

# Nurture top performers, 'outbehave' your rivals

Recently I was checking in to a hotel and was greeted by the front desk receptionist. She was wearing a button with bright red letters that read, "Service 10." This caught my attention and I immediately asked her what "Service 10" was all about. Unfortunately, for the receptionist, here's how our conversation went:

Me: What is "Service 10"?

Receptionist: (Blank stare)

Me: Certainly it must mean something?

Receptionist: (Looks over to manager at next terminal and asks, "What is 10 Service? Can you help me explain it?")

Me: Never mind.

Now, this was not a random motel on the interstate. It was a high-end hotel chain that any leader in corporate America would know about—a chain selling rooms for more than \$150 per night. Later that day, I found a sign in the lobby telling customers that "Service 10" was the company's goal to provide great customer service. Considering that the main point of contact for checking in a guest didn't even know the definition of great service, I knew that my stay probably wouldn't deliver an experience worthy of rave reviews.

This is a great example of why some companies have employees who are consistently poor at delivering customer service, while others seem to be able to "outbehave" the competition, leading to stronger business results. Winning organizations understand that employees are constantly onstage, exhibiting behaviors as part of their performance and orchestrating the memorable experiences that help attract and retain business.

Defining and delivering "star" employee performances, in fact, is the most compelling marketing initiative a company can invest in. No one knows this better than Walt Disney Co. Its legendary customer experiences might seem like "magic" but each interaction is based on a simple guiding principle: Every employee can develop positive customer relationships. Disney leaders know that investments in employee communications and training are mandatory in order to develop star performers.

My encounter with a knowledgeable man in a white jumpsuit at a Walt Disney World theme park proves this point. For those of you who haven't been there, optimizing your time requires some strategic thinking. Your main objective, besides having fun, is to get your family into as many attractions as possible. Disney employees know this



## ON PERFORMANCE

Gregg Lederman

means avoiding long lines, so when my wife and I looked a little lost and confused as to where to go next, we were approached—yes, approached/sought out/through—by a maintenance man. Although he was accessorized for cleaning, he was equipped with so much more than a broom and dust pan.

"You look like you might need some assistance. May I help you get to your next Disney adventure?" he asked. "Your daughters would love the 'Beauty and the Beast' show that begins in 45 minutes. I would suggest that one of you get in line for that now. Also, in about five minutes, Mickey Mouse will be coming out about 30 feet behind me. One of you should take the kids there and then meet up in line at 'Beauty and the Beast.' That way, your kids won't need to wait very long for either attraction."

He completed the experience by providing precise directions and a map on how to get to our destinations.

Unlike the hotel, Disney recognizes that its maintenance people are cast members performing in front of customers. Therefore, they give them the training and the props to be customer "touch points" by playing the role of social coordinators. In doing so, these individuals realize the star performances they deliver daily will be shared between happy and potential customers.

Just think about the impact this has. Disney customers, on average, will tell 20 people about that experience. Personally, I have told thousands of people.

Now back to my "Service 10" debacle. If the employees of the hotel understood the important roles they play in delivering customer service, they wouldn't have proceeded to blame me for having the wrong check-in date in their computer system, bill me the wrong amount two out of the three nights I stayed there and not deliver my complimentary copy of USA Today every morning. Other guests got their newspapers, so why didn't they treat me as a valuable member of their audience? Prob-

ably because I was too curious as to what "Service 10" was all about.

How well do employees in your company understand their role as a performer? Do they know how to think, speak and behave in ways that strengthen your work culture and provide outstanding customer experiences? Think about the challenges you, as a leader, face in trying to engage employees and inspire them to outbehave your competition.

Below are some proven methods that can help you get on your way to developing desired employee behaviors and to enhancing both individual and team performance:

- Clearly define behaviors that align with your company values and brand promises.

- Conduct behavior-based hiring to ensure optimal fit between your company values and brand and the employee candidate.

- Set expectations with employees on the behaviors required for each job and assess/review performance regularly.

- Proactively recognize employees who help your company to outbehave, and thus outperform, the competition.

To learn more about developing behaviors and making them a part of your hiring, performance evaluation, and employee recognition initiatives, go to [www.brandintegrity.com/truth8](http://www.brandintegrity.com/truth8).

Every employee in your company has the potential to become a top performer. However, as a leader, you need to make sure that your brand is clearly defined within your organization, consistently communicated to all employee groups, and integrated into leadership and human resources practices so that it can be measured and managed effectively.

As unpleasant as my hotel stay was, it emphasized a simple fact that shouldn't be ignored: On a week-to-week, day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis your company's brand is being delivered by employees who are either helping your company to outperform or underperform. Give them what they need to outbehave and your company will become a star in its industry.

*Gregg Lederman, founder and managing partner of Brand Integrity Inc., gives seminars on branding and employee performance. He is a professor at the Simon Graduate School of Business at the University of Rochester and is the author of "Achieve Brand Integrity: Ten Truths You Must Know to Enhance Employee Performance and Increase Company Profits." He can be reached at [glederman@brandintegrity.com](mailto:glederman@brandintegrity.com).*