

Care Like a Mouse

*The Keys to Delivering
Disney Quality Service*

Second Edition

Lenn Millbower

Forward by Martin Lindstrom

Praise For Care Like a Mouse

“Lenn Millbower’s book is the most inspiring yet practical, innovative yet tactical customer service book I’ve ever read. It will keep you turning page after page as you learn how to reimagine your own Disney inspired success.”

Elaine Biech, BS, MS, CPLP fellow, author, *The Art and Science of Training*, Editor, *ASTD’s Handbook: The Definitive Reference for Training and Development*

“Walt Disney appealed to people at an intensely emotional level. That emotion is the key to Disney’s legendary service philosophy. And no one is more uniquely qualified to identify the strategies behind that philosophy than Lenn Millbower. In this charming book, Lenn shares the strategies and tactics the rest of us can apply to engage customers in our own worlds.”

Dr. Karl Albrecht, co-author, *Service America! Doing Business in the New Economy*, *Psychology Today* columnist, Top 100 Thought Leaders, *Executive Excellence* magazine

“Lenn Millbower has captured the essence of the Disney approach to customer service. His easy-to-read, informative, and practical guide explains how to apply Disney methodologies in any organization. Destined to be a customer-service classic reference, *Care Like a Mouse* is a must-read for any leader and his or her customer-service team.”

Bob Lucas, BS, MA, MA, CPLP,
author, *Customer Service Skills for Success*

“With Lenn’s guidance, Lowes Foods completely revamped and simplified our corporate methodologies. We used his Purpose, Priorities, and other filters to increase levels of engagement throughout the organization and with our customers. The impact on our bottom line was outstanding. This book tells you how to replicate those successes.”

Steve Kilcoyne, Former Vice President,
Human Resources, Lowes Foods, LLC

“Hamilton Health Care System had the pleasure of working with Lenn as he assisted with the realignment of our culture. Using the techniques described in *Care Like a Mouse*, Lenn provided a detailed evaluation and analysis of our current culture, then worked with us to formulate a plan for improvement. The resulting “Heart of Hamilton” philosophy has not only significantly improved our associate satisfaction but also our patient satisfaction results...it would not have been possible without Lenn.”

Jeff Myers, CEO, Hamilton Health Care System

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Author's Note

Several chapters in *Care Like a Mouse* begin with a Walt Disney story. The stories attempt to capture the flavor of Walt Disney so that the reader may get closer to the real person. It is always a challenge to document the words and thoughts of someone who left this world in the last century. There are, fortunately, many Walt Disney sources. The stories draw on those sources. Text in quotes, where indicated, represent actual words spoken by Walt and reported by the people who knew him and, or were present at the time of the incident. In all cases, the author has attempted to be as accurate as possible in describing the situations and what the participants in those situations were experiencing. It is, nevertheless, impossible to know with certainty whether these interpretations are accurate or not. The author believes they are and offers them in the spirit of shared knowledge.

FORWARD

Some years ago, a Swedish research team set out to explore the impact of a simple smile. Teaming up with a local travel agent, they temporarily replaced the regular staff with actors tasked with an unusual job: to smile — or not to smile.

They offered exactly the same product and exactly the same service. The only difference? Some customers were welcomed with a warm smile, and others weren't. The impact was remarkable. The customers met with a smile spent 17% more than those who found themselves dealing with a non-smiling agent.

There's nothing complex about a smile, is there? It sounds so simple. And yet, as a former member of the Qantas board once said, "You have to be capable of smiling at 4 a.m. every morning."

As our world has turned increasingly rational, companies have become increasingly dependent on technology to manage their dealings with customers. In the process, they've turned their backs on the need to provide any sort of personal service.

If you were to ask customers which they prefer — super-quick delivery or excellent service — most of them would say, "I'll take the quick delivery." And yet, I've learned over the years that what we say and what we feel are often remarkably different. If we've become so addicted to instant gratification, why has the number of Americans visiting farmers' markets increased by 17 per cent? Why did the number of people attending live concerts go up by double digits last year? Why did 10 per cent more people in the

United Kingdom go to the theatre last year, even though sound quality, proximity to the stage, the comfort of the seats, and even the quality of the refreshments don't compare to those in your home entertainment set-up?

Many years ago, Alfred Hitchcock revealed one of the secrets to his great movie creations, the blue and the green script. The blue script is what he called "the theatre of the stage." It's the conventional, on-the-surface, visual and aural script: dialogue, action, sets, costumes, music, sound effects, camera angles. On the other hand, the green script, which he called "the theatre of the mind," dealt with the audience's emotions. He would map out how the audience should feel, minute by minute and even second by second, as they watched his movie. Here they should feel anxiety, turning on a dime into fear, followed a moment later by a sense of relief. As the perfectionist he was, he would create a detailed emotional map of the emotional results of his storytelling.

Whenever retailers or brands approach me for advice, I always ask "What are your blue script and your green script?" In actuality, of course, few brands have ever thought about their marketing in those terms.

In our never-ending search for operational efficiencies, we've squeezed the emotional dimension out of the equation. The end result? Retailers and brands are barely differentiated from each other. When you fly, you may never realize which airline you flew with. Check-in takes place at a self-serve terminal representing some 20 airlines. Multiple airlines share the lounge. The aircraft you're boarding might be a co-share, owned and managed by another airline. Catering is practically non-existent, and so is the service. Forget about blue scripts and green scripts. These days, the only script is grey.

Why should I choose to visit a conventional bookstore rather than Amazon? Why should I visit Macy's shoe

department, rather than shoe-shopping online at Zappos? Overhead costs in bricks-and-mortar stores practically guarantee a higher price, and limited shelf space means they can't offer the nearly unlimited selection of an online retailer. So how can the bricks-and-mortar retailer differentiate itself? The green script, of course. The shopping experience, the personal service, the human touch.

But here's the problem. Service is an intangible. Our Swedish experiment was able to quantify the value of a smile; but for most retailers, it's difficult to directly correlate great service with an increase in sales. There are just too many other factors disguising the benefit of great service.

Over the years, I've come to realize that service isn't part of most organizations' DNA, and as a result it takes a remarkable effort to improve service. Some tough emails and town hall gatherings with the CEO might have an immediate, short-term impact. For a few days or weeks, everyone will force themselves to smile. Management will fool itself into believing the organization's quality of service has improved permanently.

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Genuine excellent service is a fragile, sensitive, very rare species, and it evaporates almost as fast as you can say the word. Service is directly linked with the organization's internal culture, and the company's default mindset is to revert to old ways of doing things.

Service cannot be an afterthought or one of ten points on a to-do list. It cannot be the responsibility of one department, nor an initiative unconnected to the employees' KPI (key performance indicator). It has to be embedded into the core of the company — into the organization's very DNA.

Improving service takes time, it must be a mandate to all the staff — from the bottom of the org-chart to the very top — and it requires ongoing training. The default mindset has

been stitched into the muscle memory of the organization; to change that muscle memory requires long-term commitment. So long, in fact, that management may observe superficial improvements, pat itself on the back about its “success,” lose interest in the initiative, and move on to another shiny object.

As you read this book, ask yourself how committed you are to implementing the core of Lenn Millbower’s philosophy. If you’re truly committed, then believe this: you have a wonderful tool in your hands for changing your organization’s service culture. But this topic is a bit like feeding the birds on your balcony during the summertime; you need to know that you’ve assumed a certain degree of responsibility, and as winter arrives and things turn a little more difficult, the birds will have come to rely on your effort.

In *Care Like a Mouse*, Lenn Millbower provides some fascinating, unexpected insights into the Walt Disney’s Company’s service culture—a philosophy that still, many years after the passing of the company’s founder, is appreciated by children, adults with a child inside, and service-minded CEOs. As he breaks down the magic into bite-sized advice, models, and methodologies, Lenn helps you to understand why the Disney magic isn’t actually magical. Rather, it’s a result of hard work, solid method, and persistence. He spices all this knowledge and insight with intriguing insider stories that you’ll find useful as you convey the service message inside your own organization.

As you read the book, please do me a favor. Pause, and then reflect on how you really intend to live what Lenn is preaching. Don’t latch onto Lenn’s insights as quick, easy solutions. Make a genuine effort to explore what it would take to truly change your own organization’s default mindset. How can you make divisions collaborate? How can you encourage change through tools of motivation? Most

importantly, how can you ensure that your good intentions won't end up in the corporate dustbin with this year's customer-service initiative, but will embed itself into the very DNA of your organization?

I know it's an enormous task, but as a British journalist once wrote, "The world has never changed this quickly — and it will never change this slowly again."

There's just one perfect time for this: right now! As almost every industry is being commoditized, as technology infuses itself into every corner of our lives, as what we say and what we really want are increasingly out of balance — the timing for change has never been better.

Martin Lindstrom
Zurich, Switzerland

New York Times bestselling author of *Buyology* and *Small Data*

PRE-SHOW

World Drive

*Get a good idea and stay with it. Dog it,
and work at it until it's done and done right.*

–Walt Disney

He was a happy man. It was November 15, 1965, and Haydon Burns, the governor of Florida, was hosting a press conference. The Governor was about to announce that two crazy brothers from California had purchased 44 square miles of worthless Florida swampland.

Flanking the Governor were the two brothers, the younger on his right and the older on his left. The brothers were, of course, Walt and Roy Disney. They really weren't crazy. The land was cheap and available for purchase, the location was perfect for their proposed 'Disney World' and the political environment was welcoming.

Although Walt was the famous one, Roy mattered too. Walt and Roy, even when they were feuding, which was often, had a true partnership. Walt was the 'what if' dreamer. Roy was the numbers guy. Walt's job was to dream up new offerings. Roy's job was to decide which of Walt's dreams should be funded.

Walt Disney's first substantive comments at the press conference described the role older brother Roy played.

My brother and I have been together in our business for forty-two years now. He's my big brother and he's

the one that, when I was a little fellow, I used to go to with some of my wild ideas and he'd either straighten me out, put me on the right path or something, or if he didn't agree with me, I'd work on it for years until I got him to agree with me. . . . I didn't have to work very hard with him on this project. He's been with me from the start.

That start came in 1959 when Walt wanted a Disneyland do-over. Short cuts had been taken to build Disneyland in the mid-1950s. The shortcuts were a necessity caused by a lack of funding and support. No one had believed in the idea of Disneyland: no one except for Walt Disney.

Walt had toyed with the idea of an amusement park as early as the 1920s. At the Cathay Theater premier of Walt Disney's first animated feature film, *Snow White*, Walt had a dwarf's cottage display erected outside the theater. As he and animator Wilford Jackson walked past it, Walt, admiring the cottage, said that someday he wanted to build a park scaled to children's size.

In the 1950s, as he sat on park benches watching his daughters have fun, Walt began thinking, "I felt that there should be something built where the parents and the children could have fun together." Walt also, concurrently, was tinkering with trains. They were, for him, a symbol of possibilities. As a child, he would lie in bed and listen to train whistles blowing in the distance. He imagined the adventures those train passengers were experiencing. Perhaps, Walt thought, he could merge his fairytale village idea with a train ride. The idea of a park filled with fun things for the whole family to do and encircled by a train soon emerged.

The vision was clear to him. It eluded everyone else. All they saw was a dirty, seedy amusement carnival: a "carnie." Amusements in that day were nasty places: Run down and,

usually, run out of town by the local authorities because of their dishonest games.

Walt presented his idea to some close associates. They were dismissive. They couldn't comprehend why the great Walt Disney would want to build one of "those." Wife Lillian, in her blunt fashion said what everyone else thought. "Why do you want to build an amusement park? They're so dirty," she asked him. Walt replied, "That is just the point — mine wouldn't be."

Brother Roy wasn't much help either. He refused to gamble the corporation's money on another one of Walt's "screwy ideas." Roy explained, "We're in the motion picture business. We're in the animated film business. We don't know anything about this amusement business."

Walt also talked to every carnival amusement operator he could find. They were unanimous: it would fail.

- There needed to be many entrances, not one.
- There were too many areas that would not generate revenue.
- There wouldn't be enough ride capacity.
- The rides would cost too much to build.
- No one would care if the rides were themed.
- Maintenance costs would be exorbitant.
- Carny games would be needed for the park to be financially stable.
- Clean cut looking people would not work in an amusement park.
- It would be impossible to keep the place clean.

But Walt, never one to accept a 'No' answer, insisted:

What this country really needs is an amusement park

that families can take their children to. They've gotten so honky-tonk with a lot of questionable characters running around, and they're not too safe. They're not well kept. I want a place that's as clean as anything could ever be, and all the people in it are first-class citizens, and treated like guests.

Walt ignored the critics and followed his instinct. Roy, despite his unwilling to invest the company's money, helped obtain the financing. Once Disneyland opened, people realized that, as always, Walt was right. Disneyland was an immediate success. Walt had figured out what people wanted and built it for them. He themed his park, rides merchandise and food offerings around stories with defined messages. He trained his staff to interact with his guests. And he created an environment that immersed his guests in his movies. 50,000 people visited on opening day. By 2016, over 600 million people have visited the park.

Building Disney's World

Walt loved Disneyland but hated the squalor that surrounded it, denigrating it as a third-rate Las Vegas. The 'Florida Project' was a chance to start over; to get it right: to prove to himself and everyone else that perfection could be obtained. This time there would be enough land to maintain total control over what Walt called his 'show.'

Several locations were studied: New Jersey's Meadows, Niagara Falls, Kansas City, and Saint Louis. All were found wanting. The search then turned to Florida. Ocala, Palm Beach, and Central Florida were all considered. A Central Florida location, twelve miles from Orlando, was the winner. The Disney brothers, through a series of shell companies,

optioned the purchase of as much of that land as their company could afford. The resulting property, at forty-eight square miles, ended up being larger than the city of Manhattan.

In November 1963, Walt and Roy took a plane flight from California to Florida and back again. Secrecy was necessary. The land grabbing had been noticed. If word got out that Disney was the buyer, the land value would increase so much that the project would likely be cancelled.

The two brothers hid on the plane all day. It wasn't until late in the day, during a refueling stop in New Orleans, that they heard the tragic news of the day: United States President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas.

Hours earlier, as the rest of the world coped with the shock of the Kennedy assassination, the two brothers circled the land they had optioned. They flew north over what would become the main roadway, World Drive. They circled around a small lake at the top of the property. Walt proclaimed it the site of his new "magic kingdom." It was a fitting location. The coves of the lake loosely formed—as the imaginative Disney could envision from above—an ear on the upper left, an ear on the upper right, and a nose pointed outward on the middle right. It was as if Mickey Mouse himself had formed this spot as his home.

Ground broke for Disney World on May 30, 1967. Construction of the 27,443-acre site cost \$400 million (\$2 trillion in 1916 dollars), took two years and employed 9,000 workers. The team built one air strip, drained one lake, created another, moved 8 million cubic feet of earth, developed nine acres of tunnels, channeled fifty miles of water control canals, raised six miles of monorail track, and paved 50 miles of roads.

When Walt Disney World opened in 1971, the complex had one theme park, two hotels, two golf courses, one

campground, and 5,500 “cast members” (Walt Disney World terminology for employees). By 2016, it had grown to include four theme parks, twenty-eight hotels, five golf courses, two water parks, two entertainment districts, one sports complex, and 70,000+ cast members.

Alongside these facilitates, something else grew: a reputation for magical customer service. Service for what Disney called his “guests” was ingrained in the Disney Brothers’ DNA. They passed that DNA on to the people who would run Walt Disney World. Asked once if the company would survive his death, Walt Disney explained,

Well, I think by this time my staff, my young group of executives, and everything else, are convinced that Walt is right. That quality will out. ... I think they’re convinced, and I think they’ll hang on after ... as you say ... well ... after Disney.

“After Disney” came too soon. Walt passed away in 1966 and Roy in 1971. But the course they charted hung on. Their company has grown into a world dominating behemoth making billions in revenue. With 200,000+ team members, the company is often listed as a top 20 employer. The Company now has multiple outlets for its product (movies, theme parks, cable, digital, video games, cruise ships, retail stores, Broadway shows, etc. Besides the traditional Walt Disney Animation Studios, Disney owns ABC, ESPN, Pixar, Lucasfilm LTD, the Muppets Marvel, and 20th Century Studios.

Others have recognized Disney’s success too. Disney repeatedly lands in top spots like Cohn & Wolfe’s ‘Authentic 100,’ a list of the highest-ranking brands in the world based on consumer perception of authenticity. London-based Brand Finance has named Disney the world’s most powerful

brand. Fortune, in 2023, again ranked The Walt Disney Company on its list of World's Most Admired Companies for twentieth consecutive year.

Of special interest to this author, and the subject of this book, is customer service in the Disney theme parks. Disney theme parks are the highest rated amusement parks in the world. In repeated TEA-AECOM Global Attractions Attendance reports, Walt Disney Attractions is the number one theme park group with worldwide attendance in the millions.

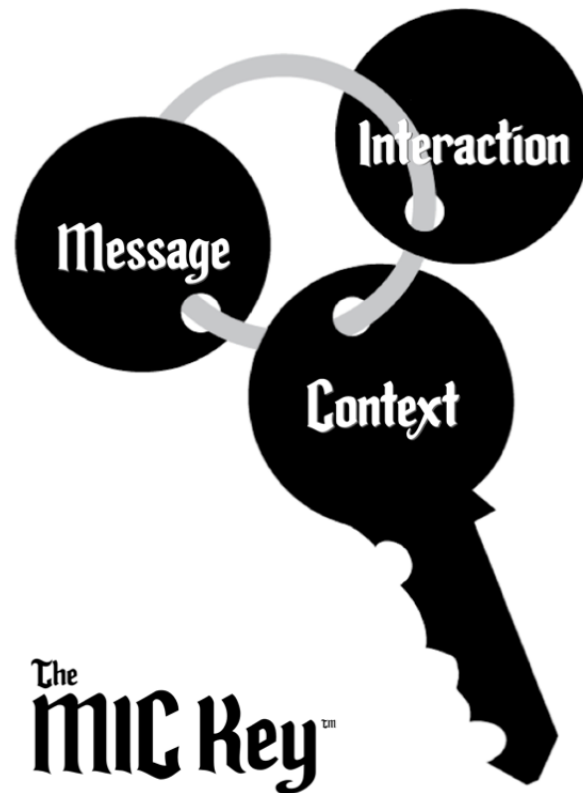
Working at World

I have, having spent 25 years working at Walt Disney World, seen Disney's service magic up close. Like most Disney careers, mine started at the bottom: as an EPCOT Land Boat Ride host. Promotions and new assignments came at a regular pace over the next 25 years. I spent time running SpaceShip Earth at EPCOT, was the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Aladdin's Royal Caravan stage manager at the Disney-MGM Studios, developed EPCOT's entertainment training and the new leader on-boarding process, and served on the opening training team for Disney's Animal Kingdom.

A stint at the Disney University followed. Then it was off to the Disney Institute and the design and management of several business programs. From there, back to Walt Disney Entertainment to write and manage all the entertainment training. My last Disney position was as one of the leaders of the Operations Learning and Development's Learning Solutions team.

People think that everything Disney touches is magic. I can state from first-hand experience that it isn't magic. It's method. Learn the method and you can make your own magic. This work, *Care Like a Mouse*, will show you how.

The MIC Key™: An Overview



Disney's success would have been impossible without a firm customer-service formula. For the purposes of this book, we will codify that formula as the MIC Key. The MIC Key explains that Disney customer service succeeds because it:

- Has a clearly defined service MESSAGE,
- Connects with its customers through personalized INTERACTIONS, and
- Presents its service in an emotionally engaging CONTEXT.

This book will examine each of those components and offer strategies and tactics to apply them to your situation.

Part One: Message

Part One explains how Walt Disney World's message is actualized at every level of the organization. We will explore tools for identifying and implementing your own message.

Chapter One: Purpose

PURPOSE is the goal every member of an organization should aim to achieve. We will explain how Walt Disney World applies purpose in its daily operations and take you through the steps necessary to create your organizational purpose statement.



Chapter Two: Operating Priorities

OPERATING PRIORITIES

constitute the filter through which purpose is delivered. We will examine Disney's four-word filter and discover how it helps employees meet customer need at the precise moment of that need. Then, we will share the steps necessary to create an operating priorities filter for your organization.

Chapter Three: Behavior Priorities

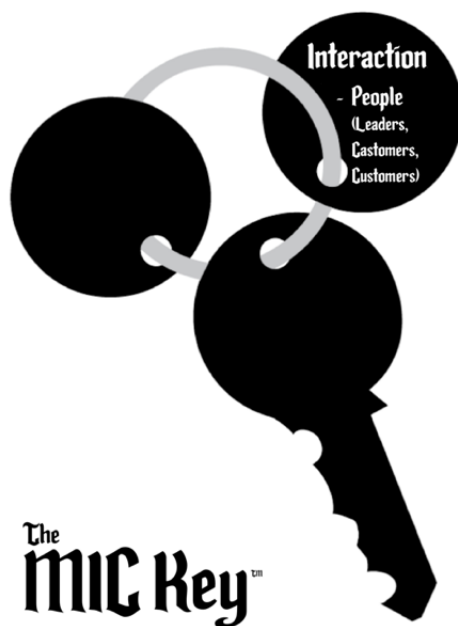
BEHAVIOR PRIORITIES describe the values leaders and employees are expected to demonstrate. Called the Disney Basics, these expectations form Walt Disney World's basis for annual reviews, promotions and mentoring, coaching, and discipline. The chapter will help you identify, codify, and align your organization's behavioral expectations with your purpose.

Part Two: Interactions

Part Two focuses on PEOPLE. Many have a deep, emotional bond with all things Disney. It's not an accident. Chapters Four, Five, and Six share the people-centric tools Disney has created and provides readers with suggestions for applying Disney's emotive methodology to their own world.

Chapter Four: Serving CustomersSM

Much of Disney's success comes from a simple relationship-based leadership formula that places its Customers first. This chapter offers specific steps for achieving customer satisfaction through effective employee care.



Chapter Five: Engaging Customers

We will then explore the ways Disney connects emotionally with customers. We will examine the Touch Point Tools used to make those interactions. Then we will offer some suggestions for applying touch point tool methodology to the reader's organization.

Chapter Six: PREspondingSM to Problems

Disney's special magic comes from its ability to anticipate and meet customer need before the customer realizes that the need exists. We will explore Disney's PREsponsive philosophy and offer a matrix system for solving service issues at the moment of need.

Part Three - Context

Chapter Seven: Staging the Platform

For Disney, everything in the environment, the CONTEXT, either enhances or undercuts purpose. Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine share the tools and techniques Disney uses to stage a unified, emotionally fulfilling environment and provides tools so that you can align all the elements in your environment.

Chapter Eight:

Themeing the Performance

The importance Disney places on cast member performance themeing is discussed. You will discover techniques for developing, training, and coaching employees to deliver their role in the show.



Chapter Nine: Fixing Process

Process is the major culprit in most service issues. Walt Disney World aggressively looks for the pain points customers experience and fixes them. This chapter will share several broken Disney processes that were corrected and explain how Disney did it. Strategies and techniques for finding and correcting broken processes will then be shared.

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The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.

–Walt Disney

The Beginning