

Disney Institute Helps Orlando Magic Launch New Customer Service Program

SUMMARY

Faced with mediocre customer service results and a scheduled relocation to the newly-built Amway Center, the Orlando Magic basketball organization decided it was time to energize and re-train its current employees as well as the center's new service personnel. The well-respected NBA organization turned to Disney Institute to help introduce a new service-oriented culture to more than 700 employees. By implementing a wide range of Disney's best practices, the Orlando Magic saw employee morale soar and customer service results jump above the 90th percentile.

FAILING TO CONNECT

"Something was missing. Many of our employees just didn't seem energized and collaborative," says Audra Hollifield, vice president of Human Resources and Administrative Services for the Orlando Magic when describing the atmosphere among service workers at the team's old venue, the Amway Arena. Customer service surveys confirmed Hollifield's observations; staffers were often failing to connect with fans.

"There was a lot of disconnect among the workers," explains Hollifield. "There was no feeling of 'we are all in this together.'" For example, if a fan spilled a drink, a nearby security guard might feel that it was not his job to help.

"We needed to change our culture," says Hollifield.

With the Magic about to move into a new \$480 million facility in October 2010, Hollifield and the team's senior management felt it was the perfect opportunity to revamp their customer service practices. "We decided we needed to open in the new venue with a clean slate," says Hollifield. To help energize their own employees, as well as all those who worked on the frontlines in the new center, the Orlando Magic turned to *Disney Institute*.

Management thought *Disney Institute* was "a perfect fit," says Hollifield. "Disney is in the same business we are in; entertainment. They know how to create special memories. And they do all this in the hopes of getting repeat business." After meeting with the Orlando Magic's senior management, *Disney Institute* consultants

Scott Moore, Sara Jones and Tom Thomson recommended a series of programs around leadership, management and service — all designed to improve the customer experience and positively impact the bottom line.

A WORLD-CLASS EXPERIENCE

Jones and Thomson began by presenting several training seminars to management. "Think of your new arena as a sports theme park," Thomson told an audience of Orlando Magic senior managers. He explained that in addition to the basketball game being played on the court, there are so many experiences that happen outside of that; from a fan parking his car to buying a souvenir or having a meal.

"Every one of these interactions with a customer, from their door to your door, has to be superb," said Thomson. "Each is an opportunity to enhance the fans' experience or negate it." Sara Jones pointed out that even if the Magic won their basketball game, a bad experience with an arena employee could prevent a fan from returning. "It's similar to Disney World," said Jones, "Whether it's your fan or

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CASE STUDY: ORLANDO MAGIC

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Jones and Thompson stressed that change had to come "from the top down." Employees need to know that management is part of team and walking the walk. "They also have to understand the operational standards you are setting and exactly what you expect of them," said Jones.

Management got the message. At a presentation in which Jones and Thomson were addressing several hundred of the Amway Center's service staffers, the audience did a double take when they spotted Orlando Magic coach Stan Van Gundy helping to wipe down seats before the grand opening. "That was a powerful message to everyone that they were all there to work together and deliver a memorable experience for their customers," says Jones.

The *Disney Institute* consultants told the frontline workers that, when it came to improving customer service, even small gestures mattered. Smiling, greeting a fan, making eye contact; they all add up to produce an environment that can lead to a legendary experience. Details count, said Jones. For example, using cell phones in guest areas is a no-no in Disney World because, as she explains, "The focus needs to be on the guest."

Of course, even great customer service organizations make mistakes. The trick is in what Disney calls customer service recovery. A *Disney Institute*-produced video shows the right and wrong way to achieve this. In the first scenario, a customer is shown dropping an ice cream cone she has just purchased, and the clerk says only "Sorry." In another version a clerk is shown coming around to the front of the counter, helping the customer clean up the dropped ice cream, and giving her a free replacement. Says Hollifield, "That really resonated with our employees. They now feel more invested in their jobs and are willing to go above and beyond."

GETTING IT RIGHT

After several weeks of Disney Institute seminars and presentations to nearly 700 employees, the Orlando Magic played its first game in the newly-opened Amway Center last November. "The instant I entered the center I saw the

difference the Disney training made," recalls Hollifield. Greeters, who used to be called ticket takers, were smiling, making eye contact, and were eager to answer fans' questions. Other employees were quick to accompany a fan if he or she asked the way, instead of merely pointing. Even pointing reflected the Disney training. Employees now use a two-finger point; Disney feels that a one-finger gesture can be seen as rude.

Tom Thomson recalls watching as a fan asked a concessionaire for a vegetarian burger. Instead of just saying she didn't have any, the staffer took out her new Amway Center directory and said, "Let me find out where you can get one." Says Thomson, "She was using that opportunity to engage with the customer. As we often say in our customer service presentations, 'It may not be your fault, but it is your problem'. It was rewarding to watch her responding to that."

As Hollifield and the Orlando Magic management admit, changing a company's customer service culture is an ongoing process. But Hollifield says they are off to a dramatic start. She reports that friends, and even the competition, comment on the improvements the Orlando Magic made in customer service. "I get lots of emails asking, 'What did you guys do?'" says Hollifield. Recently NBA commissioner David Stern visited the Amway Center and joked, "Can you please ask your employees to stop telling me how happy they are? They are so nice it's unbelievable!"

The numbers reflect the change, too. The company's surveys now reflect around 95% satisfaction. "That means, when it comes to customer service and customer interactions, we're getting it right nearly 95% of the time," explains Hollifield. "The turnaround has been remarkable."