

Why Disneyland Thrives at 60 — Entertain



Doug Lipp continues his look at Disneyland at 60. Today is Disneyland's 60th Anniversary. It's a momentous achievement for a park which is more popular today than it's ever been. Doug Lipp wraps up his five part series on the training fundamentals which made Disneyland the pinnacle of success.

“Develop your sense of humor and eventually it will develop you.”

— Walt Disney



Today marks the 60th Anniversary of Disneyland's grand opening. Today, this grande dame of theme parks stands as strong and perfectly relevant as on July 17, 1955, and basks in the glow of a well-deserved “Diamond Celebration.”

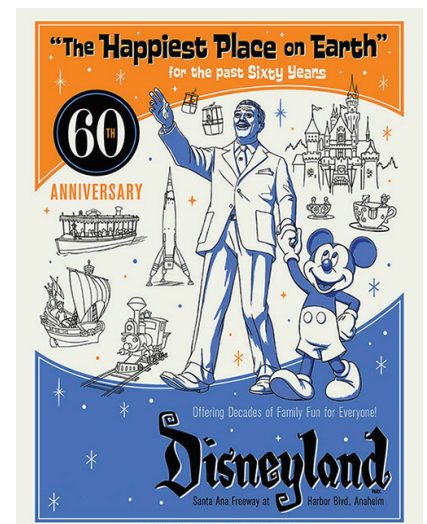
How do the employees and leaders at Disneyland continue bringing to life Walt's dream of being “The Happiest Place on Earth?” The answer lies in a rock-solid set of values and a crystal clear, yet adaptable, corporate culture. Disney University founder Van France helped bring Walt's dream to life by focusing on four key values he discovered when working for Walt: **Innovate, Support, Educate, Entertain**. This last installment focuses on Entertain.

The Fourth Circumstance of the Disney University: Entertain

“I had friendly allies in the Art Department of the Marketing Division. As a result, our handbooks and training aids were always creative and interesting, rather than the opposite, which would mean ‘dull and academic.’” — Van France

Van's description of this circumstance illustrates his firm belief in a value he shared with Walt; education can be entertaining. As Walt would say, “When the subject permits, we let fly with all the satire and gags at our command. Laughter is no enemy to learning.”

Van believed employing entertainment as a training strategy went well beyond telling jokes and laughing. By no means does a fun, interactive approach devalue training content. Van's deft merging of education and entertainment—into edutainment—created a powerful approach, increasing trainee engagement, and ensuring their retention of new concepts. Walt Disney's values and sense of humor shaped Disneyland, and Van's values and sense of humor helped shape the Disney University.



Entertainment is Hard Work

Many executives and training professionals are envious of the Disney University. People think Disney trainers have an advantage. Quite a few think that if they had all of that famous stuff, their training programs would be equally well-attended and everyone would be enthusiastic. The excuses and rationale for ineffective training programs flow like water: “If I had the staff and budget of a Disney University, life would be easy.” Or, “If I had that kind of training environment, with all of those famous characters and cutesy things, I’d never have problems getting people to show up. Who wouldn’t love that?” These leaders have a lot to learn.

A Provider of Values, Not Just Things

The benefits the Disney University staff enjoys are undeniable, but glitz and fun alone won’t last. The honeymoon will end ... then what? In fact, the Disney University is much, much more than all of these things. Van France would say, “A maxim of the movie industry is that ‘it takes a happy crew to produce a happy show’.” Van would argue that a movie set blessed with the best props and most famous actors is doomed if the crew is unhappy and the director doesn’t provide support and direction. The enduring success of the Disney University—and the Disney brand itself—is due to much more than cartoon characters and award-winning background music. The Disney University enjoys a set of crystal clear values that are aligned with, and fiercely supported by, the company leadership. The culture of having fun, originating well before Disneyland was built, continues to flourish in multiple forms, and cast members thrive in the work hard, play hard environment.



Time, heat and extreme pressure transform a drab blob of carbon into a sparkling diamond. Yet, time, competitive pressure, and heat doom far too many companies. Not Disneyland Resort. Time, heat, and pressure have only added to the brilliance of this diamond.

What examples can you give of how the exceptional training of Disney employees influences your enjoyment of the parks? What key factors do you attribute to the phenomenal success of Disneyland?

This series was based on Lipp’s best-selling book, *Disney U: How Disney University Develops the World’s Most Engaged, Loyal and Customer-Centric Employees*.