


MISSION POSSIBLE

How do you engage your team and measure success? One way is in paper cups.



Most parking managers don't want to have just a mediocre team or fail as managers. Most parking managers look to run successful operations. Success is a bit more than just the raw revenue numbers or the number of cars you can fit in a parking deck. A manager's success is directly tied to the team and their willingness to work toward the mission; not just a paycheck, but the mission, which provides the *raison d'être* of the operation. It is a reference point for each associate that reminds them of the organization's reason for being.

By Frank Giles

What is your mission and how do you get each member of your team to adopt it as their own? How do you refine your team so they are not only willing but also able to take on the mission? Failure to explore these questions can allow a potentially successful operation to be just another lousy deck or worse. It can cause a parking manager and the operation to fail. A good parking manager knows that a top notch operation takes more than just bright white lines and fancy new gates.

Communicate the Mission

There is an old saying that goes, “When you know better you’ll do better.” This statement proves true in team building. If every parking lot attendant, valet attendant, and shuttle driver was surveyed, the likelihood is high that most do not know the mission or mission statements of the organization. What’s worse is that many managers would not know the mission either. Worse still is that a few organizations don’t even have mission statements.

If a manager has not effectively developed and communicated the mission, the staff will operate off instinct, gumption, and selfish inclinations. These otherwise valuable staff members subconsciously create missions of their own, but the staff-created mission does not serve the team. It only serves the individual.

A mission can be communicated through staff meetings, memos, morning huddles, or virtually any medium that gives the manager a captive audience. The trick is keeping it at the forefront. It’s hard to keep the important stuff on the front burner when there are bigger fish to fry. Make the mission the axis point of every aspect of the operation. Everything from cash handling to customer service should hinge on the mission. Slogans or catch phrases that agree with the mission are good tools to promote team spirit and focus. They can be used whenever someone does a good job with a task or even for friendly competition among co-workers.

Grant Authority

Your employees may be willing but are they able? Communicating the mission does little good if the team does not have the skills or the authority to see it through. Granting authority to the team generates a sense of investment, and if staff are invested in the operation they won’t just work for the parking manager, but with the parking manager.

For many managers, developing staff skills is the easy part. Honing the skills of the staff requires training, and every manager can find a PowerPoint presentation or webinar training laying around somewhere. The hard part is granting authority to your staff. This requires

self training, which is not necessarily a click and point undertaking.

If excellent customer service is a part of your organization’s mission, parking attendants should be trained and authorized to address issues as they arise. The training part takes time and the authorizing part takes trust. The good news is that the two go hand-in-hand. Although it can be difficult for a manager to loosen the Kung-Fu grip that many have around operational authority (trust me, I know), it can be a great joy to see a well-trained team show initiative and exercise authority in the interest of the mission.

Try to find those responsibilities in the operation that could be shared with the team but have not yet been. Equipment maintenance, customer issues, or even certain office reports may be some good areas to wean one away from. Of course each manager should choose these areas carefully. The important thing is to get the team invested.

Back the Team

When you do not get behind your team, your team will not get behind you. If the manager is not invested in the team, the team will not be invested in the manager. This means making sure the team has the tools and equipment needed to be successful, but it also means backing the team when things may not look their best. A good manager should consistently stick up for the team when they are correct and offer honesty, opportunity, and education when they are wrong. Not only should a parking manager do these things, but it should be common knowledge among the team that this is consistent behavior to be expected and counted on.

Backing the team doesn’t mean patting them on the back when they tell a customer off or giving them a pass when they mistreat or upset a property owner. It means giving them the opportunity to improve, explain themselves, correct the situation if possible, make it right, and do better the next time. Helping the team get it right is an investment in the team, and that is as important as their investment in the mission.

Share the Glory

A final component to rallying the team around the mission is allowing them to experience the victories. To share the mission, you must share the glory.

Some may ask, “What glory?” We all receive some type of glory from the little victories of being managers—that little pat on the back when budget numbers are met or after the successful audit or inspection. One can assume that the general team would get little pleasure

out of these things, but try them. If the team is a part of the operation, they are part of the success. Don't doubt the motivation little successes may bring.

At the end of the day that's the goal: motivation. Managers train, delegate, problem solve, and lead, but in order for a team to fully conform to the mission, its members must be motivated. The team's motivation is determined by their willingness to make the mission and the operation a success.

The Measure of Success

This begs the questions: "How do we know if we are successful in our mission? How do we measure success?" It may be difficult to find a true yard stick that will measure success. Of course the raw numbers are what they are, but it can be argued that a productive facility must also maintain customer satisfaction, efficiency, outward appearance, and community effects. For these things to come together, the team must be invested in the mission. Find a way to measure the

team's investment, drive, or the extra mile.

I found a way to do this one February evening. It was cold and it had been a long day parking a busy event at the convention center. One of my parking attendants had just concluded a 10-hour shift and was noticeably tired. After completing the cash handling procedures, she clocked out and gathered her things. I watched her make her way through the parking lot headed to her car. When she got there she placed her belongings on the hood of the car and continued to walk a bit further. Her walk soon turned into a trot. It was then that I realized she was trying to chase down a wayward paper cup blowing across the parking lot. She chased it until she was able to step on it and carry it to the nearest trash can. I knew then that she was invested in the operation beyond her hourly wage. Chasing that paper cup demonstrated her commitment to her manager and her team but more importantly to the mission. So, how is success measured?

Personally, I measure success in paper cups!



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