



The Wonderful World of Customer Service at Disney

Preface

Jeff Kober has taken the very best practices in customer service at Disney and has applied them to organizations just like yours. This new book, premiering this Fall, offers insightful stories for anyone seeking to provide the very best to their customers. The following is an excerpt from Chapter three. For more information about how you can acquire a copy of this book when it's published, contact us today.

Every Guest a VIP

"WE LOVE TO ENTERTAIN KINGS AND QUEENS, BUT THE VITAL THING TO REMEMBER IS THIS—EVERY GUEST RECEIVES THE VIP TREATMENT."

--WALT DISNEY'S DISNEYLAND

WHERE KINGS ARE COMMONERS AND COMMONERS ARE KINGS

Since Disneyland opened in 1955 there have been a long list of very important people who have wanted to come from around the world to spend time in the parks. From Emperor Hirohito of Japan to the "I'm going to Disneyland/Disney World" super bowl stars of today, celebrities have been heading to play the castle.

The interesting thing about these individuals is that they often want to simply be like everyone else when they visiting. A classic tale that Marty Sklar shares is one of Betty Hutton who visited Disneyland one day. From the moment she arrived visitors recognized her and asked her for autographs. So Miss Hutton determined to that she would disguise herself. Heading over to Merlin's Magic Shop in Fantasyland, she purchased a long, false eyelashes, a bucaneer's hat and a special "sword" that went right through her head. The disguise worked perfectly; no one recognized the famous actress. But everyone stopped her to inquire where they could buy "a hat like that crazy one you've got on!"

I had the personal privilege of working closely with Judi Daley, who for over 30 years was the official hostess to almost every VIP, statesman, and celebrity who came to Walt Disney World. She exemplified the perfect ideal of a Disney hostess. On her office walls were portraits of her over the years with five American presidents. If a celebrity needed to be taken care of, they called on Judy to look over their visit to Walt Disney World.

I asked her on one occasion, who of all of the people she met made the greatest impression on her, or who of all the people she met, did the experience mean the most. She gave me the names of two individuals:

1. **John Denver.** Understand that when most celebrities arrive, they do so with an entourage of family, fellow performers, and support staff. Most of them are focused on the experience of the headliner. On this occasion there was little advanced notice of John's arrival. They had been playing out in Lakeland, and decided at the last minute that they would spend time at The Magic Kingdom. There was none of the customary planning or scheduling. Judy and her team met them and escorted for a standard formal portrait in front of the castle. Then she turned to John and asked, "where would you like to go first?" John immediately spun his heels toward his team and asked: "Where would all of you like to go?" The itinerary was then largely driven not by John but by everyone in the entourage. Not only was John more focused on whether the members of his band were having a good time, they laughed their way through The Magic Kingdom and probably had more fun than any group that had come through before.



2. **Princess Diana.** For the Princess of Wales, family was the most important thing to her. And if there were a time when that was most important to Diana it would probably have been just after her divorce to Prince Charles. That's because her boys were at a turning point of becoming teenagers, and she wanted to spend important 1:1 time with them.

That meant getting rid of the paparazzi. So while there was an entire entourage spread out over a floor of the Grand Floridian, Judy's role was to make sure that Diana had as much time away from the press and others. At times that meant back dooring them into attractions or holding attractions over after hours. But the end result was that Diana was able to be a mom spending time with her boys. And the paparazzi? They never got a photo of Diana or the boys that entire week.

Just like the story of the Prince and the Pauper, Princess Dianna didn't want to be treated better than anyone else, she just wanted the experience of being *like* everyone else. And that was manifested not in being able to go incognito, but in being able to spend the time that a mom gets to spend with her children.

Similarly, commoners want to be kings as well. Again, going back to our last chapter on understanding individual needs, people want to feel special. So Disney goes out its way to make people feel special. Disney believes in treating a every day guests like a VIP—or a Very Important Person.

VIP: A VERY INDIVIDUAL PERSON.

The expression, VIP is usually meant to mean a Very Important Person. But it can also mean a Very Individual Person. When we understand guests and the essential needs they have, we come to better addressing them as individual persons.

Here's how Disney explains it:

EVERY GUEST on our entire 42 square miles of property is a VIP whether they are visiting the Magic kingdom for a day or vacationing in our resort-hotels for a week or more...Remember that 99% of our guests are great people with everything going their way and having the time of their life. They are the easy ones to serve. Your real challenge will be that tiny 1%...the guests who are hot, tired, hungry, confused, frustrated and perhaps missing their luggage, ticket books or cameras. Or perhaps all of the above. They may not be very understanding and it may be up to you to turn their day around into the positive kind they came here to experience."

--1975 Walt Disney World Cast Member booklet

Individualizing our service toward that tiny 1% that Disney speaks of is a great way to treat guests like a VIP. That's why it's important to really understand the needs of our customers and to walk in their shoes. When we do so we find our customers are extremely satisfied with the services we provide.

Let me say something about paying attention to the 1%. I don't know that we will individually serve the remaining 99%. But I will tell you that often the 99% is looking at our treatment of the 1% and making silent judgements about how we would treat them as well. When we are extra patient with the 1%, when we go out of our way for the 1%, when we stay calm, cool and collected with the 1%, it speaks volumes to the 99%.

Another funny way of looking at this comes in my own experiences working with zoos. How a zoo takes care of its animals often becomes a silent commentary about the kind of extended effort we would make towards the guests frequenting the zoo. And vis a versa. The way we treat guests visiting a zoo speaks a silent sermon on how well the zoo pays attention to its animals.



Performance Journeys

By the way, a great approach to this is by using the Platinum Rule. Most of us are familiar with the Golden Rule—to treat others as we would want to be treated. The Platinum Rule suggests that we treat others the way that they themselves would want to be treated. This stronger approach means we have to understand what people really need and want. It's a great step toward really exceeding guest expectations.