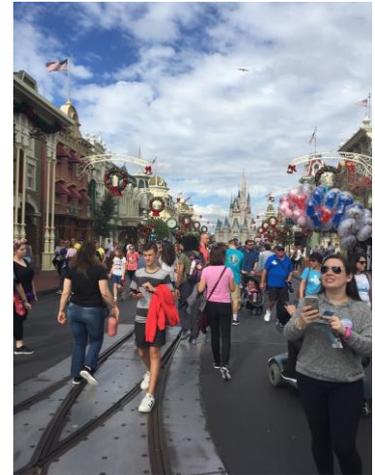




Postcard from Disney World

We have talked about it before: [Listening](#) is key when we want to learn more about audience experiences. In past projects, the Suitcase have listened to audiences talk about their experience with performance art. These conversations have for instance taught us that the *overall experience* (purchasing tickets, talking to the front-of-house-staff, the transportation to the theatre etc.) to a great extent affect how we perceive the entire visit and how likely we are to recommend the experience to others – the so-called Net Promoter Score.



Last week the Suitcase listened with a specific focus on customer service. Director of Programming, Strategic Analytics, and Sales at The Royal Danish Theatre and project owner of The Suitcase of Methods, Christina Østerby, attended Disney's [Quality Service course](#) along with two of our customer service managers. We did this to learn more about the impact and further development of our *customer service* – the first touch point between audiences and The Royal Danish Theatre.



Now to be clear, a visit to The Royal Danish Theatre is (and should be) very different from a trip to a Disney theme park. Nevertheless, the visions and strategies behind Disney's Quality Service are interesting and seem relevant to people and institutions working with customers.

In the course description, it says:

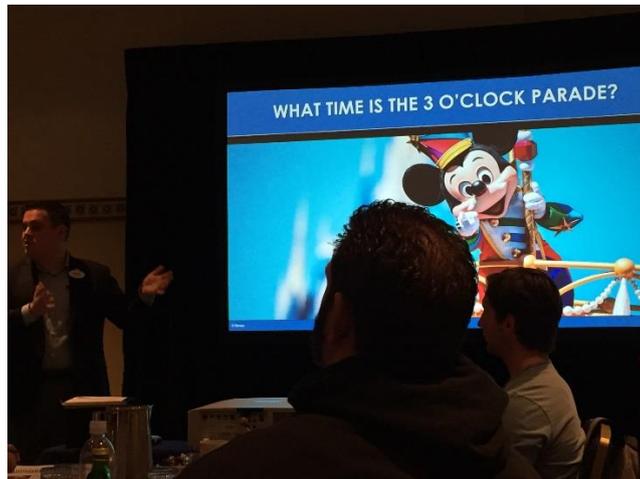
Excellent service does not simply come from a friendly transaction or helpful technology—it is the result of truly understanding your customer's expectations and putting the right guidelines and service standards in place to exceed them. When an organizational framework properly unites its people, place and processes by putting the customer at its core, exceptional service becomes possible across customer touch points. (Read more in the course description [here](#))

Listening (in a broad sense of the word) is a core practise in their customer service strategy. Disney focus on intentional listening, which means that they always listen to hear, not only a customer's *wants*, but also their *needs*.



A (simple) example of this is one of the most frequent questions the employees working in the park at Walt Disney World receives:

What time is the three o'clock parade?



Of course, these customers have a pretty good idea of when the parade begins, but their question indicates that they seek more information for instance about what to expect from the parade. Where can they stand? What will happen? Etc. The employees are trained to always put themselves in the position of the customer and try to understand what information and service could be valuable in a specific situation.

To do so Disney works with a compass tool, to help employees be aware of the different aspects of a specific customer. The Customer have various *needs, wants, stereotypes* (preconceptions about the organisation), and *emotions* while engaging with your brand or visiting your venues. For Disney it is important to cover all these aspects and to be particularly focussed on connecting emotionally with the customers.

To ensure an emotional connection they continuously gather information about the customers through different *listening posts*:

- Face-to-Face Research: (For instance talking to costumers).
- Guest Communications: (Letters, e-mails, and phone etc.).
- Websites & Social Media: (An opportunity to learn from your customers' uninhibited comments).
- Talk to your employees: (Few people know and understand your customers better than the front-line employees).

These posts or platforms for communication are not new to The Royal Danish Theatre as we already use them to communicate, as well as to gather knowledge about the audience. But the specific emotional focus in the communication could be interesting to explore further.



Does Disney ever fail?

Even though Disney works intentionally and intensively with customer service they sometimes make mistakes or fail in one way or another. In such situations, it is even more important to be aware of the customer's emotions as these are often heightened when a service failure occurs. Disney describe their approach to failure recovery like this:

The heart of service recovery is to pursue the reconciliation of the relationship, not just the resolution of the issue.¹

Sometimes it is not possible to completely oblige the customer's requirements. It might be too expensive, or simply not possible for an organization. In these cases Disney accentuate that it is the relationship with the customer, which is most important. Recovery in this situation would focus on making customers feel seen and heard by listening to them and by trying (with other means) to make their visit as pleasant as possible.

How is this relevant to The Royal Danish Theatre?

As mentioned, the experience visitors and audiences may have at Disney and The Royal Danish Theatre respectfully are in many ways very different. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see a brand working so intensely to detect and diminish unpleasant and inconvenient experiences during a visit to a Disney Theme Park. In contrast, an art experience at The Royal Danish Theatre could (and sometimes should) be provoking and complex. But in order for the audience to be 'ready to receive' these art experiences the *circumstances* surrounding the experience should be pleasant and easy. In our latest companion survey (see more [here](#)), we saw just how much the practical elements affect the overall experience. Therefore it is important to make the experience with our venues, our website, our staff, etc. a great priority. We do so by developing a customer service culture that for instance is focused on listening – listening to audiences, to our front-line employees and – for a couple of days – listening to Disney.



¹ Course manual from the Disney Institute (2018): *Disney's Approach to Quality Service* p.133

