent that the nurses won't consider him 'better' unless he eats "enough" food. Perhaps we should give them a thickening agent for lunch? I think the reason he ended up on this diet in the first place is due to coughing when taking pills. However, if I drank luke-warm water with pills, I'd cough too! I'm glad they are being safe; however, I wonder if my Dad's wishes are clear.

My Mom immensely dislikes hospitals, and so when she had knee-replacement surgery last year, her clear objective was to get the heck out of there. She'd be persistent with the nurses, doctors etc. If they said a 20 year old would be out in a week, she'd say, "Ok 2 days". And she'd proceed to do it. She'd be walking up and down the hallways with a new knee, daring the nurses to keep up. The nurse's objective might have been to keep the patient comfortable and safe, and the doctor's might have been to optimize the knee recovery. If my Mom hadn't been clear on her objective, I have no doubt that she'd have doubled her time in the hospital. Even the home nurse said she never saw such a quick recovery - apparently her dislike of hospitals extends to home care as well...

Of course this is true in a work situation as well; however, I find it is often undervalued. How do you know how you are doing if you don't know where you're going? The people and projects with the clearest objectives seem to beat the rest.... Instead of jumping into the situation, take a step back to understand your objective.

**2. Environment matters:** As the speaking masters say, check out your environment BEFORE going on stage - environment matters! This certainly rang true in my Dad's hospital rooms. The first room was somewhat luxurious - not sure if it was because it was in the stroke ICU area but my Dad seemed better solely due to the environment. The call button was easier to push (little things matter!), and the room seemed brighter and newer; thus, whether he felt better or worse, he seemed better.

We cannot always affect our environment; however, we can become acquainted with it and optimize it for our purposes. For example, we brought a small balloon into my Dad's room to spice it up. What can you do to become familiar with the environment for an important meeting? Or to liven up your work space?

**3. Questions matter:** I've always believed in the power of good questions, and it certainly spoke volumes in the hospital. The person who accesses the type of food a patient can eat (ie. Whether you'll get off the intolerable liquid diet and move your way up) came by and asked questions. She was building up to the type of food my Dad could eat, and so after talking about liquids, she asked him if he wanted to try a banana. He said rather emphatically, "no". I happen to know he likes bananas and so dug deeper. It turned out that he didn't want a banana as he had to use the restroom first. A very different answer as he could have been eating Jell-O for days if he didn't eat a bite of banana.

**4. Customer service trumps!** Although all the nurses seemed good and competent; some had a better "bedside manner" in terms of customer service. What a difference! I find that service and relationships are the differentiators for many businesses, and it has everything to do with your employees. Have you ever seen a company with unhappy employees who provide exceptional service to their customers? Me either!

Those folks who came in and used a bit of humor or went the extra mile for my Dad made a difference. As my Mom proved previously, part of recovery has to do with the person's objective and attitude. When my Dad feels positive and thinks he's making progress, he suddenly is better. Interesting how powerful customer (client/ patient) service can be! The volunteer who manned the desk to enter the hospital was FAR from young yet seemed energetic in her passion to go out of her way to be friendly and helpful - made a great first impression.

And talk about standing out from the crowd - the neurologist not only dealt with the immediate issue (the stroke) but also seemed to care and suggested ways to help address my Dad's Parkinson's complications. I actually thought it might be good that if he had to have an issue, he had it while Dr. Reiss was there as we might come away with an added benefit. Much better than an infection! How often does that happen at a hospital?

What can you learn from all situations? Observe. Look for trends. Seek out opportunities. You'll soon have the opportunity to speed by your competition.

## Preparation Success

We are constantly preparing for something - a meeting, a key customer visit, etc. Thus, a few tips might be handy:

1. **Think of the big picture** - It's easy to get lost in detail. What is the objective of your meeting? Trip? Etc.? What is required to achieve that objective?
2. **Design first** - Before jumping in and creating 10 spreadsheets which are less than optimal, design what is required to leave the meeting with a successful outcome.
3. **Automate** - Once you have designed a process or report, find ways to automate what's feasible. Ask for help.
4. **Simplify** - Complexity does not equal success. Find ways to provide clarity instead
5. **Prioritize** - No need to address everything. Instead prioritize what is most important to ensure success and focus on those. |
6. **Get familiar with your environment** - Where will your meeting take place? What will folks wear? What is expected?
7. **Leverage resources** - You don't have to do everything yourself. Who can help? Who might benefit from helping?

## Recommended Reading

["To Sell is Human"](#) by Daniel Pink- an interesting book on selling and why we are all in sales.

## Connections

Connections and relationships are the 80/20 of success! Please see this month's requests:

- A key contact is looking for a procurement or project management position. He reported up through my Director of Procurement when I was an Operations Executive and had great reviews. Please contact him directly with leads (Charles Pickering) - [CnCPick@aol.com](mailto:CnCPick@aol.com).
- My key contact is looking for a senior leadership position in a small to medium sized organization where he will have financial and operational responsibility for all logistics functions (i.e. Analytics, planning, transportation and distribution.) He has an exceptional background with 7 years of (Big 5) supply chain consulting experience and 4 years of Third-Party Logistics experience. Please email Brewster directly with ideas/ leads - [jbsmith70@gmail.com](mailto:jbsmith70@gmail.com).

**NOTE:** To submit an item for this section, please send me an email with a short description of your needs and an email address. Please note that NOT all requests will be published as it must fit the guidelines and align with the Profit through People brand.

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