

Why Disneyland Thrives at 60 – Part 3 – Leadership Support



In Part 3 of Doug Lipp's look at the success of Disneyland he examines the 2nd condition created by Disney Legend Van France, Leadership Support.

“Walt cared about everyone. He would come out of his apartment (at Disneyland) at night just to interact with the maintenance crew, with the guys sweeping the dust out of the trolley tracks on Main Street.”

– Ron Miller, former CEO of Walt Disney Productions

Setting the Stage for Success: The Four Circumstances of the Disney University

In recent days, I have introduced to you Disney University Founder Van France. Van's insistence on perpetuating Walt Disney's dream of creating “The Happiest Place on Earth” set in motion an employee development revolution that is now studied by corporations worldwide; The Disney Way.

July 17, 2015 marks the 60th Anniversary of Disneyland's grand opening. Disneyland's Diamond Celebration celebrates success over the same challenges that derail far too many organizations; the changing tastes of customers and employees, and the never ending emergence of competitors.

How do the employees and leaders at Disneyland continue bringing to life Walt's dream? The answer lies in a rock-solid set of values and a crystal clear, yet adaptable, corporate culture. The four corporate values Van France identified, and then brought to life through his transformative employee development initiatives, form the DNA of Disney operations worldwide; each of the eleven Disney theme parks, the resorts and cruise line reflect Van's values (Van called them circumstances).



Innovate

Support

Educate

Entertain

Let's explore the second of the Four Circumstances Van identified: **Leadership Support**.

"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." – **Van France**

This circumstance adds a component lacking in too many organizations; unabashed leadership support and visibility. 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.

Walt Disney walked the park ... he was visible and actively engaged. Van France did so as well—often with a camera around his neck— interacting with guests and cast members. He reasoned that the camera became an instant bridge, reducing inhibitions and leading to more open, candid interactions. (More often than not, the camera contained no film ... it was merely a prop!)

Jim Cora, retired Chairman of Disneyland International, worked with Van for over 30 years and was hand-picked by Walt Disney to help start the Disney University. Consider Jim's comments about how great leaders give support and earn trust:

"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 pre-requisites for any leader. He really listened! Van didn't always agree with what he heard, and was definitely 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." – **Jim Cora**



How often do you and your leadership team at work demonstrate support by "walking the park," personally connecting with your staff and customers? Do you really listen, gather feelings, and then act upon them? If not, what's your excuse?