

## Dead again

I have friends who spend their lives following the Grateful Dead around.

These aren't unemployed teen-agers. They're middle-class white collar members of society with careers and families, who plan weekends and vacations around Dead concert appearances and think nothing of driving 24 hours for three hours of bliss.

Each concert is unique, they say—a reunion, a reaffirmation and one big blast. Sometimes, they say, the show in the parking lot is better than the one on stage.

I have never seen the Dead live, but I'm a fan. One thing that discourages me from going is the audience. I've read the stories of the unpleasantness that sometimes mars Dead shows.

I was younger then and I could have gone and didn't and missed the Big One—Woodstock.

At 56 I have a nagging suspicion the Grateful Dead live are too late for me. I'd be the chaperone at a party of teen-agers (Do they have chaperones anymore?) or my aunt from Pottstown, Pa., who watched TV just to disapprove.

"And her skirt came all the way up to here. Shocking!"

It's nice to know, though, the Dead care about their audience and image and send out a booklet, "How to Organize and Successfully Run a Grateful Dead Concert," to groups that book them.

It, like everything else about them, has a certain home-grown ring to it: Cultivate soil, plant seed, water and watch it grow.

Keep male and female chinchillas in separate cages until female exhibits interest in male. Cage them together for three days. Separate, buy cigars and wait.

The Dead modestly admit they are "one of the top arena/stadium attractions in the country" and are "likely to be sold out."

But not by New Kids on the Block fans.

"The unique sociological phenomenon of the Grateful

Dead and their fans" (some of whom don't have tickets) "means that this is an event that MUST receive special treatment."

Not tear gas, yet.

From all accounts the parking lot is a mall where all things legal and illegal are sold, so "large-scale vending be halted" especially beer, and nitrous oxide, "often sold in balloons."

(Is that the stuff that makes you talk like Mickey Mouse? No. That's helium.)

The Dead want "a back road ... to enter at various times in the late afternoon with police escorts. Artists may arrive via helicopters but police escorts will still be necessary."

(It sounds like Elizabeth Taylor's latest wedding.)

"Dancing at their seats is encouraged. If non-permanent chairs are used they must be ganged together to insure they stay in place."

(That makes sense. Then you can't throw them.)

The Dead address the drug issue:

"There are not a great number of medical problems at Grateful Dead concerts, but common situations are heat exhaustion and banged-up feet. Security, police or ushers may also encounter persons having an adverse reaction to a hallucinogenic drug and this situation should be treated as a medical emergency first and foremost. If police action is necessary, it should be undertaken after medical treatment has been given."

(I got the information for this column from my nephew who saw them in the Boston Garden in September, 10 years after they vowed never to play there again because the sponsors didn't like Jerry Garcia's grilling lobsters on a fire escape. A \$2.1 million take changed everybody's minds.)

The Dead go on and on and I love them—at arm's length. I'll listen to their records.

I'm too old to be a Dead Head and too young to be Dead again.

F.P.

## Dead Quality

A rock 'n' roll band is an unusual place to find an outstanding employee care program, but then there's very little that's usual about the Grateful Dead.

In the incendiary world of rock music, where most performers burn brightly—and burn out—almost as quickly as they are discovered, the Dead has been shining for more than a quarter century. Instead of barring recording equipment from their concerts, a standard practice designed to protect record sales, the band embraces fans who want to record performances and sets aside a special area in concert halls to accommodate their equipment. Instead of scheduling months-long, coast-to-coast concert tours, the band limits its tours to about three weeks at a time and usually takes a month off after each tour.

While the secret to the band's musical success is a subject better suited to a music industry publication, there is no secret to what keeps its business running smoothly: the band takes care of its employees. As reported by Mark Memmott in *USA Today*, Grateful Dead Productions employs about 50 people full time. Their average annual salary is estimated at \$50,000, with those at the top end receiving about \$100,000. The company pays for health and life insurance and has established trust funds for college-age children of long-time staffers. A profit-sharing system has been established, and there probably are healthy profits to be shared. A music industry source estimates that in 1990 the Dead had ticket revenues of \$29 million, with perhaps 50% of that total making it to Grateful Dead Productions after concert expenses were paid. Record sales and band-related souvenirs also contribute to revenues.

Support goes beyond a paycheck and benefits. *USA Today* reports that road crew members are entrusted to do their jobs with very little supervision. Their opinions are valued, too. A member of the band's sound crew said that if a new \$100,000 piece of equipment is needed, all he has to do is provide facts that support the purchase and he gets the equipment.

The Grateful Dead takes care of its fans, too. Besides allowing tape recorders at concerts, the band keeps its ticket prices at or below the average price of other rock concerts. Although a Grateful Dead concert can be nearly twice as long as those of other performers—3.5 hours compared to two or less—the band plays from a 140-song repertoire in which no songs are repeated during a four-night stand in one city. Provisions are made to sell some tickets for each concert by mail order so that fans don't have to interrupt their schedules to stand in line for several hours.

Where does the Grateful Dead fit into the quality field? There are signs that a quiet transition is occurring there. Rather than adopting the quality processes of a specific quality leader such as Crosby, Deming, Feigenbaum, or Juran, organizations are instead adopting the techniques employed by Florida Power & Light, Milliken & Company, Motorola, and Xerox. Is it time to add the Grateful Dead to that list?

Brad Stratton  
Editor

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## Quality and the Dead

I think that Brad Stratton's editorial in the June 1991 issue (p. 5) was worth a whole article, complete with pictures. As a yuppified professional Deadhead, I want to elaborate on a fan's perspective. Not only does the band take care of its employees, it takes care of its fans. The fans are the customers, and the Grateful Dead is a tradition. In fact, to some, the Grateful Dead is almost a lifestyle.

What is it that makes me plan my vacations—in other cities no less—around Grateful Dead concerts? Why don't I spend my hard-earned vacation dollars in resorts or other vacation spots? Quality. Deadhead quality can be broken into four areas:

1. Customer service. When you receive

your tickets in the mail, you also receive a list of inexpensive hotels, restaurants, and camping facilities in the area. I think this shows concern for the customers on the part of the Grateful Dead staff. A hot line also lets people know concert schedules well in advance.

2. The product. The band itself plays for hours, especially on New Year's Eve. Every Grateful Dead concert is a party, in the parking lot and in the venue. The concerts sell out months in advance, and no two shows are ever the same.

3. The road staff and concern for the employees. The quality of the lighting and sound far exceeds that of any other concerts I have been to. It is not unusual to know the sound lady and light man by face, if not by name. Their accessibility and talent are impressive. I worked backstage at an amphitheater while in college, and the Grateful Dead roadies and other staff were always very pleasant. I think that one of the reasons for the relaxed atmosphere is because the roadies do not have to pack up every night and move to a new city as other band roadies do.

4. The rewards. *Forbes* magazine featured an article on the Grateful Dead a few years ago; I guess the band must be doing something right. Besides the profit to Grateful Dead productions, the band's concerts are a boon to hotel owners, local merchants, Deadhead vendors, and the local economy in general.

I agree with Stratton that it is time to add the Grateful Dead to the top quality list, along with Motorola and Xerox. I propose that the band be nominated for the Baldrige Award. Obviously, what it is doing is working. Perhaps other companies should take heed.

Kim Horne, Labco Inc., Houston, TX

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Shattanooga, TN 37402

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P.O. Box 2017  
Buena Vista, CO 81211-2017

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P.O. Box 436017  
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Deadheads Behind Bars

