

24 Ways to Engage Your Customers



By Bill Capodagli
Coauthor of *The Disney Way*

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It is no secret that creating a customer-centric culture is beneficial to any organization. A recent Deloitte Consulting study indicated that 82% of CEOs believe that culture is a potential competitive advantage; but only 28% say they *know* their culture and a mere 19% believe they have the *right* culture.

There are five elements that comprise our *Disney Way* Customer-Centric Culture Model: (1)the *Dream/Vision/Story*; (2)the *Values or Beliefs*, (3)the *Casting*, including hiring, orientation, feedback and development; (4)the *Reviews*, or how to measure customer satisfaction; and lastly (5)producing your unique *Show*, including the story, the setting, the roles, and the backstage processes.



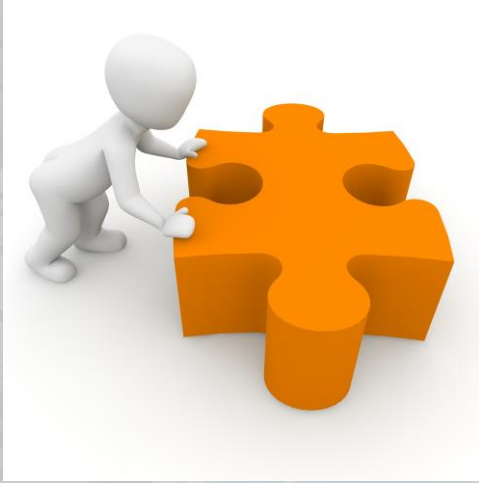
Each of these elements is essential in creating a customer-centric culture. However, if you could only do one thing, I recommend that you begin with the first element of your *Show* – how you engage your customers from their initial encounters with your organization. We call this “*moments of truth*.”

Being focused on customer engagement is well worth your effort. For years, the Gallup organization has been tracking the effects of customer engagement on a daily basis. They report that a fully *engaged* customer represents a 23% premium in returns of market share, revenue and relationship growth. A *disengaged* customer represents a 13% decrease in those same measures. (See *The Disney Way* 3e, Chapter 4)

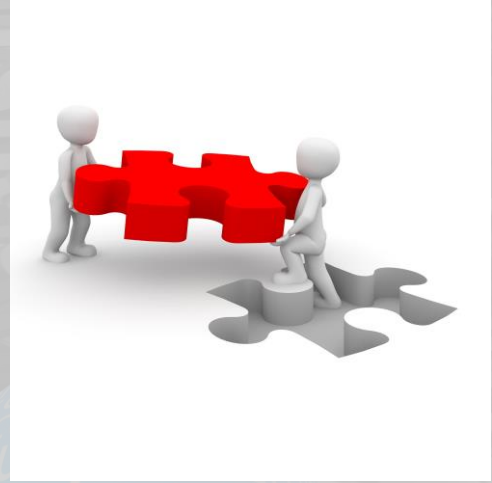
In my organization, Capodagli Jackson Consulting, we promote three levels of customer engagement: *transaction*, *absorbed*, and *connection*. The first is *transaction*. For example, if a customer asks, “Where is a good place to have lunch?” Your answer could be, “There are several restaurants on the next block.” You have completed the transaction, having politely answered the customer’s question with minimal engagement.

The next level is *absorbed*. Answering the same question in the previous paragraph, you may ask, “What kind of food do you like?” Assume the customer answers, “Italian.” You reply, “One of my favorite restaurants is Tony’s. It’s on the next block, this side of the street. Enjoy!” You have not only completed the transaction with the customer, you have engaged them to solve a problem and recommended a solution.

The ultimate level of engagement is *connection*. Using our same example, after recommending Tony’s in the *absorbed* level, you conclude by saying something like, “My name is Bill; tell Tony I sent you. If you have time after lunch, stop by and tell me how you liked it.” All of a sudden, you are connected with your customer and have become friends; and, you may find that you agree on a favorite restaurant.



Transaction
Any Piece Works



Absorbed
The Right Piece



Connected
Help Solve the Problem

I realize that you may not have the time or opportunity to connect with all of your customers. However, it takes very little effort to elevate from *transaction* to an *absorbed* level of engagement. For example, in a retail environment, you could ask about the purchase: “Is this a gift? Would you like it gift wrapped?” OR say, “I notice you have a VFW polo shirt. Are you a veteran? Thanks for your service.” What you *do not* want to do is get into what I call the *supermarket robotic response*: “paper or plastic?”; “thank you”; “have a nice day”, etc. If the engagement is perceived to be insincere, it only becomes part of an automatic *transaction* response.

Here are 24 ways to achieve positive customer engagement:

SETTING - the very first moment-of-truth is when your customers drive in, walk in or sign-online to your organization:

1. Make sure signage is clear, informative and well maintained. If a customer has difficulty finding parking or is misled by the signage, it may be difficult for them to experience positive *engagement*.



Signage can be FUN!



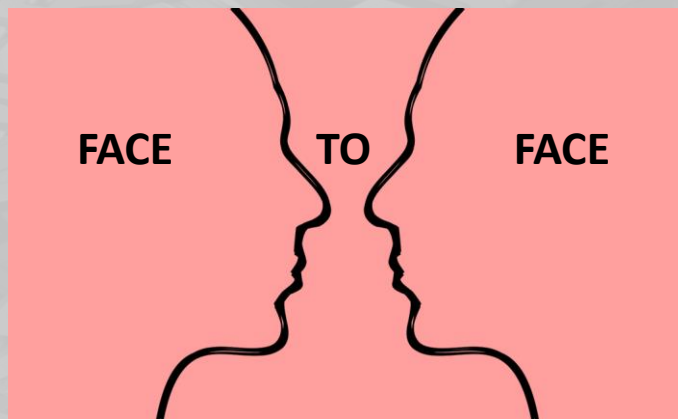
2. Keep the parking lot and entryway “hospital” clean. First impressions are lasting impressions.

3. Play music in the parking lot and entryway to convey the mood you are trying to create. If you were entering a fine Italian restaurant, you wouldn’t want the local rap radio station playing.

4. Make Sure it has a Weenie! One day when Walt came home from work, he realized how easy it was to lead his dog, Lady, anywhere he wanted her to go with a “weenie.” So he thought, if a juicy piece of meat can motivate and direct a dog, what if a different kind of weenie could help Guests reach specific destinations within Disneyland? The original Theme Park weenie was the Main Street train station, and to this day, it serves as an enticement to draw Guests into the Park. Since the very first time Walt described this idea to the Imagineers who helped create Disneyland, weenies have been planned as the central features of all Disney Theme Parks as ways to lead Guests through their entire magical adventures.



EPCOT's Weenie, Spaceship Earth



5. Personal welcome. Ask an employee to greet customers as they arrive. Don't just say "hello"; engage them; ask if they need assistance; guide them to the proper department or appropriate service line or communicate specials. Have you ever had the experience of standing in line for 10 minutes or more and finding out you are in the wrong line? A greeter should not be viewed as an added expense, but rather as someone who is setting the stage for an exceptional customer experience.

6. Provide name badges that create *engagement*. All Cast Members (Disney's term for employees) at Walt Disney World wear name badges with their hometowns printed under their first names. This tradition encourages dialog or *absorption*. It may even create a connection if the guest is from the same town or region, and he or she may even know the same people or local landmarks.

7. Avoid telling customers "NO"! Try to get to "YES" and solve a customer's problem whenever possible.

8. Give something away: candy for children; a free lottery ticket on large sales; free coffee, popcorn, or cookies. Always use this practice as a way to further engage with customers. Here is an example: "If your lottery ticket is a big winner, I hope you will come back and buy me a latte from Starbucks!"

9. Avoid clichés and "same old" phrases; look for ways to increase your level of engagement. Don't just say, "Have a nice day." Think of something your customer purchased and make a sincere comment such as, "I just love that brand of shoes. I have several pairs. My father was a shoemaker and we always treated our shoes with silicone spray or a fresh coat of polish before we wore them. It made them last a lot longer. Next time you are in, let me know how you liked your shoes."

10. Stay calm; don't let the "ankle biters" get to you. If you had \$86,400 in your savings account and someone took \$10, would you spend \$86,390 to find the \$10? Of course not! There are 86,400 seconds in a day. Why is it that when we have a 10 second confrontation with a customer, a manager, a spouse, or one of our children, we often let it ruin the next 86,390 seconds in the day.



- 11. Spend energy on solutions, not emotions! Solve the customers' problems and they will love you forever.
- 12. Take the initiative to solve customer problems. It is better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.
- 13. You can't go wrong with the Golden Rule – treat your customers the way you would like to be treated if you were in their shoes.



13 World Religions Teach a Variation of *The Golden Rule*

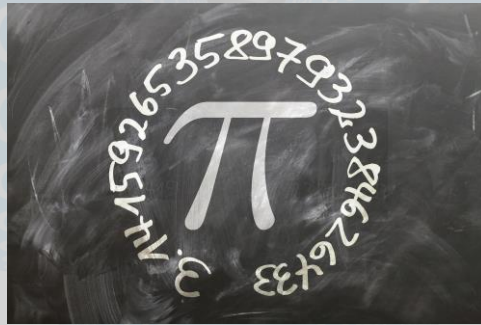


14. Engage each employee, at least weekly (daily is even better). If you're not engaging employees, how can you expect them to engage the customers? Here is an alarming statistic: over 50% of US workers experience periods of over 30 days without any job-related feedback!

15. Help employees connect with each other, and encourage feedback at all levels.

16. Continuously reinforce the *story* or mood of your department. Here's a little quiz: choose one of each of the following pairs: red or gold; plaid or stripes; white or snow; metal or cloth; blue or green; up in the air or down on the ground. How many of you chose gold? If you did, it is the wrong answer! But in reality, given the information I provided, there are no right or wrong answers. But what if I asked the question, "Which one of each of the following pairs applies to the USA flag?" The answers would be obvious. Too few companies clearly define a mood or story for their organizations; instead, employees make "red or gold" and "plaid or striped" decisions all day without any idea of the "right" answer!

17. Celebrate mistakes. Use them as training opportunities, not as times for discipline or punishment.
18. Celebrate little acts of customer kindness.
19. Celebrate employee anniversaries, birthdays, special achievements, etc.
20. Take **ANY** opportunity to celebrate! Here are a few of my favorites: National Kazoo Day, Tell a Fairytale Day, National Pi Day (that's 3.1415926, not Cherry pie), Scrabble Day, Look on the Brightside Day. All are actual dates on the calendar! Include customers in the celebrations.



Celebrate Often!
National Pi Day - March 14th

21. Take accountability to fix problems instead of blaming others when things go wrong. Attack the process, not the people!
22. At least once a year, create a “hack the process” day – an opportunity for all employees to seek out-of-the-box ways to improve customer engagement.



Hack the Process Day

23. Mentor new employees and create a formal onboarding process.
24. Have FUN with your customers and fellow employees. In *The Disney Way*, *The Disney Way Fieldbook* and *Innovate the Pixar Way*, you will find many ideas for how to do just that!

When you take yourself too seriously, life ceases to be fun!

If you can accomplish most of these 24 ideas for engaging customers and employees, you will have made a giant step in creating a customer-centric culture. Make your **Dreams** come true, **Believe** in yourself and your team, **Dare** to make a difference, and then just **Do** it!

Schedule a no obligation Consultation with *Disney Way* Expert and Management Consultant, Bill Capodagli:

