RETAINING AND RETRAINING GUESTS: BRINGING GUESTS WITH YOU THROUGH CHANGE

Miriam Sappington, Programming & Education at Thanksgiving Point Institute
Spencer Mayberry, Revenue Generating Programs Coordinator
Michele Gunnell, School Programs Coordinator
Jules Long, Explorer
OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Thanksgiving Point Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit farm, garden, and museum complex that draws upon the natural world to cultivate transformative family learning.

Inquiry-based approach

• Inquiry mindset
• Observations
• Wondering
• Inferring
• Discourse
ANALYZING OUR PROGRAMS “BEFORE”

- **School programs** (field trips and outreach)
- **Revenue-generating programs** (youth summer camps, afterschool programs)
- **Value-added programs** (Monday Night family activities, etc.)

- Focused on “take-homes” like crafts and printables

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to run and plan</td>
<td>High consumable supply/labor costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well established</td>
<td>Not always educational</td>
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<tr>
<td>High attendance</td>
<td>Methodical/inflexible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Less depth</td>
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<td>Did not fit well with mission</td>
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COMMUNICATE! COMMUNICATE! COMMUNICATE!

- Communication with staff
- Communication with guests
- Problem solving
IMPLEMENTING CHANGES

• Inquiry training
• Inquiry-based activities

Specific programs:
• Increased number of activities but more focused
• Increased volunteer recruiting
GUEST SATISFACTION

• Every guest has value—but don’t let one loud voice drown out quiet voices. Beware the loud voice!
• “This is the reason we have a membership.”
# ANALYZING OUR PROGRAMS “AFTER”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fewer “consumable” hours / more sustainable labor long-term</td>
<td>Require more staff training (“sustainable labor”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquiry-based and educational</td>
<td>Less structured</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fit better with mission</td>
<td>Greater initial time investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>More time and subject depth</td>
<td>Fun—with deeper engagement than before</td>
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APPLICATION TO SMALLER MUSEUMS

• It is possible to change old programs or to create new ones.
• Inquiry is flexible in scope.
• Inquiry doesn’t require any specialized supplies.
• Inquiry applies to everything, from nature and science to history!
RESOURCES

- *Surrounded by Science: Learning Science in Informal Environments* (Schweingruber and Fenichel, 2010)
- Leap into Science (The Franklin Institute), [https://www.fi.edu/leap](https://www.fi.edu/leap)
- *How People Learn* (National Research Council, 2000)
- *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005)
- Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences.