

# Book review: the disney way



Today, more than ever, organizations realize the importance of nurturing its employees to lead the organization towards long term growth and success. However, it was observed that through the years, many companies are not able to stay sustainable due to missing developmental opportunities or challenging business environments. Hence, the purpose of today's report; to perform a book review on *The Disney Way* by Bill Capodagli and Lynn Jackson, to understand the developmental programs at The Walt Disney Company (DIS); and how it can help companies achieve profitability and competitiveness in an increasingly volatile marketplace of the 21st century.

First, Section II of the book review seeks to examine Disney's company profile; followed by Section III and Section IV which aims to uncover Disney's core management principles; after which Section V will review the key takeaways from *The Disney Way* before Section VI concludes the paper.

## **II. Why Disney?**

Being perceived as the driving force of growth for the family entertainment industry, Disney provides creative products and innovative knowledge capital aimed at maintaining and expanding its mass media presence worldwide. Disney has five main business segments: (1) Media Networks (television and internet operations), Parks and Resorts (theme parks, holiday hotels and other traveling-relevant establishments), Studio Entertainment (Disney studio, soundtrack recording and theatrical & visual divisions), Consumer Products (play toys, Disney brand clothing and merchandises) and Interactive Media (Disney's varied websites, video games and online entertainment).

These five subsidiaries have equally contributed to Walt Disney's vision to build the "Most Magical Place on Earth"; thus compelling Disney to sustain its top talents in an increasingly competitive business environment. Hence, Disney is a natural fit for the authors to pen the book: *The Disney Way*; as first and foremost, Human Resource (HR) played an essential component at Disney and second, Disney has adopted certain strategic measures in building a prominent, prevailing and comprehensive company. Additionally, the authors also seek to share Disney's valuable insights; internal dynamics, knowledge and experiences; to help other businesses advance a valuable workforce within its organization.

### Disney at a Glance

The Walt Disney Company (DIS) or Disney was formed on October 16, 1923. It is the world's largest brand in family entertainment; serving consumers through its 5 core business areas as mentioned above. As of 2011, the company operates in over 40 countries, hiring 156,000 employees and cast members worldwide.

One of Disney's key responsibilities is to create a conducive, innovative and competitive mass media environment that is pro-consumer and pro-business. To support growth of the entertainment industry as well as to increase the bandwidth of media and theatrical related activities throughout the world, Disney through the years have been building and acquiring many large media and mass communications companies to enhance the company's existential product and services.

At present, Disney is best known for its picture films such as Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, The Little Mermaid and Aladdin. These films were all produced in the iconic Walt Disney Studios. Apart from cartoon animations, Disney also runs ABC Studios, The Disney Channel, ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network), and A+ E Networks. Till this day, Disney owns and licenses 14 theme parks globally and still uses its longest standing cartoon character: Mickey Mouse, as its official mascot.

### **III. Walt Disney's 4 Core Concepts**

As a progressive organization that nurtures and develops its people, Disney provides a challenging; yet, enjoyable working environment for its employees to grow, both personally and professionally. The authors of The Disney Way have highlighted four core concepts that form the key essence to Disney's organizational culture and they are: 1) Dream, 2) Believe, 3) Do and 4) Dare.

#### **(A) Dream: #1**

The first core concept at Disney is Dream. Disney believes in providing its employees with the opportunity to dream. In order to cultivate his employees' imaginative faculties, Disney took his cast members on excursion trips, where a creative environment is presented for his team to brainstorm and innovate. This concept was implemented to employees at all levels of the organization; thereby created a positive impact on his employees' career experiences, attitudes and expectations. Having diverse sets of ideas from bottom to top management also enables Disney to have such flexibility in thought which is key in remaining competitive in the marketplace. Also, Disney was able to rely on its management team's

internal knowledge and experiences to further contribute to Disney's strategic objectives.

### **(B) Believe: #2**

The second core concept at the Disney is Believe. Disney's Believe concept is anchored on twin principles of being committed to personal beliefs and sharing personal values with everyone in the organization. As a result of the Believe concept, Disney was able to build an all-inclusive organization where employees feel treasured, valued and empowered. This played a pivotal role in reducing employee turnover, while at the same time increased employee's engagement towards Disney and its customers.

### **(C) Dare: #3**

The third core concept at Disney is Dare. In order to remain competitive, it is in the first place necessary to have certain consideration for allowing employees to realize the importance of making mistakes. Part of the Disney's success was hinged on Walt Disney's "courage" in making mistakes. He was willing to take the risk; even if it might end up becoming an unsuccessful venture.

However, it is important to note that despite Disney's risk taking persona, he held a strong set of personal values which enabled the company manage risk. For instance, newly proposed projects had to meet certain requirements before they can be implemented. This helped the company cut back on the underlining disadvantage of risk taking, placing the company in a much more favourable position to handle risk.

**(D) Do: #4**

The fourth concept at the Disney is Do. In order to successfully nurture creativity, Disney saw the importance in ensuring that its employees and also its most important resource; received the best holistic training and development programs- where they are able to make outstanding contributions to Disney's outlook and .

Disney thus far strengthens its employee's competencies by adopting the Performance Learning Cycle (PLC) framework in its HR training program, which facilitates formalized learning channels through 4 crucial stages: (1) Training, by empowering employees through acquisition of relevant skillsets; (2) Focused Experiences, through up-scaling employees skillsets with role playing in an on-the-job scenario under a supervised environment where these on-the-job experiences will greatly develop employee's capabilities in meeting customer's actual needs; (3) Results, via appraising employee in his/her effectiveness in meeting customer-centric standards; (4) Recognition, by showing appreciation to incite intrinsic motivation needed to achieve a desired outcome.

With the PLC, Disney's training program is thus both extensive and intensive. Rather than simply adopting a " cookie-cutter" approach of a one-size-fits-all solution to training; training materials are tailored specifically to each individual learning needs; thereby ensuring maximum learning takes place throughout an employee's career with Disney.

## **IV. disney's 10 Management Principles**

This chapter aims to further list 10 Management Principles of Disney; which encompasses the four core concepts of: (1) Dream, (2) Believe, (3) Do and (4) Dare.

### **(A) Make Everyone's Dreams Come True: #1- Dream**

Firstly, the Disney principle " Make Everyone's Dreams Come True" under the Dream concept highlights the importance of fostering participation; where the organization can come together as a collective whole; to work as one, towards yielding outstanding contributions for Disney.

Historically, Walt Disney used to communicate his visions in a highly detailed-oriented and inspiring manner. For instance, he insisted on the castle at Disney Theme Park to be built first before anything else, so that the standing physical structure can powerfully stimulate the feelings of excitement and commitment needed to materialize the vision. Walt Disney thereby formed a highly creative working environment in which employees can perform their best.

Due to this reason, Disney employees can also anticipate a period of career growth opportunities and promotions as a result of Disney's large scale undertakings; as new projects would require employees to demonstrate new skills and competencies.

### **(B) You better believe it: #2- Believe**

Secondly, the Disney principle " You Better Believe It" under the Believe concept ties in closely to the importance in ensuring that employees understood the company's formal expectations and objectives; so that they

can engage in the right beliefs and attitudes needed to advance the interests of Disney.

For instance, Walt Disney wanted all employees to display courtesy to its customers. Even employees in the lower ranks of the organization such as security officers, had to abide to the courtesy code of conduct. Even when the cost of training the officers was more expensive than outsourcing the job, Disney viewed it as a compulsory policy; in order to ensure that everyone displays courtesy. This resulted in stronger brand equity for the Disney brand, as customers feel welcomed and treasured when they visit Disney's theme parks and its other places of attraction.

### **(C) Never a customer, Always a guest: #3-Believe**

Thirdly, the Disney principle “ Never A Customer, Always A Guest” under the Believe concept, illustrates Disney's appreciation for its customer. It has always been a part of Disney's tradition to treat customers as guest. Over the years, many of Disney's films and movies have been observed to echo the theme of viewing customers as guest. For instance, in the 1991 picture film of “ Beauty and The Beast”, one of its best known songs was entitled “ Be Our Guest”; which coincides with the company's deep abiding philosophy to always treat customers as guest. Due to Disney's immense efforts to inform customers that they are the company's top priority; customers can thus expect to receive only the best Customer Relationship Management (CRM) standards in the industry.



**(D) All for one, one for all:#4- Believe**

Next, the Disney principle “ All For One and One For All” under the Believe concept, addresses the power of teamwork. To support growth, everyone within the Disney must assume equal responsibility regardless of the individual’s position within the company. Even then CEO, Michael Eisner, had to make ground visits to front line employees at the Disney Theme Parks to receive feedback. This non-discriminatory work ethic fosters trust, teamwork and cohesiveness amongst all employees as any existing hierarchal structures within the company was removed to facilitate a more transparent work environment, where employees are motivated to give their best.

**(E) Share the spotlight: #5- Believe**

The fifth Disney principle “ Share the Spotlight” under the Believe concept, recognizes that through harnessing partnerships, it can improve business productivity and competitiveness. For instance, Disney hired the Philadelphia Philharmonics to produce the music soundtrack in the 1940 Animated Film “ Fantasia”, instead of subscribing to their in-house group of musicians. With the new music partnership, a new stereophonic sound was invented and produced for the picture film and to date; “ Fantasia” was the 22nd highest grossing film of all time in the United States.

This illustrates that organizations can strengthen its existing capabilities through joint partnerships to create a dynamic organization; that is a highly integral aspect in building a sustainable global institution. Disney has since also partnered with other large organizations such as DreamWorks Animation (DWA) and General Motors (GM); to achieve and realize Disney’s far-reaching corporate goals.

**(F) Dare to Dare: #6- Dare**

The sixth Disney Principle “ Dare To Dare” under the Dare concept, addresses the need for a company to take calculated risks. Disney for instance took a calculated risk in disclosing more confidential corporate information to employees holding lower-levelled positions in the organization. Despite uncertainties, Walt Disney went ahead to keep all employees equally well-informed; irregardless if one holds a senior position or a relatively low ranked job.

Ultimately, the risk paid off and today, due to the company’s transparency and its open communications with its employees, Disney was able to restructure the traditional hierarchal system into a “ boundary-less”, employee-oriented environment that seeks to increase career satisfaction for employees at Disney; i. e. by providing more opportunities and challenges than its competitors.

**(G) Practice, Practice, Practice: #7-Do**

The seventh Disney principle of “ Practice, Practice, Practice” under the Do concept describes Disney’s commitment in providing abundant learning and developmental opportunities to its employees. For instance, Disney provides a “ refreshment” course for those employees who have completed the mandatory Performance Learning Cycle (PLC) training track.

Under the reinforcement course; practicing, coaching and recognition programs are implemented where employees are able to build on personal strengths and improve on their weaknesses so that they can reach a permanent level of competency. Ultimately, this concept aims to put Disney

employees on a continual quest for self-improvement; where they can exhibit skills that would develop into invaluable assets for the organization.

### **(H) Make your elephant fly: #8-Do**

The eighth principle highlights the concept of “ Make Your Elephant Fly” under the Do concept. In this section, the author stressed the need for managing creativity through planning and preparation. In *The Disney Way*, the authors noted that Walt Disney had a controlled management style when producing animated pictures. This suggest that in reality, even a highly creative company like Disney required organizational efforts; a focused set of guidelines and management tools to ground its creative project’s aspirations. Only with such high degree of meticulousness can the projects produce accuracy that is much closer to its original visions.

### **(I) Capture the magic with storyboards: #9-Do**

“ Capturing the Magic with Storyboards” is the 9th principle under the Do concept. It highlights the effectiveness of using a creative technique called the storyboard method; in which a structured exercise is formulated; to record the thoughts and ideas of a group of participants.

Today, many organizations use “ storyboards” to promote better dialogue and interaction between its employees. The technique also tends to highlight strong likes and dislikes about a given subject that is captured on the storyboard. Hence, the storyboard is able to clearly differentiate any irregularities which can be useful in research studies or in the decision making process.

### **(j) Give details top billing: #10-Do**

The tenth and final principle, “ Give Details Top Billing”, outlines the importance of paying close attention to details. One key factor the authors note was Walt Disney’s steadfast pursuit for perfection. This perfection came through from Disney’s tireless attention to every detail. For instance, from the groundskeepers at the theme parks to the number crunchers in the finance department, Walt Disney held them accountable for doing whatever it takes to put on a good show for its customers.

Despite his tenacious search for excellence, Walt Disney recognized the need to have a fine balance between his quest for perfection and the organization’s bottom line; otherwise details become unsustainable. Paying attention to small details also meant working efficiently to ensure every dollar is channeled to its most productive use.

## **V. Key Takeaways from the Disney Way**

After reviewing Disney’s background, Disney’s 4 core concept as well as its 10 Management Principles, it is now time to summarize the key takeaways from The Disney Way.

Overall, Walt Disney considered four key success factors in building a successful organization: First, one must have the courage to envision and dream; second, one must believe in solid values; third, one must dare go after one’s vision, and forth, one must venture out to do it. Walt Disney’s unwavering philosophy of creating a magical experience for his customers; showcased how success was achieved his way-through uncommon discipline

and preparation, but with lots of excitement, creativity and enthusiasm along the way.

Moving into the 10 management principles of Disney; like Total Quality Management (TQM), Disney wanted to provide customer service of the highest standards that it could possibly offer, by ensuring every employee had a role to play in contributing to only the most excellent products and services. The 10 management principles of Disney; like IDEO (Innovation, Design Engineering Organization) a design and innovative consulting firm, practices a non-hierarchical organization culture. IDEO's employees are not rewarded based on their seniority or rank with the company, but instead are rewarded based on the number of projects that the employee undertake. Similarly, by allowing every employee's voice to be heard, Disney removed any existential hierarchy within the organizational culture through Walt Disney's willingness to disclose corporate information to everyone in the organization. By facilitating openness and transparency in communication; Disney effectively conveyed the important message to all his employees that no one is more or less important than the other and that everyone had an equally important role to play within the organization. More importantly, Disney strives to provide an environment that is both productive and enjoyable; where employees can realize their full potential and fulfill their career aspirations.

Currently, the book has listed Four Seasons Hotel & Resorts, Ernst & Young, The Cheesecake Factory and Men's Warehouse as some of today's widely recognized business to have adopted Disney's 4 core concepts; where they implement the Disney key frameworks in daily operations. and established <https://assignbuster.com/book-review-the-disney-way/>

them at the which have taken the four pillars of Disney and placed them at the heart of their organization. From these real life illustrations, it revealed that building or scaling up a company does not require adopting highly complex frameworks: but one that can be as straightforward as Disney's 4 core concepts of (1) Dream, (2) Believe, (3) Dare and (4) Do.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this book is recommended to businesses both large and small because it provides very original, simple and insightful ways of managing an organization.

Looking at future developments, the authors predict management leadership to vertically increase in importance and priority across various industries and hence, the importance for a total integrated approach to develop its internal Human Resource (HR) capabilities, as the key essence in building a sustainable successful global institution; to bring great value not just for Disney, but for the public sector and customers as well.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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