

Foreword

Walt Disney and Van France are American originals.

Due to their ground-breaking efforts, the world is a much better place for all of us. Many thousands of pages in books and countless hours in documentaries and films have analyzed Walt's inimitable combination of creativity, compassion, and his uncompromising quality standards. The lessons Walt taught me and many others could fill a library.

However, virtually nothing has been written about my mentor, Van France, and his role as the founder of the Disney University. I was fresh out of the Army and working at Disneyland when, during a chance meeting with Walt Disney, he suggested I talk with Van about some ideas I had about training at Disneyland. Walt said to me, "There's a guy over in Administration named Van France who you might like to meet. Van is starting something called the University of Disneyland. If you're interested in doing training, go meet Van and tell him Walt sent you."

Van ultimately asked me and several others to help him start what became the Disney University. Our relationship spanned over 30 years, and during that time Van became a trusted advisor and dear friend.

Van was a gifted educator and coach. His uncanny ability to effectively package and convey information was due to his ability to listen and earn trust, vital prerequisites for any leader. He really listened! Van didn't always agree with what he heard and was defi-

nately not a pushover (qualities to which many Disney executives can attest). Yet, aside from Walt Disney, I can't think of anyone more skilled at connecting with cast members, at every level of the organization.

Van wore his heart on his sleeve and provided honest feedback. He was equally comfortable challenging everything, from the usefulness of the longest-standing policies to the leadership approaches of the most powerful. Van had courage.

I kept Van in mind throughout the Tokyo Disney Resort and Disneyland Paris Resort projects. Years earlier, he taught me that one person can't do it all. He taught me to think creatively and to delegate. He wasn't a micromanager, but he held people responsible for getting things done.

Walt Disney's and Van France's lessons inspired me and countless Disney cast members around the world. Through *Disney U*, it is my sincere hope that these lessons will take their rightful place on the global stage.

—Jim Cora, retired chairman, Disneyland International