

It's hard to exceed expectations sometimes. A person already has an idea of how something is going to go or the results that will occur, and that expectation differs from person to person. Sometimes that expectation is just unrealistic and what happens just can't live up to what they hoped for which can be disappointing. Worse still, the expectation was realistic, and the activity falls far short. That's when it can be soul-crushing or anger-inducing.

But when performance exceeds your expectations that can be magical. It doesn't have to be big things either. Speaking of magical, as I was typing that last sentence our Payroll/Inventory Clerk, Capri Hinson, brought me one of the delicious cupcakes she made for the office. I wasn't expecting that to happen — especially as I was writing on this subject — and it was a wonderful surprise that exceeded my morning expectations! OK, back to what I had planned to say.

When my girls were 5 and 7 years old, we saved up and took them to Disney World. In my opinion, that's a great age for the girls to go, as meeting the princesses and other characters is very real to them. Also, I had never been there myself, so I was probably just as excited as they were.

Part of that experience is getting a picture with Mickey Mouse, of course. My expectations of that event, after already taking pictures with a few of the princesses, were waiting in the Florida heat for an hour and struggling to entertain the kids in line while we wait. But in the end, it would be worth it for them to meet Mickey, and then Jen and I would have a picture for a lifetime. But that's not what happened.

When we got to Mickey's house that morning, I made sure we arrived before the ropes dropped on that part of the park. I thought we could escape the long lines by being early. Unfortunately, it seemed everyone else in the park had the same idea as there were hundreds of people encircled in front of Mickey's house.

Soon Mickey walked out, and the crowd went wild, including my girls, who were dressed in princess gowns. Mickey worked the crowd for a minute, and then the magical thing happened. He pointed to my girls. His assistant walked over to us and said, "Mickey has chosen you as the Family of the Day. Please follow me." Mickey bowed to the girls and took their hands. He then gave us a private tour of his whole house, which was a lot of fun. They kept everyone else outside for a minute while he did that. At the end of the tour Mickey showed us the photography area. His assistant said, "As the Family of the Day, you can take as much time as you want with Mickey getting your photos." Obviously, that was way beyond my expectations. I have pictures of them walking in front of me hand-in-hand with Mickey. Yes, Jen and I teared up.

I would like to say that kind of thing will never happen again, but years later when we returned to the park and the girls were teenagers, Buzz Lightyear danced with Abrielle. He just chose her and they had a little dance at the photography area. And then Alayna had an unsuccessful staring contest with Kylo Ren in the Star Wars area.

So exceeding expectations is very difficult, but when it happens, you often never forget.

Every year Neosho County Community College gets data about its performance, and I think I know what to expect with that data. I see the trends, and I know what a good job our faculty and staff do year after year. But occasionally, I get surprised, most of the time in a good way.

I recently saw a chart from the Technical Education Authority on high school enrollment in our technical education programs. The state has a program called Excel in CTE that pays the cost to operate that program. This includes paying the tuition and most of the fees of the high school students so that there is very little — and often nothing — out of pocket to take those classes. I was expecting to see those numbers go up since we opened the Mitchell Career and Technology Center, but I was surprised.

NCCC is up 59.4% in student headcount in that program over the past five years! The average growth among the other Kansas community colleges over that same period is 8.2%. For credit hours, the numbers are similar, up 47.8% in five years compared to the average of 17.5%! Wow! That exceeded my expectations by a long shot! In terms of credit hour production, NCCC is fifth out of the 19 community colleges in Excel in CTE, but we are only 12th in terms of overall size, so we are punching way over our weight class there.

Along with that chart, I received the Community College Benchmarking Study that compares our college against many other colleges across the nation. It's a great way to see if you really are doing as well as you think when compared to others. I knew we were going to have some good numbers there, but not this good!

Our high percentage of “completers” who earned a degree or certificate put us in the top 5% of the nation! The retention of our students through the entire class was great — in the top 7%. And the enrollee success rate (finishing the class with a passing grade) was in the top 3% of the country.

Neosho student satisfaction with our advising was in the top 3% of the country and our student satisfaction with our instructional effectiveness was in the top 8%! Our withdrawal rate for our online classes, a huge problem across the country, was not a problem at NCCC. We were in the top 5% of the nation for a low rate of dropouts.

Our comparison on the national survey for student engagement was WAY beyond expectations! Active/Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners were all in the top 2-3% of the nation. Incredible!

Of course, we have things we could work on and improve, but I was truly taken aback by how great these numbers are. They greatly exceeded my expectations!

I still think back on that wonderful day watching my girls with Mickey. It was a core memory for them as well. Here at the college, while it's hard to compete with Mickey Mouse, I hope we are making those kinds of “exceeded my expectation” memories for all of our students. The numbers seem to indicate we are, and it makes everything else we do worthwhile!

And thank you for all of your support over these many years! You have exceeded my expectations as well!

If you have any questions about this column or anything else, please write me at binbody@neosho.edu.