

# Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service by Disney Institute with Theodore Kinni: A Disney Book Review

by Sharon Justus, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Don't we all wonder how Disney does it? How does Walt Disney World conjure such magical experiences at the parks that you long to return again and again? How do they make their cast members so nice and helpful? How do they create the elaborate shows, attractions, and rides?

I am impressed time and time again with every aspect of the parks, the resorts, and the dining experiences. The detail and thought that goes into creating each component must be exceptional. So how do they do it?

The library in my office building is filled with volumes of books on building better businesses, and I happened upon this one from the Disney Institute: *Be Our Guest, Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*. The forward of this book, written by Tom Staggs, Chairman, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, answers all of our questions. He says, "It's magic." Well, it's really not that simple, the magic is built in as the Disney experiences are created. Like at all successful companies, Disney's secret includes some mundane components like training and processes, but it's the goal to make each guest feel like the park, the ride, or the show was created especially for them that makes the real magic.

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□ *Be Our Guest* gives away all of the secrets -- all the answers to our questions. It breaks everything down to explain how the business is run to make the Disney parks the happiest places on earth. Walt Disney's philosophy for all of the entertainment provided by his companies is not only to meet but consistently exceed customer's expectations. Did you know that on the Disney Dream and Disney Fantasy cruise ships, the portholes in the inside staterooms are flat-screen monitors that display real time views -- the same views you would see from real portholes? Wow! That completely blows away my expectations!

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□ Disney uses a Quality Service Compass as the basis of its approach to quality service. The compass points are Guestology (market and customer research), Quality Standards, Delivery Systems (cast and setting), and Integration. You have probably determined that there is a set of Disney terms used for Disney things; they are referred to as

"Disney-Speak" and here are a few you'll see in this article: Attractions are rides and shows; cast members are employees; guests are customers; auditions are interviews; roles are jobs; and hosts and hostesses are frontline employees. Others: Costumes are uniforms; onstage indicates guest areas; offstage/backstage indicate behind the scenes areas. I mention these because these terms illustrate the culture present at the Disney company. The rides, the shows, the resorts, the restaurants, the parks, the cruise ships -- they are all telling a story. They are performances for the guests' enjoyment. In fact, I would describe my experience of Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom as walking into the movies and stories of the classic Disney films.

Walt Disney stated, "You don't build it for yourself. You know what people want, and you build it for them." That's guestology. Disney needs to know and understand its guests in order to provide the experiences they want. Demographics play a part, but so do guests' preconceived notions, stereotypes, and emotions.

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□The Quality Standards used to provide magical experiences are: Safety, Courtesy, Show, and Efficiency, and they are prioritized in that order. Safety is of utmost importance and comes before the other standards. Guests that do not feel safe will certainly not be satisfied. Courtesy requires that each guest is treated as a very important, very individual person, showing respect and recognition. Show calls for the finest performance and experience. Show is the basis for the story concept that is present in all Disney restaurants, resorts, and parks. Every element of Adventureland in Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom exudes adventure, from the rides to the trash receptacles. Efficiency is what keeps things running smoothly and helps guests experience as much of the parks as they wish. It provides ease of use for guests with services like Disney's Magical Express, and monorail and bus transportation around the property. Prioritizing the Quality Standards makes decisions easier for Cast Members; for example, a child is an inch too small to board a ride, and the parents ask if the weeping child can ride anyway. However, it's not safe to ride when you're too small to fit in the ride restraints. Although it would seem courteous to grant the family's request, no one would say expectations would be met if the child is injured. The request cannot be granted, regardless of the other three standards.

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□Delivery Systems are the Cast and the Setting. When potential cast members arrive for an audition (interview), they want to give a good impression. Disney casting wants to give a good impression, too. Potential cast members enter through a door with a knob modeled after one from Alice in Wonderland. They find their ways through the rabbit hole as they pass figures of cartoon characters and Disney film scenes.

They get an impression of the company before reaching the receptionist's desk, which is at the back of the second floor of the building. How does Disney make their employees so nice? They hire nice people and train them with the Disney culture and Quality Standards. They create a sense of excitement about working for Disney. A quote from Richard Parks listed in the book says, "We don't put people in Disney. We put Disney in people."

□ The business definition of Setting is the environment where services are delivered. The realized definition of Setting at Disney parks is the world you enter when you enter the park and leave the world you live in. Things in the parks that comprise the setting are lighting, color, music, smell, architectural design, landscape, and the like. Imagineers work to engineer every detail and special effect guests experience. All of the stories and performances of the parks are set meticulously to exceed guest expectations. As you present your ticket and enter the Magic Kingdom turnstiles, you are in a lobby of sorts, where restrooms and the like are located. Then you pass through tunnels lined with posters showing upcoming attractions, and exit the tunnels where you encounter the scent of freshly popped popcorn. Sound familiar? The entrance to Magic Kingdom is set to remind you of entering a movie theater.

□ The book likens Process to a railroad engine. The conductor can be friendly and the train cars may be opulent, but if the engine doesn't work, the train won't move, and no fares will be purchased. Service processes must run smoothly, and pinch points must be identified and eliminated. Long lines deter guests so solutions like FastPass have been initiated.

□ Integration is just what it sounds like. Bringing all these parts together and making the experience greater than sum of those parts is what makes the operation effective. The book lays out the tools and methods for integration of the parts with a matrix that can be applied to any business.

□ I might compare reading *Be Our Guest* to a behind the scenes tour at Magic Kingdom. It's like learning the inner workings of the Disney culture. The book is a great resource for any business owner, executive, or leader, but I enjoyed it as a look behind the curtain to see just how Disney really does make its own magic.

*About The Author: Sharon Justus is married with four children. She previously contributed to PassPorter News with an article on "[Planning Your Walt Disney World Vacation](#)."*

Article last updated: 02-13-2014

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