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In This Issue:

Embracing Change

Unified Celebrates A Milestone

Beefed Up Sales

Inside:

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

An Interview with
Cal-ISO's Jim Detmers

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Embrace Change...

In Order to Remain the Same

By Doug Lipp

You are a successful, middle-aged business person. You have been in business for a number of years. In some cases, you have “pulled yourself up by your own bootstraps” to survive as an independent.

In other cases, you have skillfully worked your way up through the ranks of a large organization. You have an employee base that can be as small as one other person to as large as hundreds of people. You represent the variety of faces of success of the food industry... and you are ripe for failure.

As was learned the hard way at the Walt Disney Company, success breeds arrogance and arrogance can lead to complacency. Complacency can come in many forms and one of them is the *one trick pony*. In other words, you ride your successes-to-date well beyond their effective lifespans.

Continued on Page 50



Doug Lipp is a featured speaker at the 2004 Western Food Industry Exposition on Oct. 24-26 in Las Vegas. This article addresses part of his presentation.

As a former head trainer at the Walt Disney University, **Doug Lipp's** informative and humorous style brings audiences into the unique culture of customer service that sets Disney apart. His training experience provides fascinating stories, unique insights and invaluable lessons. Learn how certain skills, attitudes and behavior contribute to exceptional performance to build, win and keep market share.



Embrace Change

(Continued from Page 49)

It might be that creative way you give presentations to prospective clients, or it could be the way you have traditionally served and supported your customers or employees.

For example, why deal with all of that confusing internet, e-commerce, or e-learning stuff when you have done just fine without it for so many years? Why think of the impact immigration has had on your community regarding issues of service, product selection or store layout? Why change now? Great question.

The key to getting beyond the one trick pony is to level with yourself and recognize that, quite possibly, the way you currently conduct business is out of date. Perhaps your customers would like services that you currently don't provide.

Quite possibly having the biggest or oldest name in the community might not be the key to holding onto existing, or attracting new customers or employees. Join the club. In order to remain the same (successful!), we must all change.

Lessons From Disney

At Disney, we had our *one-trick pony* and his name was "Herbie the Lovebug." Do you remember him? Adorable little Volkswagen who appeared on screen with Buddy Hackett, Dean Jones and Suzanne Pleshette. The trouble was there was nothing beyond "Herbie the Lovebug" except: "Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo," or "Herbie Goes Bananas."

To put it bluntly, Herbie was getting a little long in the tooth, but no one at Disney Studios had the guts to pull the plug on the Herbie franchise. Why? There were various factors, but the most compelling arguments of the day were a combination of risk aver-

ity and *innovation* were not embraced. Instead, there was a tremendous force to *stay the course* and avoid upsetting the applecart. The results were disastrous. After years of creative neglect and turning out box-office flops like: "Tron," "The Black Hole" and "Baby," (do you even remember these?), Disney stock took a nosedive and the company was targeted by several financiers who attempted several hostile takeovers from 1983-1984.

From "Davey Crockett" to "Finding Nemo:" Embracing Change

As you know, the Disney organization was not taken over or broken up, as was the case with so many companies targeted in the 1980s. In fact, the takeover attempts served as a wonderful wake-up call for the company.

In the years following the takeover attempts, the company enjoyed some of its most successful times. The reason? As a strategy to move into the future, the Board of Directors recruited some executives who weren't afraid of either the ghost of Walt or the legacy of company. To be sure, they respected the tremendous successes of their predecessors. They also believed strongly that respecting the legacy of an organization didn't mean staying in the past.

The renewed emphasis on creativity and challenging the "sacred cows" of the past enabled the company to explore new approaches.

Instead of the same, tired formulas for script writing, the company hired the talent that created such blockbuster hits as: "The Lion King," "The Little Mermaid" and, most recently, "Finding Nemo." This meant letting go of certain decision-making criteria that had been extremely successful... in its day.

From 1937-1979, Walt Disney Productions had an unparalleled string of hits with the movies and television shows it produced. This was over 40 years of knock-the-ball-out-of-the-park success and how dare anyone suggest making any changes to the recipe! The creative drought from 1979 to 1984 marked the end of one era and the beginning of another.

Had it not been for the willingness of the new management team to take some calculated risks with such things as: product development, marketing, sales and the use of technology, the company could very well have vanished. No one is immune to changes in the marketplace. No one has all of the answers.

Even Monkeys Fall From Trees

This is an old Japanese proverb that captures the essence of what Disney faced. It is what *any* organization and *any* leader ultimately faces. It means that

The key to getting beyond the one trick pony is to level with yourself and recognize that, quite possibly, the way you currently conduct business is out of date.

sion: "What would Walt think?" and arrogance: "We're Disney, we know better than our customers about their wants and needs."

This combination was a recipe for disaster. Too many people at the highest levels of the company were facing the past and wondering if Walt Disney himself would approve of a different direction. In spite of the fact that this was during the 1970s and early 80s and Walt was long gone.

During this period, the concepts of *change*, *creativ-*

regardless of how capable or skilled we are, sooner or later, we all lose our balance and make mistakes. Think about this for a moment, have you ever heard of a monkey falling from a tree?

Probably not, but we have all heard of remarkably capable people and successful companies make mistakes. In essence, we have all seen companies and very capable people from a variety of fields fall, figuratively, from their respective trees. How about yourself, which skill or ability are you particularly proud of? Is that skill as valuable now as it once was? Is it possible that the same qualities that have helped you succeed can now lead you to "falling from your tree"?

It is important to learn from our successes and mistakes and apply that learning to the area of customer service, whether it is service to your employees or your customers.

The World is Changing, Are You?

Many companies and organizations embark on new initiatives to improve any number of things, including: their service, product quality, production methods and leadership. However, the sad reality is that too many fail in their attempts. All too often, these change initiatives are started with much fanfare, yet end up in the ever-growing junk pile of "Flavor of the Month" programs.

What might have been an inherently good initiative loses popular or corporate support and falls into the category of a waste of time and money; Someone's "kick," spending run amok. Within a few months, the old attitudes and destructive behavior patterns return.

Change in and of itself is not difficult. The challenge is in sustaining the change and weaving it into the corporate culture. Sustained change requires answering two vital questions: 1.) It is the right change? 2.) Are support systems and supportive people in place to give it a chance to succeed?

Certainly, there are many sub-sections to each of these questions; life is never this simple. With that said, it is important to avoid making any process too cumbersome to implement, much less sustain. The exercise that follows is a simple, yet extremely effective

I. Short-Term: Your Leadership Style

Start:

Stop:

Continue:

I. Long-Term: Your Leadership Style

Start:

Stop:

Continue:

II. Short-Term: Your Team/Store/Company

Start:

Stop:

Continue:

II. Long-Term: Your Team/Store/Company

Start:

Stop:

Continue:

tool for implementing and sustaining change.

What Can You: Start, Stop, Continue?

Think of and list (see above chart) as many ways you would like to improve your ability to consistently provide exceptional service to your internal and external customers. What can you do that is an improvement over current practices? What should you *start*, *stop* or *continue*? Challenge every existing area of your approach to your job, your team or company as a whole.

Start: What do you as an individual, team or company want to *Start* doing that will be an improvement over your current approach? What can you do that is more up to date from the perspective of your customers?

Stop: What have you identified as unacceptable, either for your customer or employee groups, that you need to *Stop*?

Continue: What are your strengths? How can you ensure the maintenance of these strengths in light of the changes you intend to make? It helps you avoid "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" that so often accompanies change initiatives.

The opportunities to put these ideas into practice are many. The benefits of *managing* the change process proactively, compared to the consequences of having change *forced* upon you, should convince anyone to let go of defenses about not dealing with this important issue. Where do you stand? ■