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LOCAL NEWS

Treat Games time like a stage, ex-Disney training head says

Penny Buswell

Special to The Question

All the world's a stage, and Whistler business owners should treat it as such when it comes calling in a little more than three months' time.

That was the message driven home by Doug Lipp, former head of corporate training at Walt Disney University, at this year's Spirit Luncheon and Breakfast, attended by about 600 business owners, managers and supervisors Tuesday and Wednesday (Nov. 3 and 4) at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler.

Lipp's keynote address at Tuesday's luncheon centred on Disney's training strategy, which has to deal with many of the same stresses Sea to Sky company leaders will face during Olympic season, he said. He used the analogy of a "stage" to describe how Disney employees, and by extension Spirit ambassadors, should be encouraged to view their work.

"We call our employees 'cast members,' because they are all putting on a show. All business is a show," Lipp said.

Training is a major part of Disney's strategy, which Lipp feels is crucial to the company's success. He pressed the need for "a culture of excellence, woven into the fabric of your company." There should be consistency between what employees are taught and workplace practice. The company's values should be reflected in "what people do every day without being told."

Employees are further motivated by the freedom to "make changes"; at Disney there is some allowance for giving away freebies — such as popcorn when a child has spilled his or hers. This is an investment in customer satisfaction (by keeping negativity "offstage"). In addition, workers are "happy to be a hero," a philosophy that encourages them to keep engaging with customers.

The culture of the team is built around the company's core value, expressed as a short mission statement. Disney aims "to create the happiest place on Earth." After establishing a goal, Lipp said it's important to check: "Are you hiring to that? Are you training to that?"

Continuity in culture and training is part of Disney's famous attention to detail, Lipp said. He said he believes the theme parks' success is from "doing the ordinary in an extraordinary way. That's really quite easy to achieve." Research at Disney revealed customers want "friendliness, cleanliness, and safety," which the company provides through an initiative it calls Safety Courtesy Show Capacity (SCSC). The company believes by providing a safe park, with courteous staff, that looks appealing ("show") allows the park to function efficiently ("capacity").

Feedback should be part of workplace culture, Lipp said. "Treat your employees with respect. If they do a good job — let them know! If they do a bad job — let them know!"

Employees should be encouraged to comfortably talk with their superiors. Their suggestions can help improve the organization, he said.

The mention of feedback correlated with Julie Morris's reminder about the Whistler Chamber of Commerce's Mystery Shopper Program. The initiative is for 100 businesses and delivers a critique of service on the same day. Frontline staff will be rewarded with Olympic gifts, and have their names entered into a draw for Olympic tickets. Supervisors who wish to learn more about how to use Mystery Shopper responses can attend a Level 3 Chamber course called "Using Feedback to Drive Service Excellence."

For information, visit www.whistlerchamber.com

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