

Column: “Celebrating the 30th Year Anniversary of Tokyo Disneyland®”



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On April 15th, Tokyo Disneyland® celebrated the 30th anniversary of its establishment. About 570 million peoples have visited Tokyo Disneyland® since this time, including Tokyo Disney Sea®, which opened in 2001. The number of visitors continues to increase unabated, especially during this year, when a record of about 30 million visitors are expected. What is most surprising, however, is that 98% of this figure represents repeat visitors.

What are the secrets behind the astonishing popularity of Tokyo Disneyland®? According to an analysis based on marketing theory, these include a) Highly developed service, b) Efforts toward greater customer satisfaction, c) Location near the Tokyo metropolis, and d) High-quality staff. I will now explain each of these in detail.

a) Highly developed service

Tokyo Disneyland® is built on the “Kingdom of Dream and Magic” Concept. Tokyo Disneyland® forms an extraordinary space that is separated from the outside world. Cargo lanes and staff-only passages are located underground. The park is always kept clean and free of garbage by sanitation workers known as “custodians”, one of the most important types of staff at Tokyo Disneyland®.

b) Efforts toward greater customer satisfaction

Tokyo Disneyland® develops new attractions almost every year, and organizes various events every few months. Most of these attractions and events are themed on Disney’s movies. Cuisine and products that visitors enjoy in Tokyo Disneyland® are also decorated with familiar Disney characters. That is, Tokyo Disneyland® itself is a type of “show” and “entertainment”. In Tokyo Disneyland®, the staff is called a “cast”, and the visitors are called “guests”.

c) Location near the Tokyo metropolis

It takes about 20 minutes by train from Tokyo station to train station nearest to Tokyo Disneyland®. It also takes about one hour by non-stop bus from Shinjuku or Yokohama. About 30 million people live within 50 km from Tokyo Disneyland®. That is, Tokyo Disneyland® is adjacent to a mega-market, which is a unique situation worldwide.

d) High-quality staff

Every service in Tokyo Disneyland® is based on treating guests as VIPs. Tokyo Disney-

land® puts the finest focus on the quality of its staff (cast members) since they are the one who actually come into contact with guests. As I stated previously, the whole of Tokyo Disneyland® is a “show”, and employees therefore first undergo education programs so that they may go to work with the understanding that “every day is opening day”. That is, the cast are put through intense training in order to master the comprehensive content of pre-provided manuals.

There are other secrets, however, which do not fall under any sort of marketing theory analysis. In this regard, the following is a true story.

A couple visited Disneyland® one day and ordered the kid’s lunch for themselves at a restaurant. The menu says that the kid’s lunch is only for children aged nine and under. Instead of denying them outright, however, the staff member attending them first asked, “Would you really like to have the kid’s lunch?”

“Yes,” said the wife. “We want to get this dish to remind us of our deceased daughter.”

“We were not blessed with a child,” she continued. “We tried and tried, and finally gave birth to a baby girl. But she was born frail, and went in peace before her first birthday. We grieved deeply for the past year, but my husband and I agreed we couldn’t continue to weep. Today is first anniversary of our girl’s death, so we visit Disneyland®, where we always wanted to go with her. The pamphlet we received at the gate says the kids’ lunch is sold in the restaurant. So we decided to eat the kid’s lunch for our daughter.” They lowered their eyes.

“I understand,” the cast member immediately answered. “Could you come this way?” He led customers to a larger table, and brought a kid’s chair as a replacement for one adult-sized chair. After a while, three of the children’s lunches were served. “I hope your family will enjoy it,” said the cast member, with a big smile, and left.

It was an undeniable violation of the rules. Rather than being criticized, however, the cast member was praised for this response.

In Tokyo Disneyland®, the manuals serve only as a guideline, since even more important than this is the act of making guests happy.

The husband and wife were deeply moved and wrote a letter after they returned. “We couldn’t stop crying while having the kid’s lunch. We enjoyed a family get-together as if she were still alive. We will take our daughter and revisit Disneyland®.”

This just might be the reason why so many guests visit Tokyo Disneyland® again and again: because the experience penetrates deep inside their hearts.

There is a word in Japanese known as “omotenashi,” which means something like “hospitality, offering, service and treatment.” When one is treated very well, s/he is very impressed and moved. Service that merely complies with manuals in a mechanical manner can never impress or move guests. When staff looks at situations from the customer’s viewpoint at all times, however, and offers more than what the customer has expected, s/he can make customers feel both happy and moved.

Mr. Walt Disney, founder of Disneyland®, left behind several famous quotes. I would like to introduce some of them here.

“If you can dream it, you can do it. I only hope that we don’t lose sight of one thing: that it was all started by a mouse.”

“Somehow, I can’t believe that there are any heights that can’t be scaled by a man who knows the secret of making his dreams come true. This special secret, it seems to me, can be summarized in four C’s: curiosity, confidence, courage, and constancy. The greatest of these is confidence.”

“When we go into a new project, we believe in it all the way. We have confidence in our ability to do it right. And we work hard to do the best possible job.”

“They will be the people who give, who like to bring delight to other people—and who therefore also gain pleasure and satisfaction for themselves.”

Tokyo Disneyland® puts these quotes into action at every moment of every day. Mr. Disney’s faith is succeeded by the spirit of “omotenashi” in the cast of Tokyo Disneyland®. From this standpoint, we might say that Walt Disney is alive with his beloved character Mickey Mouse®.

We would like to look from the guest’s viewpoint in our daily life and offer more than what guests expect—thereby making them feel happy and moved.

