

CARLTON GREEN, Ph.D.

Director of Nutrition,
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Los Angeles, California

When you first meet Carlton Green, you are immediately struck by his positive, upbeat demeanor, which at once reminds you of someone who must spend quite a bit of his time on the motivational speaking circuit. And in a way, Green does.

In four short years as Director of Nutrition at UCLA Medical Center, his personal influence and coaching abilities are credited with a dramatic, top-to-bottom turnaround in the attitude, morale and self esteem of the institution's foodservice department and staff.

Delve a bit deeper into that turnaround, and you come quickly to the top and bottom lines, where his impact has been just as substantial. When he was brought on in March of 1997, the department was running a \$2.5 million annual deficit, with key ratios ranked at the bottom of its peer group by two national benchmarking organizations. By last year, sales were up \$2 million over 1996, foodservice was contributing \$500,000 annually to the hospital's general operating fund and its benchmarking numbers were ranked at the top of their class. And all without a single layoff.

Green's ability to generate results on both the people side and the financial side in a segment with some of the most intractable challenges in foodservice is what earned him his 2001 Silver Plate, and the well-deserved recognition it brings.

Not bad for an individual who grew up in a multiple-stepfather home and who dropped out of high school at 17. And not luck, either. Because whether it was holding down a second job at Walt Disney's California operations to help make the family budget ends meet in 1963, or returning to school for a B.A. in nutrition in 1977, a master's in restaurant and hotel administration in 1980 and a Ph.D. in business ad-

ministration in 1999, Green has largely made his own career happen. Along the way, he has spent much of it mentoring others to achieve the same kinds of results he has had in a series of positions that each time seemed to bring a bigger challenge than the one before.

Green got his first taste of foodservice in high school in Detroit, when he signed up for a chef's course that was a vocational training option. Later, after joining the Marines at 17, that earlier experience helped him move up in a succession of more re-

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sponsible foodservice positions, eventually managing the mess detail for some of the infantry's top officers.

"It is amazing how the Marines can take surly, 17-year-old kids and turn them in a short time into responsible men and women who can make serious decisions in serious situations," Green says today.

The lessons continued at the Disney organization, which put him in a management training program and helped him go back to school. Then, after leaving the Marines in 1968, Green landed a position in the foodservice department of Ambassador College in Big Sandy, Texas, where "I soon became the director, and found I had a knack for identifying ways to reduce costs,"

he recalls. A few years later, he went to work for the management company Food Dimensions (later acquired by Seiler's, which in turn was acquired by Sodexho).

"They wanted monthly forecasts with very small variances," he says. "That's when I really learned the fine art of managing financials."

Green moved to Santa Monica hospital in 1985; to San Antonio Pomona Gardens, an eldercare facility, in 1987; and then to the University of Connecticut Medical Center in 1992. At each facility he was recognized for staff development, financial improvements and operational excellence. It was that reputation which led UCLA to approach him through a headhunter in 1997.

"When I came here, I had this incredible confidence that we would not fail," he says. "I told the staff we would get to where we were going, but that we would all have to pay the price. We were given one year to turn the operation around. Otherwise, outsourcing was in the cards."

An outside analysis of the operation helped identify where the opportunities lay, Green says. "We badly needed more accountability in areas like inventory control and purchasing, portion control and merchandising. And we had a major opportunity to increase our cash sales.

"I still have a 'Marine side' to me that comes out now and then," Green says. "I began requiring sandwich prep personnel to weigh each portion. We started taking monthly inventories and put in strict controls to minimize shrinkage. We reviewed every single product for price and value and worked closely with suppliers to reach our goals."

Such moves were balanced with a variety of employee development programs and a long list of service enhancements for both patient and retail foodservice. The results?

"In 1996, we benchmarked at \$7.37 a meal. Now we're at \$3.37," he says. "We do that with 30% fewer FTEs than the 'demonstrated best practice' for a facility our size."

"I get my greatest satisfaction in life from two things," Green says. "One is from accomplishing goals that senior management does not believe can happen. The other is to watch people develop and grow. At this job I've gotten to do both."

JOHN LAWN



What's on Green's Plate?

ANNUAL MEALS SERVED: 2.8 million

FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES: 212

ANNUAL BUDGET: \$10 million

LOCATIONS: UCLA Medical Center
(659 beds); Santa Monica
Hospital (225 beds)

Developing a Leadership Style

If there is one management skill that is essential to turning around a troubled operation, it is leadership. We asked Green to identify the leadership traits he deems most important.

Be willing to change yourself first. "When you face a difficult situation, it is natural to think about changing things. But if you see a need for change, look to yourself first. Change always begins with you—when you change, everything else can change as well. A big part of leadership is setting a positive example; if your stated values are not supported by behavior, they are useless. I like to say that it is not the sermons we hear, but the sermons we see that influence our behavior. Most of us are a bit lazy—we need to learn to manage ourselves and to push ourselves, not to wait for others to push us."

Understand the essence of relationship-building. "People may not remember what you say or do, but they will remember how you made them feel about themselves. Give people credit for what they contribute, and communicate that credit to your management. Showcase people for what they have done. If people feel good about themselves when they are with you, they will produce for you and they will not let you down."

Know the power of vision. "Everything we see about us in the physical world began as a vision only one person could see. The telephone, the television, space travel—all came from people with a vision. Someone focused on it, believed it was achievable, was able to communicate it to others. In the Marines, I worked for many top commanders and they all had this attribute. Vision is critical if you want to take an organization from where it is and move it forward to what it can be."

Make education a part of your culture. "One point I always make is that you must learn something before you can do something. Not

classroom learning, but continuous learning and growing. You must make staff aware that lessons come from every aspect of an operation. A manager can bring this out in meetings by asking people to share what they have learned, and by following up with the right questions—"What made you notice that? Who else could benefit from it?" and so on."

Keep the mission clear. "If your people do not have a mission, the organization is like a ship without a rudder. Our vision may be to become the best foodservice operation of our type, but our mission tells us what we will do in a concrete way to reach that goal. In a service business, the mission must be to exceed the customer's service expectations at every point of service in the organization."

Build a high-trust culture. "When you look to hire or promote people, look to their strength of character. I am not referring to whether people lie or cheat—those kind of issues have obvious implications. Look beyond that, to the aspects of character that make people who and what they are. Look for people who want to learn, who want to improve who know how to focus, who know how to prioritize. Let employees know you recognize their strengths and that you hold them in high esteem. Match your assignments to those strengths, and you will put people into positions where they can succeed and help you improve your organization."

Perseverance. "If you believe you have the right goals, do not give up on them and do not let setbacks discourage you. A leader must have the courage of conviction to accomplish change. Often times, things will get worse before they get better. It is like a haircut, halfway through—if the barber stopped, you would look worse than when you went in. You must have the courage to forge ahead."