

The Strawberry Tea

It was the evening before the very first Strawberry Tea this church had had. The tables were set with fine China. Flowers and plants were brought in for decoration and sale and elegantly arranged. Streamers graced the gymnasium, the walls newly painted, the quilts were on display.

Next day, I arrive without having been told of the dress code for servers so I was relegated to kitchen duty. The two men in white shirt and black bow tie and trousers looked quite stunning as they went about with their tea trolleys with regular and Earl Grey tea. But no one was in charge of the kitchen, so we managed by the sink or swim method.



We tried not to step on the two ladies' vision of a proper English Tea when you heat the tea pots ahead of time, boil the water at the last minute and then make the tea. We were instructed not to heat up the water ahead of time in the big urn like we usually do for coffee hour after church. People were streaming in, the watched pot never boils, and one of the men kept saying to us, "Smell that and tell me if it is regular or Earl Grey."

Bit by bit through the three hour Tea we started making our own decisions, since no one would respond when we would ask a how-to question.

I dislodged myself from the no-serving rule later in the afternoon when two different reports came in that one lady was upset because her niece had put in an order for a Strawberry Sunday and it hadn't come while people all about her were being served. For some reason which I still cannot fathom, none of the properly dressed servers picked up the Sunday all ready to serve and take it out to the girl even as they stood hearing this report. Consequently I did it, breaking a small rule (do not serve unless dressed for it) but obeying a larger rule (to be of service).



That is what training is all about; assessing priorities, efficiencies, and effectiveness for future improvements, as well as developing the ability to make on the spot responsible decisions.

Some people who didn't want to help in the Strawberry Tea contributed \$5.00 towards buying the food to make the sandwiches, scones, whipped cream, and ice cream. The strawberries were donated. The glasses for the Strawberry Sundays were rented. When the doors opened, they were financially in the clear and \$900.00CN was earned that day to be given to Habitat for



Humanity. Mission fulfillment is the ultimate parameter for any task.

The process, and evaluating that process, is just as important as the ends. Deficient results and un-met expectations are guides to changing the process which produced them.

Summary:

The event was a success. There were small hiccups and philosophies which did not hamper meeting objectives of raising money for Habitat for Humanity.

There were communication glitches regarding the kitchen: somehow I had not been informed of the dress rule for serving. Likely I was a late addition to the team and when information is internalized people start assuming everyone knows. The dress code needed to be written down and disseminated as an automatic part of the conscripting/volunteer process. The reasoning is two-fold: it informs and reminds.

Take the kitchen staff workers. They can have an outline of what is expected and dress code sent to them when they first get on the team. Any updates include re-inserting these basics at the bottom of the message. A day or two before the event resend the information and request confirmation notice of receipt. No response means you get on the phone. The list is posted in the workplace (the kitchen) with room for questions to be written which arise.

Clearly, there was no manager present for the kitchen. I believe it was the pastoral care team which put it on. The above questions can be handled by that team for future reference and ask for experienced advice outside the group. There needs to be a central procedure manual so all groups benefit.