



HOW DISNEY DEVELOPS CULTURE

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The extremes of economic booms and busts will never vanish. Both create considerable angst among leaders, and no one is immune. Leaders in government, business, religious institutions, nonprofits and startup organizations all face similar challenges.

Boom and bust extremes force leaders to consider ways to do more with less, keep employees engaged and motivated, reduce employee turnover, improve customer service and differentiate from the competition.

Differentiation is the ultimate goal; how to stand out as the employer, vendor or service provider of choice.

Differentiating via doing more with less, keeping employees engaged and motivated and improving customer service is now more of a constant than an aberration. The anxiety and stress that used to be felt only during the extremes of boom and bust is a daily reality for many.

The strongest leaders know the importance of differentiating during the time between the twin crises of boom and bust. Fortunately, there is a growing body of leaders who realize that product development alone isn't sufficient. To differentiate, these leaders know they also must improve their employee training and development.

In the hectic dash to evolve and differentiate from the competition via training, the links between organizational values, clear training goals, employee needs and customer demands can weaken. Still, leaders must be innovative and comfortable with risk. They must provide overt, enthusiastic and sustained support. Employee education and development must be an indispensable component of organizational culture, and be entertaining, engaging and memorable.

The wild ride on the economic roller coaster quickly gets out of control when values are jettisoned and excuses start flying.

Somewhere in the world, the following two scenarios are being played out. Both reflect a passive, victim mentality, undermine sustained employee and organizational development and open the door to competitors.

Scenario 1: "This weak economy is killing me. 'Do more with less' is the name of the game. My budgets are slashed, and I have no wiggle room."

Result: There is no budget, time or people for training. Why train employees? They'll be gone pretty soon.

Scenario 2: "This booming economy is killing me. We're barely filling existing orders. Plus, I can't keep my good people. They jump ship as soon as someone else comes along waving a little extra money."

Result: There is no time or people for training. Why train employees? They'll be gone pretty soon.

These organizations are at opposite ends of the economic spectrum; one is in a dying environment and the other in a thriving environment. Yet, the economy aside, there are surprising similarities between the two. The odds are good that neither organization has a history or culture of providing useful employee training supported by top leaders.

Before either of these organizations commits to offering any sort of training, both should address the following questions: • How effective have training programs been in the past?

- How did those training programs contribute to the bottom line?
- How did those training programs contribute to the emotional health of employees?
- Who was the biggest cheerleader for training — the training manager, the CEO or the employees?

All too often, the answers to these four questions are: "I don't know," "I don't know," "I don't know" and "the training manager."

If this is the case, developing and implementing training likely isn't a good idea for either of these organizations. Absent any of the Disney University four circumstances of success — innovate, support, educate and entertain — they aren't ready. Training would most likely prove counterproductive and harmful to the organizational health of both. Pulling people from their real jobs into poorly designed training programs that aren't supported by leaders is a waste of resources and time, destined to undermine morale.

It doesn't have to be this way. And don't blame the economy; it's just the most convenient excuse for cutting training.