



Unleashing empowerment is more than a fairy tale

Most of us are aware of Disney's famous parks and resorts. With or without kids, you may well have visited and enjoyed Disney's very special brand of supercharged customer service.

More than fan behaviour

Of course, it helps that the people working there are highly enthusiastic about their work. You'd be forgiven for thinking they are all lifetime Disney fans. However, this extraordinary level of commitment to customer service is not simply fan behaviour; it was carefully constructed by Disney Resorts to create unique standards of customer service.

A university education in creating happiness

The Disney University, who are responsible for training 'cast members' as employees are known, discovered that the linchpin of outstanding customer service is empowerment at all levels. But it's not just about empowering employees; they also equip them with the right skills to do their jobs. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, Disney Resorts ensure they have a clear understanding of their purpose and how they fit into Disney's 'big picture' or vision and values.

The Disney University programme was conceived in 1955 and has been fundamental to their success for over 50 years. Clearly not every organisation is like Disney, but other organisations can definitely learn a thing or two about how to unleash real employee empowerment. For example, before new cast members are provided with technical training they need for their role, Disney share their common purpose, "to create happiness!" Their orientation training even has a name of its own, "Disney Traditions" and every person receives this, regardless of role, right from the start.

Powering up empowerment

The word empowerment has been over-used in recent years and is in danger of losing potency. We've seen distortions of empowerment where responsibility is transferred without adequate resources or support to do the job and examples where people tell you they're empowered, but organisational

constraints ensure their freedom is limited and conditional: people who've been effectively brainwashed into believing they are empowered!

Ideas which become management fads or buzzwords tend to attract employee ridicule and, like fairy tales, people soon stop believing their power to benefit organisations. Disney's approach unleashes employee empowerment and uses it to great effect to deliver unrivalled customer service. They understand that the more empowered their employees feel, the more engaged they are, the better they perform delivering outstanding service to customers and greater loyalty to Disney.

Empowered people make the dream a reality.

Walt Disney is reported to have said *"You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world... but it requires people to make the dream a reality"*. Disney has cracked the code unleashing empowerment. There is no fairy tale: Disney equips cast members with the skills required for their role and empowers them at all levels. Success builds on 50 years of Disney University training programmes providing cast members with clear sense of common purpose and their role within Disney's "big picture". The programme delivers huge benefits:

- > Cast members readily connect with the company vision;
- > They have high levels of employee engagement;
- > People are energised and happy in the workplace;
- > Management communicate trust in their staff;
- > Staff willingly engage in creative problem solving;
- > They work together to build a customer-centric culture;
- > People are loyal to the organisation.

How can organisations be more like Disney?

It might seem a formidable challenge to emulate brands like Disney Resorts, but most organisations have potential to achieve similar success. There are lots of practical things any organisation can do without huge investment to empower staff. We've helped a range of organisations unleash empowerment and, in our experience, the main ways any organisation can be more like Disney include:

- > **Align your vision with employees.** Your vision must resonate with employees' inner values – if it's not worthwhile or unclear then it will not provide a strong sense of purpose and their relationship with your organisation will be more transactional. Reflect what's important to them in your organisational values. People respond to clear, tangible and worthwhile visions – they are easier to engage with.
- > **Help people embrace the vision.** Sharing vision and values with employees improves their passion and engagement. Like Disney, create a positive culture from the very start of their working life and reinforce it throughout. As situations change, ensure everyone understands the reason for change and has a common intent. When employees see a clear line of sight between what they do every day and the organisation's purpose, they are more engaged, more productive and provide better customer experience.
- > **Macro-manage don't micro-manage.** It's easier to focus on the most important things (outcomes) if you're not head down in detail. Too many organisations unintentionally embed micro-management in pursuit of governance or because of deep aversion to risk. Once dug-

in, it's difficult to stop. To eliminate micro-management, discourage close monitoring of employees. Reward managers who encourage ownership by trusting employees and their abilities.

- > **Eliminate fear of failure.** Employees will not make empowered decisions if they fear they will get in trouble, and leaders will over-manage if they fear the consequences when employees make mistakes or abuse empowerment. When you train people, support their decisions and trust them to do the right thing, the lack of fear allows your employees to be creative, and put organisational values first when they serve customers. You must recognise their willingness to act.
- > **Enable people to be accountable.** Train people thoroughly, tell them they have the authority to deliver outcomes then get out of their way. Your role is to set boundaries within which problems will be solved and to remove barriers. You need to listen, but not interfere. Recognise when people take empowered decisions, celebrate well-intentioned failure and achievement. Act decisively if people don't make any effort to take personal accountability – they're a poor fit if you want happy customers.

If you are looking to improve your employee engagement or implement a plan to make positive changes within your organisation, Leading Change can help.

To find out more about how our proven expertise in changing leadership can help you, why not give us a call on **0203 170 8026** or email **info@leadingchangeuk.com**