

GROW

4 Powerful Secrets to Disneyland's Success at 60

Disneyland is celebrating 60 years of success. Here's the secret sauce for how the company continues to dazzle visitors and shareholders alike.



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IMAGE: Getty Images

When I was a child growing up in Southern California, Disneyland was very much a part of my life experience. Every time a relative would come to visit, you can bet that a visit to Disneyland was on our schedule. And when years later I had my own kids, Disneyland was our go-to place for family fun. I conservatively estimate that I've been to the park more than 125 times over the years.

Disneyland set the bar high for other amusement parks that followed, and it (and Walt Disney World, and the other Disney parks around the world) just seem to get better every

year. Today Disneyland began festivities in the run up to its 60th anniversary on July 17, and I suspect there will be many more anniversaries in the future.

So, what is the secret sauce that has led to Disneyland's success? According to customer service expert Doug Lipp in his book *Disney U*, in 1955 Disney University founder Van France made a commitment to Walt Disney that influenced millions of Disneyland employees--and ultimately the experience of hundreds of millions of guests. Van helped build a culture at Disneyland based on four values:

#1: Innovation

Disney University trains its employees (known as "Cast Members") to continually adapt and learn in an ever-evolving culture, and to challenge the status quo. As Van put it in this excerpt from a 1980s Disneyland management training program: "Budgets, schedules, reports, more reports, union negotiations, training programs, meetings ... more meetings, handbooks, cover-your-ass memos and the endless things which take up your time are of no value unless they end up producing A HAPPY GUEST."

#2: Leadership

Said Van France, "Walt would regularly walk through the Park, looking for problems or things to improve. I copied his routine. I continually walked through the Park, looking for different things, people problems. Facts are easy to identify, I was looking for feelings that were bothering Cast Members." From Walt and Roy Disney, and then to many generations of leaders, "walking the park" continues to be the ultimate leadership approach used at Disney resorts worldwide.

#3: Education

Walt Disney placed a long-standing value of providing employees a tailored, relevant training and education experience. Sixty years after Disneyland's grand opening, cast members at every Disney resort around the world still stream through the Disney University, before interacting with guests.

#4: Entertain

Entertainment is the cornerstone of the Disney experience, and it found its way into Disney University's training strategy too. Van France merged education and entertainment into something entirely new: edutainment. This powerful approach increases trainee engagement, ensuring their retention of new concepts.

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