

Human resource management at walt disney world resort tourism essay



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There's probably no place on earth as magical as the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. The theme park continues to thrill, delight and exceed its guests' expectations nearly 40 years after its opening. The secret to Disney's success is its well-trained, enthusiastic and motivated work force. It's a secret that the founder, Walt Disney himself realized years ago.

" You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world but it requires people to make the dream a reality," he said.

A Brief History

The Walt Disney World Resort, is the world's largest and most visited recreational resort, covering 30, 080-acres near Orlando, Florida, USA. The resort was founded with the opening of the Magic Kingdom theme park in 1971. It consists of four theme parks, two water parks, 23 resort hotels, lodges and time-share properties, sports facilities complex, and other recreational venues and entertainment. Epcot park was added in 1982, Disney's Hollywood Studios in 1989 and Disney's Animal Kingdom in 1998.

This world famous resort was inspired by the dreams of Walt Disney and his creation of Disneyland in California. The resort is the largest single-site employer in the United States, employing 42, 000 people, with over 3, 000 different job classifications. More than 1000 people work in the security department alone.

Hiring

Disney is renowned for being a fun and friendly place at which to work. Its ability to offer attractive incentives make it a desirable place to work and it is constantly evaluating the market to ensure their wages remain competitive.

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All Disney employees participate in training programs that update them on the latest service techniques, product knowledge, and technology being used in their parks. Disney recruit both internally and externally, advertising vacancies on their website, via the press, job fairs, employment exchanges and colleges. There is a large quantity of college students working in Disney. Employment representatives also travel to Puerto Rico to recruit for positions such as housekeeping, custodial and food and beverage.

It ' s 4 major employment strategies are:

Hire the right people

Develop people to deliver service quality

Provide needed support systems

Retain the best people

Once potential employees have been identified, interviews follow. The skills and abilities that managers generally look for are:

Excellent communication skills

Good team player

Self motivated

Analytical ability

Problem solver

Leadership potential

Strong computer skills

Project management skills

Relationships-builder

Able to manage expectations

Personal and professional style

Strong business judgment

Ability to facilitate and multitask

A guest service orientation

Disney theme parks promise to provide a superior service in order to create a "...imaginary world where visitors can escape the themes of the " real" world". To achieve this, the company has to employ people with the proper skills and personalities, who are also motivated, with a clear knowledge of the company's marketing objectives and strategies. Staff have to be polite, well dressed, energetic, enthusiastic, and people-loving, always serving guests whole-heartedly. All staff are provided with an extensive knowledge of the park facilities, rides, and sites.

HRM Practises

Disney believes in investing in its staff and provide various training programs and learning opportunities for employees to work their way into higher

positions. The company promotes from within 70% of the time. Almost everyone including the managers start out in an entry-level hourly job (Disney almost completely promotes from within). There is a program to help hourly workers who want to become part of management, there is another that lets them transfer to the technical unions like plumbers and electricians as an apprentice. That program involves four years of training leading to a very well-paid job.

Disney also give educational reimbursement for those who are continuing their education while working for Disney full-time.

Supervisors try to create a family-like atmosphere in Disney by offering flexible schedules and on-site day care programs for working parents. . The company also host numerous special events for its employees that are held in the park after hours.

Present day human resources practices at Disney are considered to be “ extraordinary”, with all staff being trained in excellent customer satisfaction policies. However HR practices were very poor in the early years of Disney. The Walt Disney Company originated back in 1923, when Walt and Roy Disney started their first animated recording studio. Early animation production was highly labour-intensive. Rigid division of tasks was further delineated on gender lines. By 1941, the Walt Disney Company employed 1, 100 people. Ellwood (1998) describes Walt Disney as “ a notorious workaholic, a perfectionist who pushed his staff relentlessly”. Both “ paternalistic and domineering” he rewarded loyalty and punished dissidents. There were no women or black people promoted to senior positions during

this period. The company was the only Hollywood studio without union representation and as such was targeted by the American Federation of Labour. Eventually, animators took industrial action over conditions and lack of recognition in 1941.

By the end of the 1990s, the Walt Disney Company had developed into a \$23 billion media conglomerate.

Cast Members

Employees in Disney are called 'cast members'. Quality cast members are a direct result of quality hiring practices. Bonuses are paid to workers who refer new hires. Disney believes it's important to have people who have actually worked in different parts of the company, to do the hiring. So these cast members working in the casting office, come from all different parts of the Disney organization, and work on 12-month assignments.

While prospective cast members wait for their initial interviews, they watch a short video that describes the interview process and outlines what the company expects of them, if they're successful.

Once hired, all new cast members go through the same 1 and a half day training program called Traditions. It's here they learn the basics of being good cast members, from Disney history to direction on how to meet and exceed guest expectations. Cast members learn they must adhere to the company's strict 13 page manual of dress codes, known as the "Disney Look." The "Disney Look" is a rigid code of cast member appearance that imposes a well-scrubbed, all-American look. It details the size of earrings

allowed, to the size of finger nails, to the no tolerance rule regarding facial
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hair and dyed hair for both females and males. Disney's grooming standards make sense when you consider employees to be part of a cast of characters so there is no room for non-conformity.

Every employee is instructed in the "Seven Guidelines to Guest Service" which highlights the need to smile and to be cheerful.

From the very start, staff are encouraged to implement a "have a nice day!" mentality, and to smile the "Disney smile" all day.

Casting

Employees are routinely assigned jobs according to age and appearance, a process officially known as "casting". The most "presentable" get the most popular "front-line" jobs and shifts. For example:

Young and pretty workers get jobs that involve a lot of interaction with customers;

Haitian women generally work in housekeeping;

Older women sell in the shops

Older men work in security

Puerto Recons work in food preparation

African Americans work as stewards or cooks,

More than a 100 Africans are employed in the "Animal Kingdom", to lend "authentic flavour".

Anyone who might appear “ less ‘ presentable’ work on the night shift

Cast Members receive some excellent benefits including:

Health, Dental, Life Insurance

Complimentary Theme Park Passports

Learning and Development Opportunities

Paid holidays, vacations, and sick days

Retirement plan.

Scholarship Program

30% Discount on park merchandise

Employee Stock Purchase Program

Access to a Cast Member-only lake and recreation area with tennis, volleyball, and an Olympic-size swimming pool.

Educational Reimbursement

Educational Matching Gifts Program

Service Awards

Employee & Cast Member Contests

Childcare Centres

Credit Unions

Employee Stores

Cast Members usually work 40 hours or more each week, with quality service being the responsibility of every one. Each one measures service quality levels, establish benchmarks and set goals, as there is no person in charge of quality. Instead of one quality director, Disney has 42, 000 of them.

(Paton S. M. Service Quality, Disney Style, Quality Digest)

Disney University

Many hours have been devoted to designing successful employee ‘universities’ which train workers in the Disneyland philosophy.

Walt Disney established the Disney University to teach these unique skills. The University provides cast members with free world-class training in diverse skills including computer applications, professional development, management/leaderships development, health & safety, interviewing, business, etc.

Empowerment

Disney is committed to employee empowerment. Employees are empowered to resolve all guest issues on their own, with managers only getting involved in extreme circumstances. Managers use service measurement teams to empower employees. 1 or 2 employees from each department take note of any service issues that might take from a guest’s stay at the resort. By keeping records of every problem, and how it was dealt with, helps to reduce

the chances of it happening again. To keep up-to-date with their guests expectations, Disney also collects huge amounts of data about guests from opinion polls, surveys, focus groups etc. From this information, the company know that the top three things that guests expect are for the parks to be clean, friendly and fun. Every worker, from the CEO to cleaner, know these 3 expectations well, and is empowered to make them happen. All employees know, too, the definition of quality at Disney:

“ Disney defines quality as attention to detail and exceeding guest expectations.”

Performance Appraisals

Management use performance appraisals and performance surveys, to measure internal service quality. The annual performance appraisal is designed to give the employee a broad perspective of his/her accomplishment from the previous year and to identify upcoming challenges. Another strategy employed by managers to deliver service quality, are monthly development action plans. (DAPs) (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000)

Rewards

Disney certainly know the true value of retaining productive employees. Annual turnover amongst its employees is only 20%. This low turnover is made possible by treating employees like resort guests, and the extensive employees reward programs, Disney offers. There are in excess of 50 different reward and recognition programs, that are geared towards maintaining high employee morale, the most prestigious award being the “ Partners in Excellence” program. This award involves one employee nominating another employee (who has excellent attendance and no <https://assignbuster.com/human-resource-management-at-walt-disney-world-resort-tourism-essay/>

disciplinary action record). The nominated employee then receives a bronze statue of the company founder, Walt Disney, and is invited to a dinner ceremony where he/she is individually recognized for his/her outstanding accomplishments by company executives.

Disney also rewards employees through service pins, attendance awards, and Recognition-O-Grams (ROGs). Recipients usually wear service pins on their uniforms, which they receive service pins on their first, fifth, tenth, twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries. Attendance awards are also offered to employees after one, three, five, ten and fifteen years of perfect attendance. The awards range from honorary certificates to a \$2000 gift certificate.

Recession hits Disney Theme Parks

Like many other industries, the entertainment industry has been affected by the world economic downturn. Early this year, Disney reported a 32% drop in net income for its fiscal first quarter of 2010, attributing the results to the recession's effects on its studio, television and parks. The Walt Disney Co. axed 1, 900 jobs from its theme parks in California and Florida. Walt Disney World in Orlando eliminated 1, 400 jobs. The original Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California, axed 300 positions. The rest of the jobs were eliminated at the company's corporate headquarters at Burbank.

“ These decisions are not made lightly, but are essential to maintaining our leadership in family tourism and reflect today's economic realities,” said Mike Griffin, a Walt Disney World spokesman.

Those laid off received a 60-day paid administrative leave, a severance package that is based on their years of service, extended medical benefits, and job placement.

According to the Los Angeles Times:

“ Disney is bracing for an extended downturn as people skip theme parks to save money. The recession, and the recent decline, has really hit the theme park industry, but it has hit the destination parks more than the regional parks, People are staying closer to home,” the newspaper said.

Trade Unions

Workers are represented by 34 unions, the biggest being the Service Trade Council Union (STCU), The STCU represents about 22, 000 F/T and 5, 000 P/T workers at Disney World. The SEIU is part of the STCU, a consortium of six trade unions that is the only group certified to bargain with the Disney company. In the last two years alone, Disneyland Resort has successfully negotiated nine agreements with the union. These agreements included wage increases, sick pay and access to seven affordable and reliable health care plans offered through Disney’s Signature benefits package for full-time cast members.

Conclusion

This essay looked at the human resource practises that have been adopted at Disney in order to maximize the delivery of superior guest services.

Reasons for the company’s success include emphasis on customer service, and a focus on the elements of efficiency, courtesy, show, and safety. It has

shown how employee strategies at Disney lead to the attainment of exceptional service quality.

Disney takes a lot of care with its casting department and regularly assess its pay packages and new ways of recruiting. It offers a competitive package of wages and incentives to it's staff, such as free park admission and discounts on park merchandise.

In the past, Disney's theme parks has been fairly recession-proof. But this year, fewer people found their way to the Magic Kingdom as profits were down from 2008-10. Disney said the company manages its operation based on demand, and like any other business it is subject to the ups and downs of the economy

It's important that management stress to workers that employee development and empowerment is an on-going process, as the actions of empowered employees have enabled Disney to develop a lasting relationship with millions of guests worldwide. The human resource department must continually develop successful recruiting strategies and effective reward and recognition programs to maintain high morale and promote teamwork.