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## **The most difficult question, ever**

What's the single most difficult thing a theme park cast member is ever called upon to do?

Move a crowd of people off the street and behind a Magic Kingdom parade barrier? Maybe, but with a strong voice and a stronger attitude, that's really no big deal.

Calm a crying child before he stops the line at load? Also tricky, but a warm smile and kneeling down to a child's eye level do wonderful things.

Wiping up a "protein spill" after said child finishes that ride? Disgusting, but less so once one discovers that invaluable substance, "Vo-Ban" (the stuff you sprinkle over fresh upchuck to make it stink less.)

No, this single most difficult thing a theme park employee has to do is...

Ask a woman if she is pregnant.

If she says 'yes,' hey, not only have you done your job well, but maybe you also just prevented a horrible incident that could have compromised her pregnancy.

But if she says 'no'... hell hath no fury like a woman mistaken for a pregnant one.

I'll always remember one soul-destroying exchange I witnessed at Walt Disney World's Big Thunder Mountain load platform:

"Excuse me, ma'am, but are you pregnant?"

"PREGNANT? No! What are you saying, do I look FAT?"

"Um," (awkward pause) "actually, I was saying that I thought you looked, maybe, pregnant."

At this moment, every other operator on the platform looks

away, trying to shrink behind the nearest stanchion, or, ideally, into a hole in the floor.

"I AM NOT PREGNANT! Oh my God," the young woman then buries her head into her friend's chest and sobs. "They think I look fat. Let's get out of here!"

Then they cross over the train and out the station, as the poor cast member who asked her the question looks like he'd just as soon throw himself in front of said train.

Bad times, all around.

Still, you've got to ask. The consequence of letting an expectant mother on some rides can be horrific. You remember that "safety brake" that stops a fast-moving coaster in eight feet? You do not want a pregnant belly anywhere near a lap bar when a roller coaster hits that safety brake.

I never, ever wanted to be that cast member, who felt just as humiliated asking the question as that poor woman felt having to answer it. Which is why I felt the weight of the world lift from me one day as I discovered an impromptu solution.

A maybe-pregnant, maybe-not young woman was walking down the platform at load. As she walked closer, and the moment of truth approached, I turned to the pair of teenage boys in front of me and asked, in a booming voice with a huge smile on my face...

"Are you pregnant?"

They looked at me like I was nuts. But I didn't wait for an answer. I then asked the elderly ladies behind them the same question.

"Are you pregnant?"

She just laughed. To the burly biker dudes behind them,

"Are you pregnant?"

They laughed, too, as the woman-in-question finally approached, laughing along with the rest of the platform.

"No," she said.

Soul-crushing moment averted!

I kept asking down the line for that entire train, just for appearances. That became my Standard Operating Procedure for

every potential pregnancy then on: ask *everyone* around the woman in question if they were pregnant, so that the woman would not feel singled out.

Many times, I saw a panicked look on the woman's face as I approached, and I knew that she would be answering 'yes.' When that happened, I stopped the schtick, changed to an earnest expression of concern and explained, "Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, ma'am, but we can't allow expectant mothers to ride. Here, please come stand right over here," as I would help her across the train to the unload side and changed my expression to a wide smile, "and you can wait for your group while they ride."

Never failed, and no one ever complained.