
What Curly from City Slickers Can Teach Us

June 18, 2018

By Matt Keenan

Partner

Jack Palance won an Academy Award for his role as Curly in the movie *City Slickers*. Filmed in part near Durango, and released in 1991, the comedy also starred Billy Crystal as Mitch Robbins and was a box office and critical smash. In the movie, Curly was a crusty cowboy prone to barking out commands while a filterless Camel dangled from his lips. Curly was assigned to Robbins and his two buddies on a cattle drive from the middle of nowhere to an equally obscure venue.

Curly provided loads of comedic humor but it was the advice he imparted midway through the drive that, I submit, has relevance to the scientific communities engaged in drug and device development. It's when Curly underscored the importance of the "one thing" to Mitch Robbins.

And it went like this:

Curly: "Do you know what the secret of life is?"

Curly: "This" (Curly extends his finger in the air.)

Mitch: "Your finger?"

Curly: "One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and the rest don't mean shit."

Mitch: "But what is the 'one thing?'"

Curly: "That's what you have to find out." (Curly pulls his horse and off they go.)

I believe there is one thing of paramount importance in the world of bioscience. And I would pose it in the form of a question: are you patient-centric?

Asked in a more direct manner: who is your patient advocate?

To have answered this question appropriately means you have composed the building blocks for success, and with it, taken a giant leap to address issues of risk management.

Hospitals figured this out a long time ago. They use this in their branding – promising someone who is a “supporter, believer, sponsor, backer” of patients. They use this position to brand themselves as helping shape how quality-driven care is delivered. They describe how this role helps improve patient satisfaction among patients and families.

To be sure, the drug and device world is dominated by an abundance of ISO and CFRs governing engineering and quality-assurance principles with the singular goal of creating safe and effective products. Nevertheless, asking the one question keeps the vision focused on the right place, the right person.

This is particularly true as more companies grow dependent on technology.

Large medical device companies fill this space with a medical director or chief medical officer, thereby making the voice of the patient heard at the highest levels of the organization. Other companies may fill this role with a consultant who has a visible presence at the company without necessarily working there fulltime.

As we know, there is no risk-free device, product or drug. But for smaller companies not capable of filling this type of position with a physician, there is still value in having someone with some aspects of medical expertise to consider the interests of the patients and their physicians.

There are other benefits from the org chart filling this position. It shows the healthcare community you are serious about understanding their needs and it adds a measure of credibility to the company’s initiatives. The rather negative optics of big pharma unfortunately has relevance to little pharma as well. Finding the proper balance between risks and benefits can be evaluated by someone with a medical perspective.

Bioscience companies can improve their products and reduce their legal liabilities if they consider the patient at every step of the way. Ensuring that those priorities are invested in one person is the tried and true pathway forward.