INSIDE INNOVATION

"The attractions are always evolving. ... Space Mountain is a great example."

DINAMARIE STEFANI • SENIOR QUALITY ASSURANCE PROJECT ENGINEER, ADVANCED MEDICAL OPTICS

Disneyland as classroom

Corporate managers seek to glean insights from the theme park that they can apply to their own jobs.

First of two columns about innovation at Disneyland.

With childlike gleams in their eyes and notebooks in hand, nearly two dozen corporate managers from three Orange County companies visited Disneyland last week — but not just to have fun.

They went as part of a UC Irvine Extension program in search of Walt Disney Co. innovations, insights and inspirations that they could put to use at their own companies.

"Disneyland is 50 years old, but they're not resting on their laurels," noted Gilbert Madrid, research and development manager at Edwards Lifesciences in Irvine.

The goal for the Disneyland visit was to move beyond textbook theories of management, said Martin Wartenberg, who is lead instructor of the Leadership and Management Program for Technology Professionals, or LAMP.

The day trip came near the end of a two-week LAMP program that local medical-device companies helped to tailor for their midlevel research managers, with support from federal job-training funds and the Orange County Workforce Investment Board.

As the students toured the park and reflected on what they were experiencing, they spotted many innovative approaches that could...
INNOVATION: Park’s themes cross over

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help almost any company improve. Here are some samples:

EMBRACE CHANGE

"It has been seven to 10 years since I’ve been here, and I was shocked at how much change has occurred," said Tom Mead, senior manager of regulatory affairs at Edwards. "Disney must embrace change -- and force change to happen."

Mead noted that Disney must overcome naysayers who worry about how many people will be upset. "They must say, 'We have to do this. We have to keep evolving. We have to stay attractive to our audience.'"

Dinamari Stefani, senior quality assurance project engineer at Advanced Medical Optics in Santa Ana, noted the redesign of the Space Mountain roller-coaster ride and the addition of music from the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

"It's totally evolved from what it was when I was a teenager, when it was a space experience," she said. "Now it's like, 'Rock out, let's go fast and 'Yeah!'"

MOLD THE CUSTOMER'S EXPERIENCE

Disneyland's designers have

carefully choreographed visitors' experience, said Robert Friedman, senior manager for heart- valve product development at Edwards. "They have the whole thing planned out," agreed Jeff Pellicer, project manager at Advanced Medical Optics, or AMO. "They get you excited. There's a waiting to get on the ride -- the excitement there. Then there's the ride itself and the memory, with the toys and the music afterwords."

For Stefani at Edwards Lifesciences, that's a reminder that every business needs to focus on making its customers' experience simple and enjoyable.

"At Disneyland, he said, "the experience is endless. Customers aren't aware of what's behind the scenes." At Edwards, he said, "We do this same. Our products are designed so doctors can only do certain things. For example, labs can only turn one way -- the way they should turn."

For Friedman at Edwards, the way Disney coordinates sights, sounds, and smell is a model for preparing corporate presentations. By doing more than just a simple PowerPoint projection, he

some models where our engineers could practice."

FOSTER TEAMWORK

Refael Bedia, production manager at Beckman Coulter in Fullerton, found that his work life was reflected in a multiplayer online game that he played at the Innovation attraction.

The same cooperative skills in the game are also required in modern corporations with multiple locations. Teams at Beckman Coulter, for example, need to work online to coordinate work at the Fullerton headquarters and at sites in Minnesota and Indiana, he said.

MAINTAIN BALANCE

Disneyland demonstrates the importance of balancing fun and seriousness, said Hongchu Cao, an Edwards Lifesciences distinguished engineer in heart-valve therapy. He focused on the aspect of Disneyland that creates the greatest harm -- rides that occasionally malfunction, injuring or injuring park visitors.

"As an engineer, I can't help but look beyond the fun. I look at the good part: what makes the park tick, the pneumatics, the hydraulics, the servo controllers behind the scenes," he said.

"Innovation in this park is not just for the sake of innovation. You can have better glasses and technology, but they can get you into trouble," he said, so Disneyland's planners "apply old, simple, pneumatic tools where they're called for. They apply innovation where it's needed. That's key."

For any company, from the workplace to the customer, a worthy goal is to create an experience that's pleasurable, perhaps delightful and fun, too. But more fundamental goals are to serve customers' needs and to avoid harming them.

"They're dealing with fun -- have a good time -- but it's serious business," Cao said. "When the roller coaster has an accident, it's life, just like when we design a device... You want everyone to have fun, but when someone gets hurt, it's not funny."

"Any medical device company is struggling with that you want to create great products that people will want. But you also want to be reliable 100 percent."

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FILE PHOTO: PAUL E. RODRIGUEZ, THE REGISTER

"What I was noticing, going around the park, is that there's a tremendous amount of choreography that's planned out in advance. Something is put into place ahead of time with an eye to what's the sensory input you're going to have and try to appeal to."

ROBERT FRIEDMAN

SENIOR MANAGER FOR HEART-VALUE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AT EDWARDS LIFESCIENTIFIC

"Maybe that would help to get ideas across more." For Stefani, interactive exhibits at the Innovation showcase of corporate inventions suggested a way to help designers of AMO medical devices better understand their customers, who are doctors.

"The best way we can provide a product is to go live it, experience it," she said. "It would be cool at AMO if we had a pseudo operating room where engineers could go into. Observe what's really going on out in the field, then come back to the pseudo O.R. and have