



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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UNDERSTANDING DISNEY'S MAGIC

The Walt Disney Company name is synonymous with creativity and innovation. For over sixty years, Disney has been a pioneer in the crafting and production of movies, is the acknowledged founder of the "entertainment" industry and has become an influential force in the shaping of American culture in the last half of the 20th Century. Through the Disney Institute, they offer organizations an opportunity to learn some of the principles and processes related to creating an environment that fosters creativity and innovation. Two weeks ago, a group of 21st Century church leaders participated in a special Leadership Network Learning Adventure and attended the Disney Institute followed by a time of shared learning and discussion related to creativity and innovation in congregations. Using Disney's definitions of creativity (the production of new and useful ideas in any domain) and innovation (the implementation of creative ideas), some key learnings from the Learning Adventure include the following.

Disney uses a four-step model for managing creativity and innovation which starts by defining a culture beginning with the understanding of two basic beliefs: everyone is creative and you can organize to maximize creative potential. The second step is alignment to help focus creative ideas using three questions "Who are you?" "What do you do?" and "Where are you going?" in the context of the "service theme" or mission. Disney's service theme, for example, is to "create happiness." The third step is designing the right processes to move creative ideas toward implementation. The last step is refinement of the product or service which includes listening and learning from the cast and guests; measuring and re-measuring; recognizing and celebrating accomplishments of teams and individuals; and sharing ideas and best practices throughout the company.

Key learnings identified by the participants include: The **importance of boundaries**...creativity does not flourish in a "no holds barred" environment but operates best within given limits or boundaries. Animators use "construction lines" to help channel their creative ideas into tangible drawings. Cast members (employees) are given a wide latitude of responsibility within a given framework or script that provides creative freedom. **Everyone knows the story**...the Disney culture is transmitted and reinforced by the shared stories that illustrate their values of innovation, creativity and commitment to quality. Every employee, from top to bottom, knows the stories and shares them with others while helping to create new stories. **Focus on the little things**...real breakthroughs come in the thousands of little things as well as the "one big idea." **The importance of language**...cultures are shaped and new ideas are introduced by the creative use of language. For example, Disney employees are "cast members" and visitors to Disney are "guests." **From observer to participant**...Disney understands that people have shifted from being observers to participants and their attractions and shows are increasingly interactive and create experiences that involve all of one's senses and emotions. **Employees are cast for a role; not hired for a job**...employees at Disney are selected on the basis of fit to the role they are being asked to play. Attitude is especially important. One pastor, a former Disney employee, observed that he uses the CASH method in hiring staff influenced by what he learned as a Disney employee. "C is for character since the church is a character-based organization. A is for attitude. S is for skills. People can acquire skills but the right attitude is hard to find. And H is for habits, primarily any negative habits that need to be addressed." **Everyone is responsible for the results of the whole**...Disney is a team culture and every employee understands the importance of their contribution to the total Disney "experience." **Visitors will go away but guests will come back**...70% of the people at Disney World are repeat customers. Disney understands how to make people feel welcome and to provide such a positive overall experience that they want to come back again and again.

Key questions which may be useful in evaluating creativity and innovation in your congregation or organization are: Where are the most creative pockets in your church and how can you tap into them?" "How do you personally model creativity for others?" "What needs to be changed structurally to involve more people in the creative process?" "In the past five years, what creative ideas have you had that are now aligned and which ones did you eventually have to reject?" "Where are the pockets of 'runaway creativity' that need more focus in order to be aligned?"

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