



# The 6 Disney customer service secrets everyone should know

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**"£2.50 is the minimum by card but you can pay next time"**

The competition for a cup of coffee (or tea) at Richmond station is fierce. Even at 5:30am. I am also not at my best at 5:30am so I forgot my change on my bedside table on this particular morning. So I couldn't quite believe my ears when the "Bagels Already" man responded to my lack of change by saying "£2.50 is the minimum by card but you can pay next time you come".

I already only ever go to this particular shop because of this same man's kindly demeanor and I know why. Customer service is king.

If Customer service is king and Disney are the kings of customer service then we can all learn a little from their 50+ years at the top. My time working for the mouse gave me unique insight into Disney World and I endeavor to apply this every day.

## **1. Sorry seems to be the hardest word**

Disney use the LAST model to deal with unhappy customers and I am yet to see this approach fail. Regardless of situation or industry.

- Listen
- Apologise
- Solve
- Thank

**Listen:** Most people just want to know that someone is hearing them. The complaint will mostly not be about you or your conduct but when you put on your name badge (or equivalent) and talk to that customer you become Disney or whichever company you are representing.

**Apologise:** Sorry is a powerful word and can forgive many mistakes. Be sorry and tell them so. Sorry doesn't have to be an admission of guilt or wrongdoing you could just be sorry that this has happened or sorry that the customer you are speaking to has had a poor experience. Either way let them know straight away it works wonders.

**Solve:** Listening and apologising alone will actually solve many situations but if there is something more behind this unhappy customer you need to resolve this at all costs. That doesn't mean you need to replace the £500,000 pound machine or anything else equally costly or ridiculous. It means like for like time for time, money for money etc.

In the example of the breakfast I gave above the manager gave us a free breakfast buffet and invited us back for a second breakfast buffet. This actually cost Disney pennies but represented huge value to us.

Same thing applies to the free day in the park. Not only are you getting a free day but you are getting the time back in the park. Both cost Disney nothing but represent a huge

long term financial gain.

Put your long term hat on and figure out what you can do to win and retain your customers in your industry.

**Thank:** You must thank your customer for bringing this to your attention. Believe me you want customers telling you the bad stuff. It means they have faith in your ability to solve their problem.

The alternative is much worse and very common on my side of the pond. We British like to grit and bear things, so rather than causing a scene and getting what we want we simple "Shan't be returning to this establishment". This means we British need to be much more in tune with our customers and push harder to receive the negative feedback. Something we also don't like....

## **2. Consistency is key**

At Disney there are a lot of rules.

The "Disney look" a set of strictly enforced rules on appearance that include facial hair, jewellery, footwear and hair styles.

The Disney customer service basics. A set of rules on how you must always act when you are "on stage".

- *I project a positive image and energy*
- *I stay in character and play my part*
- *I am courteous and respectful to all guests including children*
- *I go above and beyond*

Leadership basics. A set of rules for managers on how they must always act.

- *I lead with a positive attitude and demonstrate commitment to Cast Members*
- *I know and manage my operation and teach it to Cast Member*

- *I recognise and hold Cast Members accountable for delivering The Four Keys Basics*

These are all taught to you at "Traditions" which is a deep dive Disney customer service and culture day. This is the first training that all "cast members" must do.

All of these rules are driven by guest feedback and "maintaining the magic". I.e. Guests like it when you smile and don't have eyebrow piercings. Not so keen on cast members wearing heavy Gothic makeup that smoke whilst cursing Mickey Mouse.

I am not saying every organisation should be as dictatorial as Disney but what is expected of employees should be crystal clear, taught and enforced. It should be in your employee's DNA.

### **3. The higher the expectation the greater the fall**

The top reason why people do not return to Walt Disney World is "poor customer service". Not the 2 hour queues or ballooning ticket prices (\$79.88 a day when I worked there in 2008 - \$110+ today).

Why? Quite simply if you save for years, as many do, to go to Disney World and it deserves the pedestal you have placed it on then you will save some more and go again. If it doesn't you won't.

While I was working at EPCOT on New Year's Eve 2008 with 89,700 guests in the park a very upset British couple told me that they would never come again. This was their 15th and final visit and they vowed they would sell their Disney Vacation club timeshare all because they had 1 very bad experience with a skipper on their boat crossing seven seas lagoon.

Bottom Line. If you have a reputation for excellence or sit at the high end you need to work much harder to ensure this excellence occurs at each and every customer interaction. Otherwise you will lose customers that would have accepted the same treatment from your competitors.

### **4. A happy customer is a paying customer**

My family came to visit while I was at Disney and my parents booked and paid for all of us (10) to go for a "character breakfast". This cost a small fortune and was sadly

plagued by difficulties (waiting over an hour to get in, 10min of buffet left, food was cold, no characters etc).

My mother aired our frustrations to the duty manager who, after apologising, gave us everything for free and invited us back the next day for free again to make up for it with a truly "magical" experience. The cost to Disney was nothing as my parents used the money for food elsewhere at Disney on another day.

## **5. Play the long game**

The number one reason guests don't return to Disney World is poor customer service. Conversely good customer service is the number one reason guests do return.

On any given day 75% of the guests in Disney parks are repeat customers. With 25M+ yearly visitors to Disney World and 132M+ yearly visitors to Disney parks globally accounting for a third of Walt Disney's \$45Bn revenue and \$2Bn of their profits you can see the importance of getting this right.

If you have a bad day at Disney World go to Guest Relations and tell them this they will give you a free day in the park to make up for it.

Why? Because it costs them the price of a ticket and you will spend money the next day anyway. You will feel like you got a huge amount of value (family of 4 for 1 day = \$400+) and become an advocate rather than a detractor. You will return.

## **6. A fish swims from its head**

When the original Disneyland in Anaheim opened in 1957 Walt Disney was walking around the park with his executive leadership team. Walt noticed one executive stepping over a piece of litter and asked him "why didn't you pick that up?" the man replied "It's not my job to pick up litter". He didn't last the day.

This may seem draconian but today even the park general managers walk around picking up litter.

Bottom Line. Culture is key so act like an owner and embody what you want your employees to emulate. Otherwise it won't happen.

## **In Summary**

Customer service isn't a fluffy nice to have. It is core to the success of your business in the digital age and you need a team that understand and live it.

Customer service is a science not an art with data driven decisions and rules underpinning the success of leaders in this space.

If you put your customer's success and experience at the heart of your business strategy they will give back to you just like I will always go back to "Bagels Already" for my morning tea. I will also always go back to Disney World whenever I can.

About the author:

*Daniel works for LinkedIn. He is passionate about people, technology, health and family. His opinions and posts are his own and do not reflect the views of LinkedIn.*