

ENHANCING YOUR VISITOR'S
EXPERIENCE

March 10th and 11th, 2005



The Longwood Graduate Program Symposium

March 10th & 11th, 2005

**Co-hosted by
Chanticleer, A Pleasure Garden,
Longwood Gardens, and
Winterthur, An American Country Estate**

*The Longwood Graduate Program gratefully acknowledges the University of Delaware
for continued support of the Program.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
THE LONGWOOD GRADUATE PROGRAM	5
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	6
SYMPOSIUM SUPPORTERS	7
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES.....	8
FACILITATORS	10
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS	11
STAGING VISITOR EXPERIENCES	13
PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FOR PERSONAL LEARNING	24
PLANNING FOR EXCELLENT VISITOR EXPERIENCE	30
SEEING OURSELVES THROUGH VISITORS' EYES.....	35
APPENDIX.....	38



INTRODUCTION

By James E. Swasey, PhD

The Longwood Graduate Program has been training people for positions in public gardens for thirty eight years. The first class of Longwood Fellows came to the University of Delaware and Longwood Gardens in 1967, and they hosted the first seminar series in 1968. C. Gordon Tyrrell, Director of Gardens at Winterthur, in his seminar presentation that year about *Planning and Planting for the Public* said, “You can’t plant for the public if you don’t plan for them” Later in his talk he said, “Try to anticipate what the public will do and be one jump ahead.”¹

When Richard Lighty was Coordinator of The Program the opening sentence of his introduction to the 1983 Seminars was, “All public gardens exist to serve people, who are referred to variously as the market, the audience, the visitor, or the community.”² That year the seminars were devoted to an exploration of the many ways public gardens could be useful to specific communities.

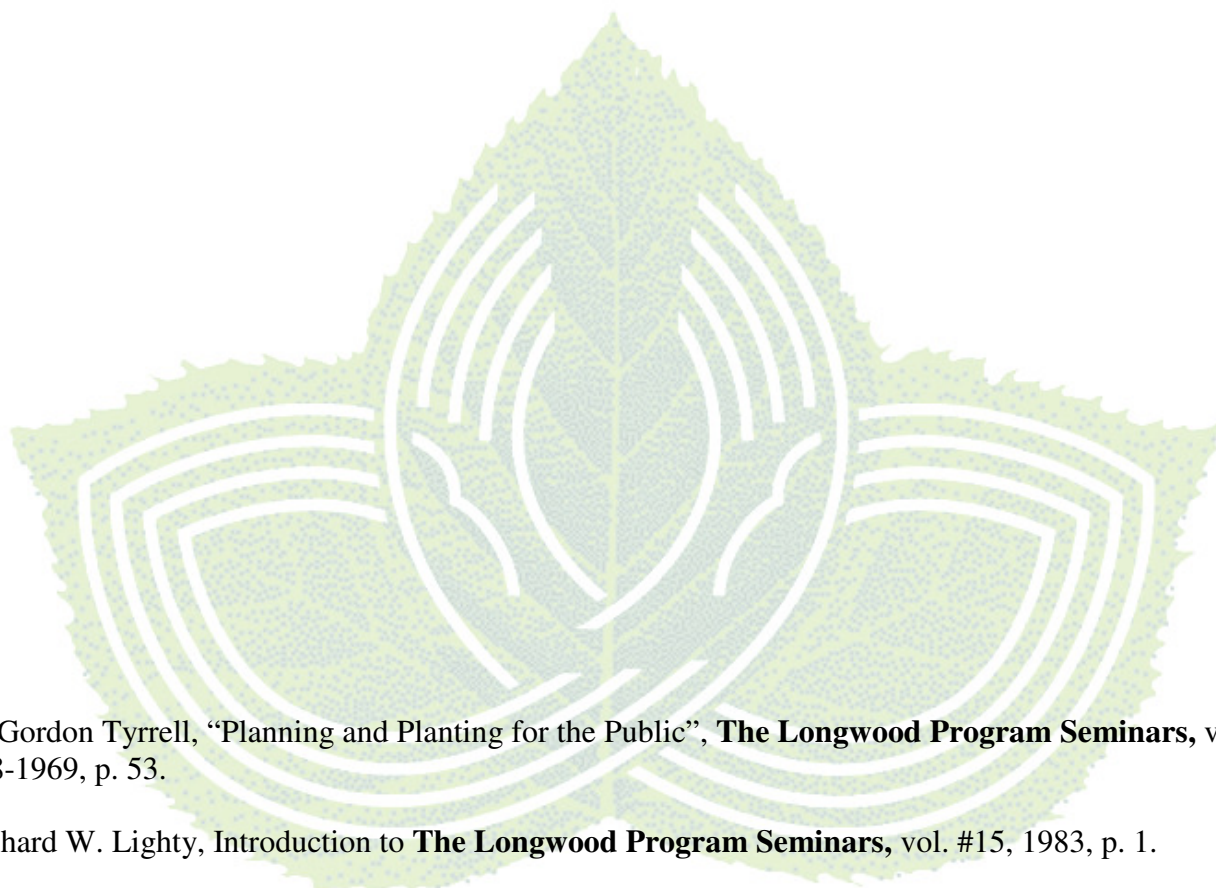
Ross J. Loomis in the Department of Psychology at Colorado State University talked about, *Getting to Know the Audience*, in the 1977 Seminar Series. The subheadings of his talk included: “Who is the Audience?”, “What are the Expectations of Visitors?”, and “How do Visitors use a Special Environment?”³

Second-year Longwood Fellow, Karla Patterson, in 1978 titled her presentation, “A Fresh Look at Garden Visitors.”⁴ She referred to Henry Norweb of the Holden Arboretum who earlier had written in the **AABGA Bulletin**, “Knowing why people visit can be very useful or can be equally detrimental. How the information is used is the determining factor.”⁵

The experiences that our visitors have at our gardens and museums today are perhaps even more critical than they were in the last century. The “health” of our institutions may depend upon it. The

Longwood Fellows think so and thus the topic for 2005: The Visitor's Experience. We are confident that you will take home at least one new idea that will help enhance the experience of the visitors at your institution.

James E. Swasey, Coordinator
Longwood Graduate Program



¹ C. Gordon Tyrrell, “Planning and Planting for the Public”, **The Longwood Program Seminars**, vol. #1, 1968-1969, p. 53.

² Richard W. Lighty, Introduction to **The Longwood Program Seminars**, vol. #15, 1983, p. 1.

³ Ross J. Loomis, “Getting to Know the Audience”, **The Longwood Program Seminars**, vol. 9, 1977, p. 8.

⁴ Karla S. Patterson, “A Fresh Look at Garden Visitors”, **The Longwood Program Seminars**, vol. 10, 1978, p. 34.

⁵ J. Henry Norweb, “The Importance of Knowing Why People Visit”, **AABGA Bulletin**, October 1972, p. 183.

THE LONGWOOD GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Longwood Graduate Program offers students the opportunity to train for leadership careers in Public Horticulture. This two-year fellowship program combines thesis research, project work, and classroom instruction at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware, with practical work experience at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Graduates from the program earn a Master's of Science degree in Public Horticulture and seek employment at arboreta, botanic gardens, and other horticultural institutions across North America.

For more information on The Longwood Graduate Program, call the Program office at (302)831-2517 or visit the website at: <http://www.udel.edu/LongwoodGrad/HomePage.htm>

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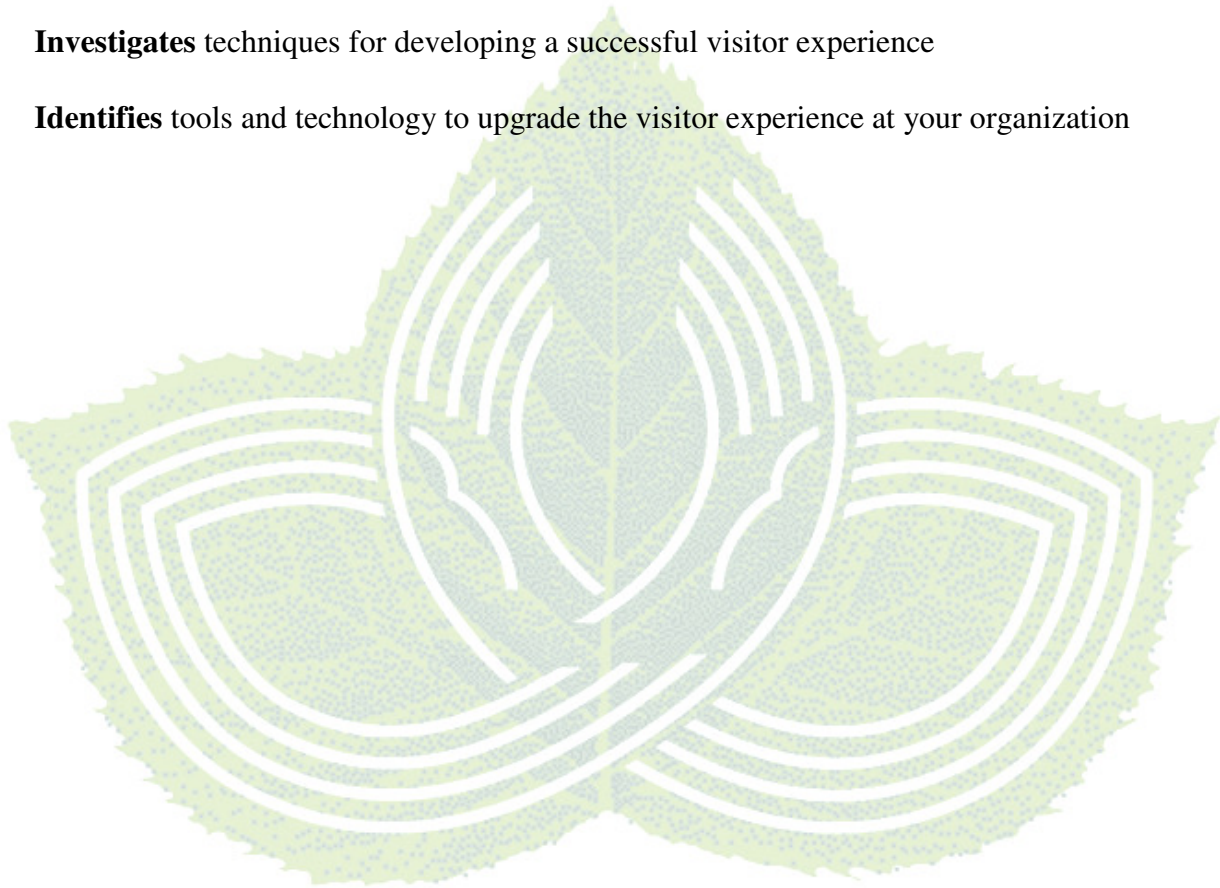
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Elaine Grehl
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The 2005 Longwood Graduate Symposium on the Visitor's Experience:

- **Creates** opportunities for professionals to learn from innovators in the field
- **Provides** a climate for discussion and networking among leaders in various fields
- **Examines** components of a visitor experience
- **Investigates** techniques for developing a successful visitor experience
- **Identifies** tools and technology to upgrade the visitor experience at your organization



SYMPOSIUM SUPPORTERS

THE LONGWOOD GRADUATE PROGRAM
WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING SUPORTERS:

CO-HOSTS

Chanticleer, A Pleasure Garden
Longwood Gardens
Winterthur, An American Country Estate

LEADERS

Beth Twiss-Garrity, Vice-President of Education and Public Programs, National Constitution Center
Rici Peterson, Interpretive Planning Consultant, The Acorn Group, Inc.

STEWARDS

Lynn Dierking, Associate Director, Institute for Learning Innovation
Visiting Women Scholars Award Program-University of Delaware

FRIENDS

David Aplin, Outreach Director, Sea Studios
Sarah D. Blodgett Interpretation Consultant and Facilitator
Shannon Connolly, Research Assistant, Conflict Resolution Program
Rick J. Lewandowski, Director, Mt. Cuba Center, Inc.
Daniel J. Stark, Executive Director, American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta
University of Delaware
Kris Whipple CIG, CIT, Interpretive Consultant/Trainer

*The Longwood Graduate Program gratefully acknowledges the University of Delaware
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* Symposium supporters grouped according to the amount contributed

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

B. Joseph Pine II

In the best selling book, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, co-author, Joe Pine, explains that today's customers want experiences – memorable events affecting them in a personal way. He is the co-founder of **Strategic Horizons LLP**, a thinking studio dedicated to helping businesses create ways of adding value to their offerings. He is an internationally acclaimed author, speaker, and management advisor to Fortune 500 companies and entrepreneurial start-ups. Additional writings include the award-winning book, *Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition* and articles for the Harvard Business Review, The Wall Street Journal, Chief Executive, Worldlink, Health Forum Journal, and CIO. Joe has taught at several universities including The Pennsylvania State University, Harvard Design School, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a Visiting Professor at the University of Amsterdam. Prior to writing and speaking activities he held a number of technical and managerial positions with IBM.

Lynn D. Dierking

An internationally recognized speaker and author, Lynn Dierking focuses on research concerning the behavior and free-choice learning of children, families, and adults in museum settings. She holds the Ph.D. in Education from the University of Florida, Gainesville, and has co-authored two books including the acclaimed, *The Museum Experience and Collaboration: Critical Criteria for Success*. She is Associate Director at the **Institute for Learning Innovation** working in the field of museums, cultural institutions, and other informal learning settings. Her research priorities include: learning in diverse settings, the long-term impact of informal educational experiences on individuals and families, and the evaluation of community-based programs. Lynn was an Associate in the Smithsonian Office of Educational Research, served as a faculty member in the University of Maryland's Science Teaching Center, and directed a national curriculum project, Science in American Life, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. She co-edited *Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Establishing a Research Agenda*, the proceedings of a national conference hosted by the **Institute for Learning Innovation**.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES (cont.)

Beth A. Twiss-Garrity

Beth Twiss-Garrity has developed a practical approach to interpretive planning and visitor research based on her work in a variety of museum settings. She is the Vice-President of Education and Public Programs at the [National Constitution Center](#) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and serves as co-chair of the American Association of Museums' Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation. She has the M.A. from the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture at the University of Delaware.

Rici Peterson

As an interpretive planning consultant with The **Acorn Group Inc.**, Rici ("ree-see") Peterson works with parks, gardens, museums, historic sites, and conservation organizations across North America. Her project objectives include creating enjoyable visitor experiences, cultivating a supportive public, and promoting a stewardship ethic for heritage resources. Rici is the Director of [Attending Marvels](#) and has been developing interpretive programs and training staff for non-profits, government agencies, and private industry since 1987. She is also a Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT) and Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) for the National Association for Interpretation. As a workshop facilitator, her infectious enthusiasm, upbeat style, and careful attention to the principles of interpretive communications creates a quality learning environment for tour guides, docents, and interpreters.

FACILITATORS

David Aplin
Sea Studios, Outreach Director

Sarah D. Blodgett
Interpretation Consultant and Facilitator

Shannon Connolly
Research Assistant, Conflict Resolution Program

Elaine Grehl
Longwood Graduate Fellow

Rick J. Lewandowski
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Executive Director, American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta

Kris Whipple CIG, CIT
Interpretive Consultant/Trainer

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

March 10, 2005 at Winterthur, An American Country Estate, and Longwood Gardens

11:30am – 12:30pm Registration

12:30pm – 12:45pm Welcome

Symposium Chair, Christian Galindo, welcomes guests to our Symposium, outlines the events of the day and introduces the first speaker.

12:45pm – 1:50pm B. Joseph Pine II

The Business You Are Really In: Staging Visitor Experiences

Cultural institutions are undergoing tremendous change, underscoring a fundamental shift occurring in the very structure of the economy. Today's consumers are increasingly seeking something beyond good service, something very different in both form and substance; personal experience. In this session, Joe Pine will outline the fundamentals of staging experiences and how many leading organizations have created engaging, profitable experiences that enhance the value for visitors and employees alike.

1:50pm – 1:55pm Welcome from Winterthur, An American Country Estate

Linda Eirhardt welcomes guests to Winterthur, and provides a bit of the Estate's history.

1:55pm – 2:45pm Lynn D. Dierking

Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Understanding Visitors

Staff who work in cultural institutions need to understand their potential visitors, what needs they have, and most of all why they are there (or not there!), in order to create the types of experiences that meet the needs of potential visitors and encourage them to return. This session will discuss the visitor experience within the context of lifelong free-choice learning, and the role that cultural institutions play within the learning infrastructure of their communities.

2:45pm – 3:10pm Break

3:10pm - 4:00pm Networking Workshop

Identifying Your Role in Your Visitor's Experience

What is your role in the visitor experience at your organization? Explore this concept with professional peers in this guided informal discussion.

6:00pm-8:30pm Evening at Longwood

Longwood Gardens, one of the world's premier horticultural showplaces, is a display garden situated on 1,050 acres in southeast Pennsylvania. Featuring 11,000 different types of plants, Longwood delights visitors every day of the year with its spectacular indoor and outdoor displays, extensive educational programs, and exciting performances and concerts. Among its most notable features are 3 ½ acres of conservatories and greenhouses, that include 20 breathtaking gardens under glass. In 2005, Longwood will complete a multi-million dollar renovation of its East Conservatory and will mark its Centennial in 2006 with a year-long celebration.

March 11, 2005 at Winterthur, An American Country Estate

8:00am – 9:00am Registration

9:00am – 9:10am Welcome

Symposium Chair, Christian Galindo, will provide a welcome and summary of the previous day's information, outline the day, and introduce the first speaker.

9:10am – 10:00am Beth A. Twiss-Garrity

Planning for Excellent Visitor Experiences

How do we plan and create a visitor experience that bridges the messages we want to share and the motivations, expectations, and prior knowledge of our visitors? The speaker will present a sequential set of questions that may guide the planning process. Particular attention on how to keep the institution's mission and identity central and how research and evaluation can be integrated into this planning process to keep visitors in mind.

10:00am – 10:25am Break

10:25am– 11:15am Rici Peterson

Planning for Success

How do we make it all work? Participants will be introduced to a *planning process* that creates successful visitor experiences by integrating the concepts covered in the first three sessions. The Visitor Experience Model and its five stages (decision, entry, connection, exit, and commitment) will be presented, as will the "Five Ms" of successful planning (management, markets, message, mechanics, and media). The focus will be the creation of sustainable benefits for your organization, your visitors, your support community, and the natural or cultural resources served by your mission.

11:15am – 12:15pm Lunch

12:15pm – 1:15pm Workshop

Evaluating Your Visitor's Experience

This workshop will allow you to apply the concepts introduced by all of our speakers. Your responses to the Visitor Experience Model Evaluation Exercise will serve as the basis for discussion. Working with small peer groups, you will be encouraged to pinpoint your organization's strengths, and areas for improvement, at each stage of the Visitor's Experience. Here you will begin to identify patterns common to all institutions. This process will uncover success stories, departmental roles, challenges, and barriers to improvement. It also will help you transform the way you think about the Visitor's Experience at your organization.

1:15pm-1:35pm Break

1:35pm – 3:00pm Workshop

Creating Your Visitor's Experience

With your newly acquired expertise you and your peers will apply your skills on a whole new level. Your group will be presented with a synopsis of the challenges identified in the previous workshop, and work together to create innovative solutions that enhance the Visitor's Experience.

3:15pm – 3:55pm Wrap-up

Sharing Your Visitor's Experience

To conclude your Symposium experience Rici Peterson will provide a summary of the day's workshop results, as well as offer suggestions for applying your new skills at your institution. Rici also will introduce a "5-M" planning approach that integrates the material covered throughout the past two days. You will also be directed towards specific resources that will empower you to approach your Visitor's Experience from an advanced planning perspective.

3:55pm-4:00pm Closing Remarks

2006 Symposium Chair, Julie Paul, will offer thanks to speakers, sponsors, and supporters of the 2005 Longwood Graduate Symposium.

STAGING VISITOR EXPERIENCES

by B. Joseph Pine II
Co-Founder, Strategic Horizons LLP

Consider the lowly coffee bean. Companies that harvest this *commodity* and trade it on the futures market receive the equivalent of just two to three cents per cup of coffee. When a manufacturer roasts, grinds, packages, and puts those same beans in a grocery store, turning them into a *good*, the price jumps to between five and fifteen cents per cup (depending on brand and package size). Brew the ground beans in a vending machine, kiosk, or corner diner, and that *service* now sells for fifty cents to a buck per cup.

So depending on what a business does with it, coffee can be any of three economic offerings – commodity, good, or service – with three distinct ranges of value customers attach to it. But wait: serve that same coffee in a Starbucks – where the ordering, creation, and consumption of the cup embodies a distinctive ambience or heightened sense of theatre – and consumers gladly pay two, three, even four dollars for each cup. Businesses that ascend to this fourth level of economic value establish a distinctive *experience* that envelops the purchase of coffee, increasing its value (and therefore its price) by several orders of magnitude over the original commodity.

Experiences are a distinct economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods, but one that – until now – went largely unrecognized. When someone buys a good, he receives a tangible thing; when he buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying memorable events that a company stages to engage him in a personal way.

Beyond Goods and Services

Goods and services are no longer enough. Companies in industry after industry recognize the need to stage experiences for their guests. The Hard Rock Cafe, for example, was the world's first theme restaurant, opening in London in 1971. It merged rock music with food service to create a unique dining

experience – one successful to this day. Retail is becoming more experiential with stores like REI, based in Seattle, which has put 65-foot climbing walls inside its latest establishments, and a \$5 fee for guests to climb the rock. Stores have cross-country ski or bicycle trails, walking paths with different surfaces to test out shoes, rain rooms, and the newest store in Denver sits right next to a river for easy access to a kayaking experience. The big idea is to get consumers to experience the goods at the store, and then the chance that they will buy those goods goes up tremendously.

Hotels are becoming more experiential as well. Ian Schrager, the co-founder of Studio 54 in the 1970s, has opened up a series of boutique hotels around the world to provide a distinctly non-chain experience. His theme for the Paramount Hotel in Manhattan, for example, is “in the know.” It is for people in the know; for people who want to see others in the know; for people who want to be in the know. So much so is that outside the hotel there is no sign indicating where it is. You have to *know* where it is to be able to find it!

Even manufacturers are getting into the act. Volkswagen has opened up a theme park outside of its factory in Wolfsburg, Germany, called Autostadt. It is more than a factory tour, though that of course is available. There is a different pavilion for each of VW’s brands – including Audi, Seat, Lamborghini, and Bentley – that exposes the underlying themes that the company is trying to get across to each of its markets. If you order a car to be built by that factory and picked up at Autostadt, VW stores it one of several huge towers surrounded by water, and when you arrive at the showroom, a mechanical arm picks up the car, brings it down into a tunnel, and then it appears in the middle of the showroom as if by magic for a unique delivery experience.

But it is not just frivolous activities or fantasy environments that engender experiences. In the U.S., one of the industries that best recognizes the need to shift from services to experiences is in fact healthcare. As just one example among many, when Peter Betts, CEO of East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie, Louisiana, found his hospital faltering, he went so far as to take his management team to Walt Disney World to learn from the premier experience stager in the world. To bring back Disney’s cartoonish

experience, but rather to extract out the *principles* that Disney applies, and then apply them to the hospital's business. The team brought back a number of ideas that they have since implemented, including scripting patient encounters, costuming employees (now called team members), and enhancing its surroundings from various shades of off-white to colorful murals on the ceilings, with a piano player in the atrium, and moving off-stage activity (such as transporting blood) to back hallways inaccessible by patients or their families, the guests of the experience. So successful has East Jefferson been that it gained eighteen points in market share, going from losing millions of dollars every year to having profits of millions of dollars every year, that it returned to the local government.

Of course no discussion of experiences would be complete without mentioning Las Vegas – the Experience Capital of the World. Everything in Las Vegas is about experiences, from the gaming tables to the spectacular shows to the themed casinos lining the Las Vegas Strip. So successful have the over-the-top themed casinos been – most of them appropriating European culture in some way, such as Bellagio, Paris, and The Venetian – that the older, downtown casinos fell on hard times. So they banded together and hired famed experienced architect and placemaker Jon Jerde (who also designed Bellagio). Jerde created The Fremont Street Experience, an electronic canopy over four blocks of the main downtown street. Every night, the electronic show produced by this canopy draw guests from miles around, who then play the tables at the downtown casinos.

But now those guests face a new attraction on the strip – one previously unknown in Las Vegas. Visitors can now indulge their cultural side by paying admission to visit the Gallery of Fine Art at the Bellagio or the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum at The Venetian. Who would have thought it?

So What's a Cultural Institution to Do?

Of course, cultural institutions such as horticulture centers, museums, botanic gardens, and nature centers have *always* been in the experience business. Experiences are not new; what *is* new is that most every business is now getting into the experience business. So the emerging Experience Economy means that the bar is being raised on all experience stagers everywhere – and cultural institutions most of all, for

they have generally resisted any impulses that smacked of commercialism. But as consumers get used to wonderfully engaging experiences not only while on vacation, but whenever they shop, dine, or go out for the day or evening, they will demand that every experience they have – even those they’ve been doing for years – engage them just as much.

Therefore, it is crucial for cultural institutions to think differently today than they have in the past. If you do not, then you will consign your great institution to a stagnant backwater of the Experience Economy, unable to fulfill your great mission of exposing visitors to precious places or amazing artifacts and of expanding knowledge under your care.

To help you avoid that fate, here are three essential imperatives that cultural institutions must embrace in the emerging Experience Economy.

Hit the Sweet Spot

Cultural institutions are generally defined as an *esthetic* and/or *educational* experiences. With esthetic experiences, guests remain passive, but are immersed in a wholly captivating environment. They are not active, nor are they watching or listening to the performances of others. Rather, it is the environment itself – or what is provocatively placed in that environment – that engages them. When guests move from the passive to *active* and from immersed inside the environment to *absorption* of what is presented to them, then they are partaking in an educational experience.

These are but two of the four realms of experience. There are also *entertainment* experiences where guests passively absorb in the sights, sounds, and activities that one presents. That can be a great way to attract guests to your venue, but generally it is not enough to keep them coming back time and time again. And then there are the exact opposite: *escapist* experiences. Here, guests are immersed in an environment where they provide the experience through their own active participation. Amusement parks, bowling centers, golf courses, casinos, recreation and sports centers, and waterparks are all examples of escapist experiences.

The best experiences – the most engaging, robust, and compelling experiences – are those that *hit the sweet spot* in the middle of (or within the bounds of passing through) all four experience realms. So on top of your normal esthetic and educational experiences, ask yourself: How can you incorporate entertaining elements of fun, spontaneity, and surprise? How can you provide escapist activities that guests can do inside of your cultural institution?

One experience that truly hits the sweet spot is Keukenhof in Lisse, The Netherlands. The famous gardens of Keukenhof are a wonderful place to be with and behold flowers in the spring – Dutch tulips in particular. It is therefore, primarily an esthetic experience. The esthetics extend beyond the design of the flower gardens; it's the only place I have ever encountered two-tone grass, for example. It adds educational elements of course, as information about each type of flower is provided, and you find many visitors writing down notes on their favorite varieties. While walking around is at least somewhat escapist, Keukenhof adds many other such elements, including a hedge maze in the middle of the park. This proves an exciting activity for visitors, some of whom climb up the fort in the middle of the maze to direct their fellow participants. Finally, Keukenhof brings entertainment through a roving band of street musicians and a water show around a small lake, timed to music for visitors to enjoy.

Direct Your Workers to Act

A second imperative follows from understanding that in the Experience Economy, work is theatre. I do not mean work *as* theatre. I literally mean: work IS theatre! It is not a metaphor but a model. Whenever workers are in front of customers, they are acting – whether they know it or not, whether they do it well or not, they are acting (the simplest definition of which is “someone watches another person work”). You must direct your workers to act, therefore, in a way that engages each guest with every interaction.

As renowned English stage director Peter Brook declared in the very first line of his book *The Empty Space*, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”

Anyone working in front of customers, therefore, must act in a way that engages each guest, drawing them into the experience.

This is well recognized by many cultural institutions, such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and other places where workers dress up as historical characters situated in a particular time and place. But it is not a principle just for such “A” characters, but for *everyone* in contact with guests. Each worker must find his role, characterize that role, rehearse it, and perform it to acclaim with every interaction. Whether it’s ticket taker, security guard, docent, curator, or administrator, the visitor experience at every cultural institution depends on how well each worker acts. Otherwise, your place remains but an empty space.

Not only must workers act, but the entire cultural institution experience must be imbued with drama. Consider the following story of my most memorable museum experience:

I remember it clearly: the moment I first saw *The Nightwatchmen* by Rembrandt at the Rijksmuseum. It was while first teaching at the University of Amsterdam. My engagement was in the hundreds-year-old building that originally housed what is now the star attraction at the Netherlands’ national museum. After seeing the University’s darkened wall left empty in honor of what once hung there, I greatly anticipated experiencing the masterpiece.

Upon entering the Rijksmuseum, I first went through an area featuring the Golden Age of Holland. There is a great lesson here: during the Agrarian Economy – when the extracting and shipping of commodities was the primary commercial activity – the Dutch ruled the economic world. As first goods and then services came to dominate, the Dutch slowly lost their prime place.

I saw many other exhibits at the Rijksmuseum – from natural artifacts to naval artillery to national artistry – and at every turn of the path or climb of the stairs I wondered, “Is *The Nightwatchmen* in the *next* room?” Finally, after many hours and countless spaces (“Arg-g-g, where is it?”), through a doorway to a room unlike any other yet encountered – the ceiling higher, the walls greener – there, stretched out alone across one whole side of the room, hung the famous

painting. Its presentation was every bit a match for its anticipation. I, like so many other guests, stood transfixed in the presence of the Rijksmuseum's crown jewel. After what seemed like hours, I made my way out, transformed by the singular experience.

This re-telling demonstrates how *dramatic structure* can enhance any cultural institution visit. The question remains: Was it deliberately designed, or did it occur by happenstance? Does the Rijksmuseum intentionally take its guests along a journey that starts with great anticipation, incites rising action (even, arg-g-g, crisis), leading to a pronounced climax, followed by quickly falling action, and denouement? Or did it just work out that way for me?

Every cultural institution should strive for just such a dramatic structure, if not for the entire experience, then for distinct pieces of it. If you cannot design such drama upfront, assess existing exhibits, places, or paths for dramatic appeal and make adjustments to enhance the experience.

Do not confine your drama to feature events. Because work is theatre, every interaction a worker has with a guest constitutes acting. That is why Exploris, not-a-museum in Raleigh, North Carolina, bills itself as the “world's first global experience center”, used New York-based Pastiche Inc. to teach theatre techniques to every one of its employees – right down to the part-timers in the gift shop.

Do not let the experience end at the gift shop, either. The Experience Music Project (EMP) in Seattle extends the drama of its experience through its Music Experience Guide (MEG). More than a typical audio device, the MEG is a personal digital assistant through which guests can access a huge amount of audio clips on EMP's many pieces. At the end of each visit, EMP uploads what each individual experienced, automatically creating mass-customized web pages for visitors to relive their individual memories as a post-show experience.

Go Beyond the Experience

Embracing theatre in your work will go a long way to staging a compelling experience, and thereby gaining a competitive advantage over all the other experiences out there. But just as goods and

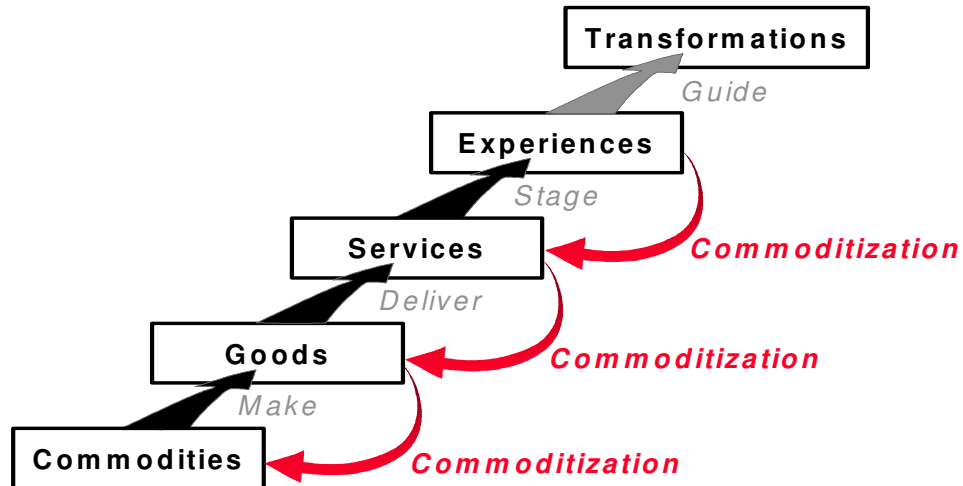
services before them, experiences will eventually be commoditized. You know an experience has become a commodity whenever guests start mouthing those immortal words, “Been there. Done that.” You need only think of Planet Hollywood and other such theme restaurants to know what I mean.

So what is beyond experiences? Well, what happens when you design an experience that is so perfect for an individual – providing exactly what he/she needs right now – then you cannot help *changing* that individual. When you customize an experience you automatically turn it into a **transformation**, which companies layer on top of experiences (you’ve heard the phrase “a life-transforming experience”), just as they layer experiences on top of services. (See Exhibit Below, “The Progression of Economic Value”, for a fuller view.)

With transformations, the economic offering of a business is the individual person or company changed as a result of what the company does. In other words, *the customer is the product!* The individual buyer of the transformation essentially says, “Change me.” The company’s economic offering is not the materials it uses, nor the physical things it makes. It is not the processes it executes, nor the encounters it orchestrates. When a company guides transformations, the offering is the individual.

Therefore, the exact form and content of any particular transformational offering has to be considered very carefully. The transformation elicitor must first understand its customers’ aspirations before it can hope to affect the right change in particular traits – whether they be physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual – within that individual. These aspirations center not on any good, service, or experience, but on the customer themselves, on what he or she wants to become.

The Progression of Economic Value



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Source: B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), p. 166.

Many experience stagers naturally lend themselves to the transformation business. Think of fitness centers, which charge an admission or membership fee in return for the time guests spend using the equipment. But why do individuals spend all of that time enduring work, sweat, and pain? Because they think the *gain* will be worth it; they will *become* more fit. Why do people go to psychiatrists and pay over \$100 per hour, only to be asked, “Well, what do *you* think?” Because they think they will get well in some way. And why do people pay tens of thousands of dollars to go back to business school? Because they know they will be transformed by the experience, giving them new skills, knowledge, and capabilities, making them more employable, enabling them to have better careers, and fundamentally so that they will enjoy business life more. As John Quelch, former Dean of the London Business School, told *Fast Company*, “We’re not in the education business. We’re in the transformation business. We expect everyone who participates in the program at the London Business School – whether it’s for three days or for two years – to be transformed by the experience.”

Many experience stagers already tap into the desire for this economic offering beyond experiences, even if only on a small level. It's no coincidence that the Richard Petty Driving Experience – which charges up to \$1199 for turning amateurs into professional stock car drivers, at least for a day – uses 1-800-*BE-PETTY* as its toll-free number. Some theme parks have a design-your-own roller coaster that turns guests into experience designers themselves.

Parents provide a key market for life-transforming experiences. Whether it's football leagues, ice time, ballet lessons, or martial arts disciplines, parents want their kids to do more than “spend time.” They want them to be transformed by the time spent. Even birthday parties are becoming fodder for transformations. SCORE Learning Centers, for example, throw parties where the birthday child and all the guests learn how to become better at particular subjects.

And why do parents take their kids to cultural institutions? Is it purely to while away a couple of hours? Or just to teach them some things on a particular subject? Do they just want to expose their kids to certain cultural ideals – or do they want something more? After all, how many of you readers are in the positions you are in right now in a cultural institution because of a single, or series of, life-transforming experiences you had as a child?

To tap into this consumer desire for transformations, first *understand the aspirations of your guests*. What more are they looking for from you, than just the experience itself? What do they want to become? Once you determine what aspirational possibilities exist, you can add specific elements into your experience to guide guests to that end.

Second, *state your transformational capability in the form of From _____ To _____*. All transformations change the aspirant from his current state to a new one. A proper statement of the change desired goes a long way to designing the right experiences that will achieve the sought effect. Perhaps it is From uncultured To cultured, or From first-time visitor To knowledgeable patron. For some, it might even be From dysfunctional family To caring family. (What would you do differently if that were your offering?)

Third, *make the customer's first experience a diagnosis*. You must understand the gap between where a customer is today and where he wants to be. In many cases, this turns into triage – turning down customers that have no hope of ever achieving their aspirations. That is why the Richard Petty Driving Experience first makes sure its guests are capable of driving at high speeds before letting them loose in stock cars to “be” Richard Petty. But think of what engaging experiences you can stage in your cultural institution that would, possibly for the very first time, help guests discover why they are coming to you in the first place, and what you can do about it.

Remember, guests are not solely interested in the experience itself. Engaging interactions that hit the sweet spot and provide a high degree of dramatic structure are not enough. These are but means to an end. If you can understand – and guide your guests to achieve – their aspirations, you can provide both meaning to your mission and success to your balance sheet. For there are no economic offerings more valued than those that help customers achieve their aspirations.

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PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FOR PERSONAL LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING VISITORS

By Lynn D. Dierking, Ph.D.
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From the birth of the Internet to the proliferation of educational programming offered by IMAX, educational television, and many others, there are more opportunities for out-of-school, self-directed learning than ever before. In a typical day, an individual might surf the Internet to track down a book in her local library, attend a play or a book discussion group, watch a nature documentary on television or interact with exhibitions at the local museum. All of these events are free-choice learning experiences, the most common type of learning in which people engage throughout their lives. Free-choice learning is self-directed, voluntary, and guided by an individual's needs and interests (Falk & Dierking, 2000; 2002; Falk, 2001). Museums and other cultural institutions in the 21st Century have a unique opportunity to be exemplary public institutions for personal learning. What do they need to do in order to play a leadership role in 21st Century learning? In order to create the types of experiences that meet the needs of potential visitors and which encourage them to return, staff who work in cultural institutions need to better understand who their potential visitors are, what needs they have and most of all why they are there (or even more importantly not there!).

Free-Choice Learning

Societies worldwide are in the midst of great change, directly tied to the shifting of world economies from ones that are industrially based to ones that are information and knowledge based. For almost four decades, a number of forward-thinking educators have been talking about the transition of the world into a *Learning Society* (Machlup, 1962; Dizard, 1982). They suggested that for the world to fully transition to a knowledge-based economy, learning across the life span would need to become central to

the society as never before. Cradle-to-grave learning has long been a goal of many societies, but these societal changes are making it even more of a necessity and way of life. As knowledge becomes the currency of the realm, individuals require diverse strategies for staying informed and educated across their life spans. In the 21st Century, the learning strategy of choice for many people, most of the time, will be free-choice learning.

Before I proceed much further, it is important for me to clarify that when I use the term learning I am broadly defining it to include not only the typical notions of learning about ideas, facts and concepts, most often expressed in words, but also the broader notion of learning which also encompasses shifts in attitude, values, and beliefs, aesthetic understandings, social interaction, to name a few. These types of learning may not always be easily expressed in words. Learning is a contextually driven effort by people to find meaning in the real world, an organic, situated, integrated process (Paris & Cross, 1983; Calvin, 1997). John H. Falk and I developed a model several years ago, which at the time we called the Interactive Experience Model, conceptualized to deal with the complexity and richness of such learning and meaning-making (Dierking & Falk, 1992, 2000). In 2000 we recast this model as the Contextual Model of Learning, suggesting that three overlapping contexts contribute to and influence the interactions and experiences that people have and the consequent learning and meaning-making that results--- the Personal context, the Socio-cultural context and the Physical context.

The Personal Context encompasses what the visitor brings to the visit: their interests and motivations, their preferred ways of learning and their prior knowledge and experience. The Social/Cultural Context recognizes that learning always occurs within a social/cultural milieu; visitors rarely visit alone and even if they do they become a part of the socio-cultural milieu our society calls “museum.” Learning is both a collaborative process and a collaborative product. The Physical Context includes the architecture and “feel” of the institution, in other words the sights, sounds and smells, as well as the design features of the experience. The model also includes a fourth and very important dimension -- TIME. One needs to pan the camera back in time and space so the experience is situated within the

visitor's life and within the larger context of the community and society in which he or she lives. For the convenience of explanation, we have distinguished three separate contexts, but it is important to keep in mind that these contexts are not really separate, or even separable. The Contextual Model of Learning provides the large-scale framework within which to organize information about learning; the details vary depending upon the specific context of the learner.

Like any learning, free-choice learning is influenced by contextual factors, difficult to avoid when you watch the news on television with family, read an arts magazine, surf the Internet to find out about a health-related concern, tour a historic site while on vacation, or visit an art museum to see a travelling exhibition on Art Nouveau. All of these experiences are motivated by a desire to find out more about the world, to gain information, to enhance understanding. Whereas as recently as a generation ago, learning was perceived as a necessary but painful process that one "graduated" from sometime in adolescence. By the end of the next generation, it will be transformed into something that everyone will *consciously want* to do all the time to be personally, socially and physically satisfied.

These changes are already apparent. A Canadian research institute has been polling the public for more than a quarter century about how Canadians spend their leisure time and in a recent report, citizens suggested that they spent 18 hours/week on learning activities, 95% of which were free-choice, a 57% increase since 1970 (Lewington, 1998). Societies are recognizing that to keep up with rapid changes and the amount of information around us, the successful person (and I would add the fulfilled person) will be learning across their life span. And the exciting news is that cultural institutions have an essential role to play.

Cultural Institutions and the 21st Century Learner

The learning journey of 21st Century citizens requires many way stations each helping to fulfill part of the individual's learning needs. What the world needs is a richly integrated, broadly supported learning infrastructure, a system of support that enables millions of unique individuals to meet their widely varying learning needs any time of the day, at any point in their life. This basic learning

infrastructure already exists, composed of 1) the formal sector (K-12 education, trade schools, and universities), 2) the free-choice sector of the Internet, print and broadcast media, libraries, community-based organizations, cultural institutions and friends and family and 3) the work place. All three educational entities can work together to support and sustain learning across the life span.

Clearly cultural institutions have a leadership role to play in the education of their communities, particularly in the area of free-choice learning. In the U.S. Americans now spend more time and money on leisure and recreation than they do on food or housing. The fastest growing segment of the leisure market is what is known as value-added tourism – eco-tourism and cultural tourism – a niche richly served by cultural institutions (Tribe, 1995; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Worldwide, cultural institutions are riding a crest of unprecedented popularity driven by the new Learning Society. People in ever growing numbers are seeking out these institutions because they are widely perceived to be good places to go to satisfy the desire for high quality, enjoyable, learning experiences.

What are the implications of these ideas and how can cultural institutions better support visitors' free-choice learning? First there is much that an institution can do individually to support visitors' free-choice learning and identity-building, and second there is much that these institutions can do collectively. At the individual level, cultural institutions need to:

- ✓ Meaningfully connect with people and their lives in ways which enable visitors to identify personally and collectively with the institution,
- ✓ Communicate to people that they are rich resources for personal learning, both individually and collaboratively and then provide the tools that will enable visitors to successfully do so,
- ✓ Reach out to new audiences who currently do not see their own personal or collective identity reflected and affirmed there, and
- ✓ Design rich, relevant *and* memorable experiences that effectively tap into people's personal, socio-cultural and physical contexts and identities once they do visit.

There is also much that the cultural institutions can do collectively to accomplish these goals. Cultural institutions should be working together collaboratively, both with other cultural institution partners, but also with other partners in the community, appreciating that they are part of a larger web of influence in people's lives. Returning to the notion of the learning infrastructure as a web of influence that shapes people's understanding, attitudes, aesthetic beliefs, etc., one recognizes that although cultural institutions are important, so are schools and universities, electronic media, increasingly the Internet, as well as community-based organizations, libraries and a whole host of others. The entire learning infrastructure provides value and support, and the entire infrastructure needs to be valued and supported.

In order to capitalize on these emerging realities cultural institutions must adopt strategies that will allow them to more effectively understand and meet the need of their visitors. In my opinion, learning research is the key to accomplishing this task. We need to better understand:

- ✓ The prior experiences, interests, backgrounds and expectations of people visiting and those we would like to visit—why have they come, what might they come for, what are they curious about and what do they want to know more about (an emphasis on what *they want* to know, not what the *museum thinks they should* know) and for those not using our institutions, why?;
- ✓ How are visitors (and potential visitors) spending their free time? What kinds of experiences do they have outside the museum? What avenues provide meaning and richness to their lives? What other free-choice learning activities do they engage in? How can the museum complement these? What would be meaningful and useful to those who do not typically visit?; and
- ✓ How do people interact in, and connect with our institutions? What are they talking about with companions and staff? How are they personally, socio-culturally and physically connecting to exhibitions and programs? How do they or could they use their museum experience later?

In closing, this is an exciting, yet challenging time for museums. And these perspectives require a different kind of research and practice on the part of museums. We need to be thinking about educational

programming, research and assessment in the long term, while also making the same long-term commitment to being an active part of our communities, truly looking outside our institutions as well as within. People are seeking meaning in their lives and there is a tremendous opportunity to tap into that need. By emphasizing opportunities for people to make connections, find meaning, and to identify personally and collectively with our institutions, we can become social change agents and meaningful partners, truly becoming places for meaningful learning in the community.

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PLANNING FOR EXCELLENT VISITOR EXPERIENCE

By Beth A. Twiss-Garrity, M.A.
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How do we plan a visitor experience that bridges the messages we want to share and the motivations, expectations and prior knowledge of our visitors? One method is to consider the interaction a communication model with a message that has a sender, a vehicle and receivers. Another is to consider a research and development protocol. This presentation will blend these models based upon my experiences in developing visitor experiences as part of capital campaigns at Winterthur, a decorative arts museum in Delaware, and at the National Constitution Center, an interactive history museum in Philadelphia.

For the purpose of this presentation, “visitor experience” will be used to indicate the variety of ways in which people interact with organizations that want to convey information and ideas, usually through artifacts, living plants or animals. I will use the catch-all “museum” to name that place, be it a traditional museum, garden, or zoo. The experience under planning can be a visit to a museum in total, to an exhibit in particular, or participation in a program. No matter the scale, these all include attention to creature comforts, physical and intellectual accessibility to content, and an understanding of cognitive and affective functioning.

Communication models take these variables into account. While models differ in their particulars, in general they all share four elements: a message, a sender of the message, a medium or vehicle for carrying the message, and one or more receivers. More complex models consider “filters” that affect how the message is shaped and received based upon the life experiences, prejudices, and motivations of the sender and receivers. In shaping visitor experience, these communication models provide a systematic way to consider the planning process, where the museum is the sender, the experience itself is the vehicle

or medium for the message and the receivers are visitors.¹ Lynn Dierking and John Falk’s work on learning in free-choice situations provides an example of how to integrate the social, psychological and physical complexities that surround the communication process.²

For the planning process, the American Association of Museum’s Museum Advancement and Excellence Research and Development Protocol also provides a step-by-step method for integrating the needs of the audience with the experience.³ In this circular model, the planning activity begins with a needs assessment - what is needed by whom. One then conducts an environmental scan (who is doing similar things) and a gap analysis (what is missing that your institution could provide). With this information, one moves to product development – the visitor experience. Throughout product development, one tests prototypes with the audience in order to hone the product to best meet audience needs. This evaluation process continues after product launch, completing the circle as one returns to the needs assessment step.

In my mind, both of these methods require that one begins with well-defined messages. What do we want the visitor experience to be about? A careful study of the museum’s mission creates the universe from which messages can be crafted. Beginning with the mission keeps one focused on what the museum offers uniquely and the reason for which not-for-profit status has been granted – in other words, it defines the sender of the message.

While this exercise limits the universe of messages, it forces one both to be creative and realistic. For example, at the National Constitution Center, our congressional charter states that the Center is to help Americans better understand and appreciate the U.S. Constitution and its relevance to daily life. The

¹ I was first introduced to this model in visitor service training at Winterthur, though diagrams for it can be found in many places, especially in discussions of internet planning. See “Communication and Information Technology,” <http://www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Communication%20and%20Information%20Technology/index.html>, January 25, 2005.

² Lynn Dierking and John Falk, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000.

³ American Association of Museums, “Research and Development Protocol,” unpublished paper of Museum Advancement and Excellence, February 9, 2000 version.

emphasis on “Americans” and the “U.S. Constitution” means that we do not need necessarily to consider how people from other countries might understand our Constitution nor do we need to deal with constitution-writing worldwide. The relation of the document to daily life, however, opens up a wide-range of areas for exploration from product and drug safety to Supreme Court decisions on accessibility in sport.

One other important part of crafting the message is making it readily understandable. In the National Park Service, where I first learned about museum interpretation, we were encouraged to be able to sum up the message of a program or tour in one sentence. The goal was that a visitor, in later telling someone of the visit, would be able to offer this sentence, or something close to it. Exhibit developers similarly often look for a one-sentence description of what a planned exhibition will be about. When crafting the visitor experience, work spent on succinctly stating the message will focus product development on those items that best deliver the message.

Just as the research protocol began with questions about who is creating the product for whom, I find it best to move to thinking about the audience or receivers of the message before designing the visitor experience. In the early planning stages, it is easiest to consider general characteristics of the audience. Many useful paradigms exist in educational literature, such as lists of learning styles and multiple intelligences that give a general sense of how people learn within formal educational settings. Visitor research done in museums, however, helps us better understand how people react to the free-choice setting.

While it is best to use audience research done at the museum where the visitor experience will occur in order to take into account that particular audience’s needs and motivations, some commonalities seem to exist when one reads audience research reports from many museums. For example, in my own research at Winterthur, we discovered that visitors to decorative arts museums and historic houses, had a common set of learning strategies in how they thought about furnishings in a museum setting. The visitors often first approached these objects by considering how they related to furnishing within the

visitors' own life – “my grandmother had one of those!” - or history stories they knew – “George Washington used that.” While this statement seems self-evident, what was interesting was that this initial approach was common among school children over the age of seven and well-educated adult visitors of any age.⁴

That said, there are very real differences in the motivations that visitors have for coming to a museum. Students in school groups are there because they must be; their teachers have arranged the visit to meet curricular needs. Family groups with small children often are looking to an “edifying” social experience where the adults can feel as if they have provided their children with an educational experience. Adult visitors tend to be goal-oriented, whether it is to do something that is “relaxing” or it is to learn new material that will enrich their work life. And, of course, the age of the visitor matters too – from young singles looking for a meeting place to seniors wanting to explore their own history.

Visitor testing of the proposed visitor experience is the best way to determine if one's assumptions are true, which brings us to the experience itself – the vehicle or product for sharing the message. Based upon a book on reshaping one's business to meet new market demands, I have developed a question I often use to brainstorm product development. What can our museum deliver that no other institution is doing, for which a demand can be created, and we can do better than anyone else?⁵ Within that question, obviously, are considerations of the sender, message, and receivers, but it also moves one to consider planning an experience that meets some quality threshold. It calls attention to the human and financial resources needed. At the National Constitution Center, as the only museum in the U.S. devoted entirely to the story of the Constitution, a document that envelopes the daily life of each citizen, there are many visitor experiences we could plan that would meet the first two parts of that question. As with all institutions, however, we have limited staff and funds, causing us to have to focus on those items where we can excel.

⁴ Beth A. Twiss-Garrity, “Listening to Our Visitors' Voices,” *Old Collections, New Audiences: Decorative Arts and Visitor Experience for the 21st Century* Dearborn: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, 2000.

⁵ Christopher G. Worley, David E. Hitchin and Walter L. Ross, *Integrated Strategic Change* Reading MA: Addison- Wesley Publishing Company, 1996.

The planning processes outlined here are quite linear, which I admit to feeding into my learning style. Their systematic approaches suggest models to balance the needs of the museum in creating a visitor experience with the motivations and needs visitors bring to the museum. It is out of this sort of careful planning that excellent personalized experiences develop, created by visitors themselves as they interact with the exhibits and programs we have provided.



SEEING OURSELVES THROUGH VISITORS’ EYES:

Ensuring a quality visitor experience benefits everyone

By Rici Peterson, Interpretive Planning Consultant,
The Acorn Group, Inc.

These are tough times for museums, parks, gardens, and other heritage resource institutions. Funding shortfalls, changing societal priorities and shifting political whims put us at risk. People today, faced with an unprecedented array of choices regarding how to spend their free time and disposable income, may or may not choose to visit. For those of us that wish not only to survive but thrive, it pays to know the difference between what we *think* we are offering our visitors and what our visitors are actually experiencing.

The five-stage Visitor Experience Model, well articulated by fellow interpretive planner Lisa Brochu,⁶ is an invaluable tool to help us shift our perspectives. There are five stages to every visitor experience: decision, entry, connection, exit, and commitment. Whether we know it or not, each creates an enduring impression on our guests. The good news is that we have the opportunity to make each stage a positive and mutually beneficial experience. Taking the visitor’s perspective throws light on our institutions’ strengths and weaknesses, empowering us to make constructive changes and build stronger, more effective relationships with visitors, partners, and communities. When we see things through our visitors’ eyes, everyone benefits.

The first stage, “Decision”, begins when potential visitors become aware of our site. Subconsciously or consciously, they ask themselves “Why should I go? What is there to do? Will it be worth the drive/time/energy/money? Will it be easy to get to; will I be comfortable? Safe? Dressed appropriately? Are there children’s activities? Would we have more fun elsewhere?” Early impressions are formed, setting up expectations for what’s in store. By taking on “visitor’s mind”, institutions can

⁶ Brochu, Lisa. *Interpretive Planning: the 5M Method for Successful Planning Projects*. InterpPress, Fort Collins, CO, 2003.

evaluate how well they connect with target markets from the first contact. Marketing materials should clearly communicate who we are and the benefits of visiting, offering everything potential visitors need to decide to visit—and creating happy (and realistic) expectations.

The “Entry” stage is a time of transition, where expectations continue to grow—or begin to erode. Travel, wayfinding, and orientation experiences should reinforce that visitors are welcome and that a fulfilling experience is in store. Signs, traffic control aids, graphics, site design, and staff demeanor all bear witness to our attitude toward visitors. Site themes, first introduced in marketing materials, should be reinforced throughout the entry stage.

The “Connection” stage encompasses the attractions and activities visitors have come to experience—giving us multiple opportunities to build meaningful relationships between our visitors, our sites, and our missions. Regardless of our approach, we should make our exhibits and programs enjoyable and relevant by making content understandable and linking it to what visitors care about. We can ensure lasting impact by structuring all communication around compelling messages or themes—not just in our programming but in details of architecture, site design, décor, uniforms, and even informal encounters with staff.

The “Exit” stage is decompression, where the visitor prepares to leave our world and re-enter their own. At this point, our guests are reflecting on and evaluating their experiences. If connections have been made, here is where we solidify them. We can provide opportunities to return for new programs, ask questions, explore reference works, sign up for event notification, and get involved. Gift shop merchandise should offer meaningful memorabilia that reinforce site themes. Even the simple gesture of thanking departing guests makes a lasting positive impression.

“Commitment” is the really interesting stage of the visitor experience. Although it comes last and occurs off-site, it actually represents a beginning—where small transformations begin to reveal themselves. If we have done our job well in the first four stages, commitment surfaces as repeat visitation,

word of mouth advertising, stewardship behaviors toward heritage resources, sustainable income levels, quality volunteer recruitment, charitable donations, political support and positive community relations.

When we consider our sites from the visitor experience perspective, we can become advocates for our visitors. They benefit, our institution benefits, and our heritage resources themselves benefit.

