



Institute of Success  
and Goal Achievement



**Institute of Success and Goal Achievement  
Interview with Pete Winiarski and Dennis Snow**

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**Pete:** Hi everyone, welcome once again. You have made it to the Institute of Success and Goal Achievement at [i-saga.net](http://i-saga.net).

This is our weekly interview where we find for you some fantastic guests who can help you accelerate your success and goal achievement. As you know, the Institute of Success and Goal Achievement is looking to help folks like you gain more of a sense of freedom, fun and fulfillment in your lives, whatever that means to you.

Certainly as we think about many of us as entrepreneurs and small business owners with that in mind one of those themes that is incredibly important is finding customers for life, getting them to be loyal to us no matter what it is we do.

We've got with us today a fantastic guest named Dennis Snow. Dennis, are you there?

**Dennis:** I am here. Thank you for having me on the show.

**Pete:** Thank you for joining. I'm really looking forward to this. I love what we're calling this today; the idea of creating walk through fire customer loyalty.

**Dennis:** It's very critical in today's environment to keep those precious customers and make sure they don't defect to the competition. Right now this is a very pertinent topic to just about any business I think.



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**Pete:** I think it is. The idea of walking through fire, we're going to get to figure out what that means. I actually am prepared to take my shoes off if that's what you ask me to do during this call. This will be fun.

The idea folks listening today, as Dennis teed up for us, it is absolutely critical to have your customers stick with you. We're out there trying to get our product and our service into the customer's hands in a way that they stick around with us forever.

We're keeping an eye on our bottom line results, we're doing our best to get good products out there; we want to use our service levels as a differentiator and not everyone does that extremely well.

The idea's we'll talk about today is using what Dennis has learned over his career. As we'll hear he's had 20 years worth of time with Disney, which everyone knows Disney World and the whole Disney Corporation is just fantastic at playing the service game.

Then, of course, Dennis has been out there consulting with other businesses teaching the same principles he'll be sharing with us on the phone today. I'm really excited about this. Dennis, if it's okay with you why don't we just jump right in and get this interview rolling?

**Dennis:** That sounds good.

**Pete:** Why don't we start with a little bit of your background so we can hear what your success story is and how you came to be somewhat of an expert at this; I imagine with 20 years at Disney you were probably one of those folks wearing a Mickey outfit.

**Dennis:** Yes, I was. I grew up in Vermont. I was going to college up there and thought I'm going to go down to Disney World and just work for a summer job and just spend three months down there. How cool would that be?

I went down and I was Captain Nemo at 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. It was just the greatest thing, so I ended up transferring to school



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down here and started working at Disney World full-time and actually went to college part-time. It took me seven years to get my degree.

As my kids say there are a lot of people that take seven years to get their degrees, they call them doctors. It was worth it because I learned a lot during that time on the front lines. A lot of people go to Disney World and they think it's got to be so much fun to work at Disney World, how great would that be?

It is, but it's also a lot of hard work. If you've ever been here to Disney World during the summer time when it's really crowded, it's very hard work but very rewarding. I was promoted into my first management position there in 1981, it was the best title I've ever had. I was the supervisor of Fantasyland. I wish I had saved one of the business cards.

I managed different locations around the company and probably the two best jobs I had there was managing the Disney University, which is the internal training arm of the company— with cast members coming into the company and training them, and then the leadership training.

We had a division that worked with outside companies that would want to come down and benchmark with us and my last several years with the company I ran a division of that at the Disney Institute.

About 10 years ago I decided that I wanted to go out on my own to teach, speak, write and all those things, so that's what I've been doing for the last 10 years. As much as I enjoyed Disney World, and I really did, I like this even better.

**Pete:** That sounds like the ideal career for just about anyone that wants to get into the line of work that you are.

**Dennis:** That Disney name opens up a lot of doors.

**Pete:** To me, that is one of the key words for i-saga and for me, as one of my values is fun and having fun in what you do. You can't help but put a smile on your face when you just talk to someone about Disney World.



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**Dennis:** It's interesting; when I do presentations or workshops with organizations, afterwards— let's say it's a keynote speech, there are always the folks that come up and say we were just at Disney World and we had the greatest time.

I do get the people who are not Disney fans. They were there and just did not like waiting in line or something bad happened. It shows that nothing is perfect. There's no perfect organization, but the thing that I do need to hand to the Disney organization is that they try very hard to create that outstanding experience because they recognize that's what causes the loyalty.

The rides might get people there the first time, but there are a lot of places that you can get great rides. Just ask any of your listeners, most of our products today, people have a lot of choices and rides are no different.

What Disney recognizes and what I try to communicate to organizations I consult with is that what we're really selling is a relationship; an experience, because that one time visit, that one time purchase isn't enough to keep any of us in business anymore.

People have to be referring us and coming back and all of those things we want our customers or guests to do.

**Pete:** That's a great perspective. I have to tell you, we took our kids to Disney last year for the first time and we promised them that okay, we'll go to Disney this year, and I was thinking Disneyland because I had some meetings scheduled out in Southern California.

Wouldn't you know I ended up with a three month consulting gig in France? But, they have a Disney too, so that's exactly what we did.

**Dennis:** This is actually true now. With all of the Disney parks the sun never sets on a Disney theme park. Somewhere in the world there is a Disney theme park open at any given moment.



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**Pete:** There you go. It was just as much fun, it created that experience and they're still talking about it.

**Dennis:** I'm glad to hear that.

**Pete:** Dennis, one of the questions I ask every guest before we dive into their particular content has to do with their specific and personal definition of success.

The reason I do this is because as the Institute of Success and Goal Achievement there's some pretty interesting things we learn getting into the minds of the guests on what makes them tick, not just what they're experts at.

I'm interested in Dennis Snow's definition; what is success for you?

**Dennis:** It's probably one that you hear from a lot of the folks that you talk to, but I believe that it is an important definition, which guides what I do and that is to do something that makes a difference in the lives of other people.

I try to build my business and my personal life around that, whether it's with my kids or with my clients. At the end of the day I really do want to make a difference.

I know that sounds trite, and I don't know if I'm always successful at it, but when I am successful at it I feel good, I think the client feels good and my family feels good. So, to me that's been a good guiding principle to live my life by and build my business by, focusing in on that difference.

**Pete:** I think that's perfect. The idea of i-saga being the balance and gaining more of financial freedom, fun and fulfillment, this is the fulfillment piece.

- Did I make a difference?
- Did I matter?
- Am I making contributions?



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It's a perfect match that your definition of success hits that mark.

**Dennis:** I find when I get hung up on the financials; we all need to make money and we want to make money, that's a part of what we do, but when I find things don't go right it's usually because I've gotten so bogged down in that that I'm forgetting about contribution and the value that I'm trying to bring to the table. I have to keep my eye on the ball.

**Pete:** Good for you. It's not necessarily all about money and if you are bringing great value than everything else will fall into place.

**Dennis:** Not all the time, but most of the time.

**Pete:** That's right, as often as we want. One more curiosity point about Dennis Snow the person, before we get into Dennis Snow the expert; are there any core values or beliefs that guide you that you want to share with us?

**Dennis:** Yes. I've tried to communicate these with my children also. I have two grown children and I've tried to communicate this, and this is what I try to live my life by. I would never say I'm always successful at it but this is what I try to do.

1. Number one I try to **respect** everybody I interact with, to treat everybody with dignity and respect.

I do a lot of work with healthcare industry and that's helped me to appreciate the importance of dignity. In a healthcare situation, that's about as much out of somebody's comfort zone as they're going to be. When I work with good healthcare organizations and see how they make sure that people maintain their dignity, it was a real lesson to me.

I try to do that; be respectful of other people's views, their position, their opinions, so it's that whole idea of respect.

2. The second thing that I really try to live my life by and ingrain in my kids is the whole idea of **responsibility**.



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You do what you say you're going to do. You take your commitments seriously, you follow through on your commitments and that you have that sense of ownership that we're responsible for our own actions.

I believe in a thing probably most people would agree that there's too much finger pointing and looking for where can we place the blame when nine times out of ten we can place the blame square on our shoulders.

If there's something that goes wrong, there's something we could've done differently, so that whole idea of taking responsibility I think is critical in business and in personal life.

3. The third thing is **resilience**.

Stay with it, there's no such thing as an overnight success. I love that - I think it's in Malcolm Gladwell's new book where he talks about the 10,000 hour rule. When you look at the Beatles who were viewed as overnight successes in the early '60's with all the years they spent playing in joints and places all over that they paid their dues.

Most successes, when you peel it back there was a lot of hard work. There were failures in there and there were sleepless nights, but they stayed with it.

4. The fourth thing for me is just being **grateful** for what I have.

I recognize that it's all tenuous, that any of this can go away at any moment and we better be appreciative of whatever we have while we have it.

Those four things are again, both from a business perspective and a personal perspective, the things I try to live by- respect, responsibility, resilience and gratitude.

**Pete:** Fantastic. I really like the balance you had there. You almost had four R's.



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**Dennis:** I know. The trainer in me should have four R's. One of the things I always find with certain things - you might disagree with me, I'm sure other people do, but a lot of times when things just neatly fit into an acronym I always think oh you had to make it fit the word so you add something on or took something off.

I always just say these are the words and if they spell something out great; if they don't that's great too.

**Pete:** We'll work on that, maybe there's a foreign translation for the word gratitude that begins with the letter 'R' somewhere.

**Dennis:** If we can seamlessly make it work, yes.

**Pete:** Let's get into customer service and loyalty to see if you can help us and all of the entrepreneurs and small business owners. Frankly, even those that are in corporate America roles that are listening to i-saga, because there are quite a few there too, so help us get going here.

If we can crack this, it'll really help stabilize this. Let's get us grounded, when you talk about customer service, what is it that you're talking about?

**Dennis:** Customer service to me is how do I feel? That's what customer service is. As I'm interacting with your organization, how do I feel?

I think customer service comes down to three things, when you boil it all away. Let's say I'm a customer of your organization, these are the three things I want.

- ✓ I want you to do the job right. I want you to know what you're doing.
- ✓ I want you to be efficient while you're doing it, and
- ✓ I want you to be nice to me.

That's really it.



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When I look at customer service anywhere I go those are really the three things. Do it right, know what you're doing, be efficient while you're doing it and respect my time because my time is valuable and all those things, and be nice to me.

If people in our organizations do those three things consistently we're going to be successful, we're going to have loyal customers.

When you think about when things go wrong from your experience as a customer anywhere, it's usually one of those three things. They didn't treat me nicely, the person didn't know what they were doing or they wasted my time.

You can layer on complexity but when you boil it down, and I don't care how complicated the industry is, those are the three things we all want as customers.

**Pete:** You can almost hear the complaints of friends of yours at the weekend barbecue or at some event and they do tend to fit into when someone or a business doesn't do one of those three things well.

**Dennis:** If you interact with an employee at a store who clearly doesn't know what they're doing, you're irritated. They might be nice but you're still irritated because they don't know what they're doing.

You can have someone who knows exactly what they're doing but they're demeaning while they do it, they make you feel like a fool; whether it's a computer software hotline or whatever it is. Again, it's a negative experience.

You're in the checkout line and there are 10 checkout lines and only one of them is open and there's a 20 minute wait - they're not being efficient so you're irritated.

All three of them need to be in place for it to be a great experience. You could get away with screwing up on one of them, but when you



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start screwing up two of them then you're going down a slippery slope and if you screw up all three of them I'm not coming back.

**Pete:** One of the lessons that I learned, back in my McKinsey consulting days when I was a good pair of hands, operations consultant working with clients on a particular service project, was we were looking at customer service ratings.

You may find that you screw one of these things up and if you recover well then your ratings might go higher than they would've been otherwise.

**Dennis:** Absolutely you can find that. You can't live off that, where hey let's screw something up so we can have some service recovery here.

**Pete:** You have that grace period maybe one or two times and that's it.

**Dennis:** Exactly. If you go someplace and they continually screw it up you're not going to be loyal to them, but your point is very well taken. Things happen in organizations, but when they make it right and you can tell that they really care to make it right, they can come out stronger because of that and it all comes down to the employees.

Do they really buy into those three things? Do they know what to do if something does go wrong, whether it's getting somebody else involved or being able to handle it themselves, do they know exactly what to do?

I'm sure when you were doing that with McKinsey that was a big part of it. A lot of employees don't feel empowered to do anything they're not sure what to do if something goes wrong.

**Pete:** Yes, and I think there's a huge training aspect. Some of the elements of your background are a direct hit if you think about the Disney University—you just think of Disney—Disney is one of those companies that pops to mind with great service.



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The amount of training that they give the cast members in the case of Disney, to make sure they are completely on board. It's interesting, I have friends of mine who, in their businesses, I'll call up and the person who answers the phone sounds like a dead fish. It's like you're bothering me, what do you want?

When I look at the three criteria, if you will, those three elements... do the job right, be efficient, respect my time and then be nice to me. Their role at that point is if you want a live person to answer the phone, they're answering the phone and getting it to the right place.

That perspective - it's not that they're not nice to you, but there's a certain tone and you just feel a little bit awkward through that interchange.

**Dennis:** Here's a way to look at it that I think a lot of companies could find to be valuable and connects exactly to what you're saying it's the difference between a task mentality and a relationship mentality.

You can answer the phone as a task or you can answer the phone as an opportunity to build a relationship. It's a completely different outcome depending on which mentality you go with.

You can answer the phone as a task and transfer the person to the right line, but as a customer I feel processed. Whereas, if you answer the phone and you have that relationship mentality I feel welcome and important to you. So, it's that difference between a task approach and a relationship approach.

**Pete:** That's very helpful and you brought that theme up earlier, this whole idea of relationships and the idea of selling a relationship or an experience.

**Dennis:** It's like a toll booth operator. There are toll booth operators where they take your money as a task. Then there are other toll booth operators that they smile at you they say have a nice day and they mean it. They're doing the same job, it takes the same amount of time, but one makes you feel good and the other one makes you feel processed.



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**Pete:** That's a very accurate word; processed. I feel like I just went through the ringer.

**Dennis:** That applies to any organization.

**Pete:** Completely. Disney, of course, pops to mind as a great example and a great company, and I know you'll talk a lot about Disney through this whole thing.

This idea of great customer service and building the loyalty; what are some other companies? Who else is really good at it?

**Dennis:** Besides the ones we all talk about; Nordstrom, Southwest Airlines and others that we all talk about, two of my favorite companies that some of your listeners may have heard of- one is called Seasons 52.

It's a fairly new restaurant concept that is part of Darden and I think they have maybe five or six restaurants now. Orlando is just crazy with restaurants. You can't throw a stone in any direction and not hit a restaurant. It's massively competitive- how they all stay in business I have no idea- but Seasons 52, first of all the food is excellent, so they get it right.

They have trained their people to be experts in food recommendations and wine pairings with the food. The level of knowledge that they have trained their servers to have in this and their approach in doing it, just in how nice and friendly they are- my wife and I eat there all the time and it's consistently excellent.

When you go back to why they do it it's the exact same thing that we focused in on when I was at Disney. They hire great people to do it, they train them on all of these things constantly, and they hold them accountable for it it's non-negotiable, that's part of working at Seasons 52.

I have yet to send somebody there. I have clients and so forth come to town or friends come to town and I'll say go to Seasons 52. I have yet



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to have somebody come to me and say yes, it was okay. Everybody raves about it.

They've cracked the code of consistency, which again was one of the secrets of Disney. At Disney there are 55,000 people who work there, so it would be very easy to lose consistency there.

There are all the different themes and different levels of hotels and different parks, so it would be very easy to lose consistency and that's why having rules is good.

- ✓ Are we hiring the right people?
- ✓ Are we training them on the approach that we believe in as an organization?
- ✓ Do we make it non-negotiable?

Seasons 52 does that, Disney does that, Nordstrom does it– all the greats do it.

Another favorite company of mine is a shoe store called The Walking Company. They sell the same types of shoes that you can find in a lot of stores but the way they do it, the way they make sure they get you the right pair of shoes, you feel like it's almost a partnership when you go through it.

When you walk out of there you feel like you got the right pair of shoes and that you know these are the right pair of shoes. You go back to how they do it and they're professionals at it. They don't just hire anybody they hire people who are wired to make sure that you get the right product.

They train them consistently, constantly and they hold them accountable for it.

**Pete:** There's certainly a pattern in everything you've described, circling back to those three elements they're coming through. You've used the word accountable and holding people accountable to deliver in the method that they've been trained.



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So, they've got the great people and they are going through a tremendous training exercise it sounds like, to make sure that consistency is in place.

In the accountability I imagine if you're going to get a hand slap for something, in one of these businesses, that's known for its service level they'd better be delivering in the way they're supposed to be delivering or otherwise it sounds like something a supervisor could pull you aside for.

**Dennis:** My guess is if you go back to your McKinsey days and you see where there might be gaps in performance in an organization you're consulting with, more times than not it's the accountability gap.

We do train people on these things, but then we don't hold them accountable for actually following through. There's a wonderful quote, and I have to apologize because I don't know who said this. I heard it somewhere and I didn't write down who said it. I've Googled it and everything and I can't find the originator but it says:

***“Intolerable service exists because intolerable service is tolerated.”***

I just love that quote because most organizations tolerate intolerable service. If we do, we can put people through the greatest training in the world, but if then we walk by as they ignore a customer or don't pick up that piece of trash off the ground as we trained them to do, like we did at Disney and we ignore it, we're doing is we're training them that that's okay.

What happens on the job following that formal training is just as critical and just as important as that formal training.

I look at everything as training. When we have our team meetings, when I'm talking around and I'm coaching an employee or a cast member, when I'm posting a customer letter up on the bulletin board, positive or negative; that's all training.



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**Pete:** That's a healthy perspective. I like that perspective because of what it's saying back to one of the core values you have about being responsible for your own actions.

In a lot of ways, if you're the manager or the supervisor you are also responsible for your team's actions; therefore, what you're doing is you're using every opportunity as a training opportunity.

**Dennis:** We're all guilty of this, we get busy and we get bogged down in certain things as leaders. It's very easy to take your eye off the ball. We're in business to drive customer loyalty. When we get bogged down in some of the minutiae and it takes us away from reinforcing the values of the organization everything starts to suffer at that point.

To me, it all comes back to that accountability piece. Am I holding myself accountable? Am I holding my people accountable?

By the way, I look at recognition as accountability too. When we see one of our people delivering excellent service or we hear them on the phone and we say wow, they sound great the way they handled that situation; recognizing their performance, to me that is accountability too.

Consequently, it says I really do believe in these things because I recognize you when you do those things very well.

When I was a supervisor at Disney World, as supervisors and managers, the expectation was 75% of your time would be spent out in your area, whether it was one of the theme parks or hotels, whatever you were responsible for; interacting with guests, interacting with cast members, observing the operation and coaching where necessary.

Seventy-five percent of your time was expected to be out there, not in your office doing paperwork and all those other things.

**Pete:** That's as a manager?



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**Dennis:** Quite frankly, our offices were so bad you didn't want to be in there anyway, which goes back to Walt's philosophy. He didn't want the company to spend any money on offices. He said I don't want you to be in your offices, I want you out in the park.

**Pete:** Is that for all people or is that for the managers?

**Dennis:** The 75% of your time?

**Pete:** Yes.

**Dennis:** That's for anybody in a leadership position, you're expected to be out there 75% of your time.

**Pete:** So, I imagine this whole theme of helping everyone in the organization to see things from the customer's or guest's perspective, that's certainly one tool that pops to mind, you just hold that expectation that three quarters of your day and of your time you're going to be doing exactly that.

If you're a one person entrepreneur or a large organization for that matter; what are some tools you can use to really help understand the customer's perspective?

**Dennis:** One of the tools that I've used with a lot of my clients is called service-mapping. Other people might call it moments of truth, process mapping, but there are a lot of different names for it.

What I do with organizations is we look at any process. It could be somebody's entire experience in a restaurant or it could be phoning in an order for a catalog, it could be taking out a loan at a bank - you look at any process and you map it out.

The key is that you map it out through the lens of the customer. If I was working with a team at a bank for instance and let's say we were mapping out the loan process.



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We're looking at the various steps and somebody says well, at this step now we process the paperwork. The question I would ask is, while we're processing the paperwork what's the customer doing? Of course the answer is they're waiting.

Okay, now we have something to work with. When you map out the experience it's through the customer's lens, which is a critical part of it and it makes people look at okay, we've been designing this for our own convenience, not the customer's convenience.

Once you truly have it mapped out through the lens, how do we make each step excellent? Let's say a process has 15 steps to it. What I usually find is that five or six of the steps, we're delivering excellent service, world-class service at those steps.

This makes you look at the entire thing now and when you look at each step through the customer's lens there's always room for improvement, there are always several steps where we're delivering that task oriented service that I talked about.

As an entrepreneur, as a single person company or as a small organization, it makes you start refining what you put your customers through so that you're demonstrating that you understand their lens each step of the way.

That service mapping tool for me is a real tangible way of doing it because then that service map can become a great training tool. If I hire somebody else into my bank this is how we open up a savings account. This is how we process a loan here and so forth, so they see it through the customer's lens and that's how we differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

**Pete:** I imagine that's the sort of analysis that would lead you to recognize maybe we should put up some wide screen TVs in here, maybe we should have a little kids play area over in the corner.

How many moms or even dads— how many parents are coming through, standing in line and being forced to wait for 20 minutes?



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**Dennis:** You go back to the early days at Disneyland or even Disney World at the beginning and when you waited in line you waited in line, that's what you did.

Over the years, looking at it through the lens of the guest and how they can differentiate Disney from the other options people have, now you look at some of the newer attractions - if you don't wait in line at least for a few minutes you miss part of the show. They built it into the show.

It's constantly looking at your process and how do we get better at what we do to differentiate ourselves, not just for the sake of getting better, but this is how we differentiate ourselves from the competitors?

**Pete:** How do you get everyone involved in this whole theme of making improvements? It's one thing to maybe get people together on a formal exercise to do a service mapping and in the course of a couple days go brainstorm out a couple solutions, but how do you bed it in so that you can actually get everyone who works there thinking about this?

**Dennis:** I think it goes back to when I was defining training earlier, it's the relentlessness of it that it's everything that you do. I think as leaders we have to make sure that we don't see customer service as an add-on or as oh yes, something else we need to do.

That is what we do. I think as the manager, as the owner or as the vice-president, what we need to be doing is constantly reinforcing it, constantly communicating and asking our people; what can we do better?

That doesn't have to be done in a formal meeting that can be done as you observe and you see things that as the leader you think gee, that just doesn't look right.

Ask the employee on the spot, what do you think we can do better here to make this easier for the customer? At first our employees if they've never done it before, they look at us like we're crazy. What's he/she



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really getting at here? However, the more we do it the more people start recognizing we're sincere about it and we really do want their input.

I also do believe that it is important to periodically step aside as a team or as a small group with a dedicated time of what can we do better and do things like service mapping. I think there's a lot of value to that, but I think the other thing is just our relentlessness as leaders of how can we serve our customers better?

When we demonstrate that's our focus our people start to recognize that needs to be their focus too.

**Pete:** Dennis, earlier you were talking about this major effort to have consistency across an organization— 55,000 people— and how consistently Disney has managed to pull this off.

What are some of the tricks there? How do you do that?

**Dennis:** I don't want to over simplify it but it really does go back to these three things.

Are you hiring people that are wired to give great service? You can't train somebody to be empathetic. You can train them how to be empathetic in our organization's culture or in our industry, but they have to bring the empathetic bone to the table.

You can't train somebody to pay attention to detail. They either do or they don't. Like an accountant, if somebody doesn't have the attention to detail gene in their body you can send them to the greatest training program in the world and they're just going to be a mediocre accountant.

If you take somebody who really has that attention to detail and send them to a great training class, they're going to take that and build that into the way they do things.



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A huge part of Disney's effort and world-class organizations is— are we looking for people that have that service approach and building their interviewing process around that?

Once we've got that person on board, going back to what we're talking about with that training piece, are we then saying all right, you've got the raw materials here are our non-negotiables in our organization. This is how you take what you have inside of you and apply them in our organization.

The third thing is that accountability piece and it is non-negotiable. We're going to recognize you when you do it well and we're going to coach you when you don't do it well. If you consistently don't do it well we're going to have to part ways. That's how you get consistency.

For example, look at the various hotels in the Disney organization, they have economy hotels and they have high-end hotels. The experience itself, the luxuriousness of the experience is going to differ in those different ranges of hotels, but how you're treated as a guest is going to be the same.

**Pete:** I can see that. I don't know if I've stayed in the full spectrum, but way back I remember staying at All Star Music, which is the more economy end. I've stayed at the Timberland Lodge.

**Dennis:** Excellent!

**Pete:** Yes, that was fun. I've stayed at - it was one of the two new ones, it was either the Beach Club or the Yacht Club.

**Dennis:** Wonderful hotels.

**Pete:** That was great. Two years in a row I ran the marathon there, so not only did I want to actually go and have a nice place to sleep, but what I was eating mattered and to get that nice big pasta dinner the night before.



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I distinctly remember it wasn't necessarily something that was on the menu, but they knew hey, we've got thousands of runners here that are going to get up and run all day, let's feed them what they want.

They were tremendous at preparing essentially something that was off the menu and they were happy to do it.

**Dennis:** The amenities at the various levels of hotels clearly are going to be different, based on the price point, but you should always know you're in a Disney place, regardless of where you're staying, regardless of where you are on the property by the way you are treated and that's where those non-negotiables come into play.

**Pete:** Where else can you have breakfast with Tigger?

**Dennis:** That's right. There may be a few other places, but Disney lawyers are tracking them down. You never want to mess with the mouse.

**Pete:** Let's talk about culture a little bit, because that's one of the things that I'm attentive to with the work I do with my clients, in trying to construct a culture that they want.

In this case, it's really a culture of service excellence. I know that you've talked a bit about language and the importance of the right language. How does all that fit together?

**Dennis:** I think language is an important part of culture. When you look at if you speak from a - I'm going to try to say this word - anthropological perspective, that's how cultures are perpetuated is through language and stories.

When you look at the Disney operation, that phrase of calling employees cast members is not a trite thing that is a strategic thing. It's not about loading people on the submarines at 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, it's about making it a show, it's about making people feel like they're there.



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It's not about handing somebody the hamburger, it's about happiness, it's about the feeling they have of being in a restaurant at Disney World.

That whole idea of cast member is critical. Other terminology we use is on stage and back stage, very critical stuff. Back stage, that's where all the operational stuff is going to happen.

At Disney there's the typical back stage stuff. I have seen Cinderella smoking a cigarette, all of those weird things, but never in view of a guest. When you're on stage the show is on and I think that applies to any organization.

When you look at companies, the language that you choose - one of the things I always cringe is when I hear a manager or an executive calling their employees head count. What's our head count? Or, when they call their customers throughput - what's been our throughput today?

That's language that detracts from what we're trying to create as an organization. Again, it sounds trite, but a lot of companies call their employees team members or associates and while that's not the secret to building people up in the organization, its part of the secret.

What is it that we're really trying to do? Disney calls their customer's guests that goes back to Walt Disney wanting people to feel like they're a guest in his home. You treat guests differently than you treat customers.

I'm not saying that companies need to adopt that Disney language they just need to think about the language that they use. I was at a presentation one time for a group of employees that a vice-president was giving, and he was giving some information to the front line employees of the organization.

He said 'I don't think this has come down to your level yet'. I thought do you hear what you're saying? Come down to your level? Do you mean we haven't demeaned ourselves down to your level yet?



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Words matter. I think that one of the things as leaders if we want to create an environment that truly delivers service excellence we need to watch the language that we use. Again, it's not about the show business language and all that stuff, it's about language in general.

**Pete:** It's interesting that you brought in the anthropological perspective, that rolled off well. It's a mouthful. I said that without practice.

This is going way back, but I had a few college courses, because I had to select my electives and I can remember taking an anthropology course way back when. It was fascinating not only talking about Lucy, the missing link and all that stuff but also some of the indigenous tribes and how cultures are created was some of that.

I'm having this echoing in my mind back from all those years ago as you brought that up and that's exactly right. Whether it was pre vocal language days and how people grunted and how people communicated, oftentimes the alpha dog had its way of communicating and that was a very specific type of culture.

As we humans created the power of speech and the ability to communicate more clearly it shaped and accelerated who we were as people. Interesting, and you've really applied that in this environment.

**Dennis:** Storytelling is just such a powerful leadership tool.

When you're in a presentation or you're in a new hire orientation, whatever it may be, and we get all the, here's what you get fired for and here's who your bosses are that's all stuff we need to know. But then, when we start hearing the good and the bad stories, that's when our ears start perking up because there's an emotional connection there.

Part of that culture I think is that culture of story telling and what are the stories that make up...I'll give you an example.



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When they were opening up Disney World back in 1971, the Contemporary Resort and hotel they hadn't laid the sod and it was the night before opening.

They got a whole bunch of cast members, they brought them over to the Contemporary Resort, they trucked in all the sod, they were laying the sod and the President of Walt Disney Attractions, a guy by the name of Dick Nunis, he was out there with the group, the trucks rolled up and they start throwing out the sod.

Somebody said to him, Dick how does this go? He said I don't know green side up. That's a story that's been told over and over since those days of, we all pitch in. When it comes down to it, the chips are down and we're opening or the show is going on it's everybody's responsibility to pitch in.

Sort of the gag around that is people say green side up and they all know what they're talking about. It goes back to that story that's been shared over and over since that opening day.

**Pete:** That's a great image. Thankfully, my sod is green side up right now.

**Dennis:** It depends on the time of year down here in Florida, but yes its green side up today.

**Pete:** That's right. So Dennis, the idea of i-saga, the Institute of Success and Goal Achievement, is about more freedom, fun and fulfillment, and usually freedom has to do with financial freedom to take the pressure off.

What I'd like to do is connect all this that we're talking about today. How does being a part of an organization or your own small business, whoever it is, that does great at providing fantastic customer service and developing that customer loyalty, how does it relate to the financial freedom, fun and fulfillment?

**Dennis:** At this particular time this is a very pertinent question. I don't want to give the impression that giving great service automatically means everything from a financial standpoint is great.



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Most companies today, Disney included, Southwest Airlines included, Nordstrom included - it's a tough financial time.

The companies that stay focused on creating the great customer experience, when we come out of this time, those are the companies that will be positioned to excel and leave the competition in the dust.

Even though we're all in financially challenging times right now, if we sustain that loyalty when it comes around, we've already got our loyal customers. Whereas, so many organizations today and you see it all around, just cut and cut and cut to the point where they're really hurting the customer experience. They're either going to go out of business or they're going to be in rebuild mode when everything turns around.

In terms of financial freedom, my hope would be that right now giving excellent service that we all live the financial dream.

Right now, it is a tough economy, so to me it's more important right now than ever to be focused on how do we deliver that experience so we don't lose customers and keep that differentiation, so that when things do turn around we're positioned to be highly successful and that's where I think we are right now.

When I see clients that are saying where can we cut, let's cut training, let's cut this let's cut that - I'm thinking you're just killing yourself, because when this all turns around you're going to be left in the dust by the companies that keep their eye on the ball.

Great customer service doesn't have to be expensive. It's about those same things we talked about at the very beginning do the job right, be efficient while you're doing it, and be nice to me. It goes back to those three things.

It doesn't have to be expensive to do those things. We can do that on a lean labor force and a budget.



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**Pete:** Absolutely. If you've managed over the last few years, put the processes in place where you're hiring the right folks in the first place, giving them the right level of training and you've created that culture, then it's not about throwing more money at it it's about the people doing what they've been trained to do and doing that well.

**Dennis:** Going back to that recognition piece— now is the time if ever— to let your folks know how much you appreciate what they do.

**Pete:** That is important, yes. What about any differences for entrepreneurs and small business owners to be aware of as compared to the larger organizations like Disney?

**Dennis:** I think it's just the scope of the thing that changes. The principles are exactly the same and I've had the opportunity to work with large organizations, tens of thousands of people and small organizations with 10 people.

The principles are the same. The complexity is what changes. I think from the entrepreneur's standpoint, the one thing I would say and this is a Tom Peters quote is *"It's not that your people don't know what you're doing it's that they do know what you're doing."*

As an entrepreneur it's probably more important for you to be role-modeling the behaviors you expect because you're it; you're who everybody on the team is looking at.

In a large organization sometimes you may have a bad manager here and there and you can skate by with that, but when you have an entrepreneurial organization and it's just you that your employees are looking at, it's vital that you model the behaviors you expect them to exhibit.

Otherwise, I think the principles are the same. Hire the right people, train them, hold the accountable and then from the customer end do the job right, be efficient and be nice to me.

**Pete:** You have simplified it haven't you?



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**Dennis:** Pete, I think what the challenge is, is that we tend to over complicate it. We get overwhelmed, we look at all the stuff we have to do and we tend to over complicate things. I think it helps to step back and say what is it we're trying to accomplish here? It usually is pretty simple stuff.

**Pete:** Right, it doesn't have to be any more complicated than it is, especially if you're going back to your point of service mapping and understanding things through the lens of the customer. If you're doing it well there with a simple process then why make it anymore complicated than it needs to be?

Believe it or not we're closing in on the end here Dennis.

**Dennis:** You're right, wow!

**Pete:** Look at that.

**Dennis:** We're only on question number one.

**Pete:** Great. The next question then is the one that covers everything else. If there was anything you wanted to share that we just didn't get to, given that I only asked you one question today.

Honestly, we did talk a lot about so many different dimensions of customer service and customer loyalty, if there's that one bit of advice you wanted to share that I didn't get embedded into a question for you, what would that be?

**Dennis:** The one mantra that I think can be an umbrella over everything that we've talked about is everything speaks. From a customer, guest or client perspective everything speaks, every detail is saying something about the experience.

That everything speaks mentality covers all we've talked about from the customer experience, just remember everything speaks.



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From our employee's perspective as we interact with our employees it's the same thing; everything speaks. Everything we do; what we do during the interview, what we do during the training, what we do during coaching; everything speaks.

No matter the size of the organization if leaders could just have that one thought in mind that really helps to guide our behaviors as leaders.

**Pete:** That's fantastic you brought in that employee perspective. What just popped into my mind for me was an earlier part of my career where I was doing some interviewing. I actually had some great employee experiences at a couple of fantastic places to work and McKinsey was certainly one of them.

Every process in there is just extremely well buttoned up and I was part of the recruiting team for a while. I remember moving on after the McKinsey life and going into some other roles. The recruiting process was as hodge-podge patch-worked together as you can imagine and that was the first experience for these people that you were trying to woo into your organization.

**Dennis:** Everything speaks.

**Pete:** Everything speaks.

**Dennis:** An example of that is say one of our values is attention to detail and during that interview process there's no attention to detail. The training began of what we really value.

We can put a poster up on the wall that says attention to detail is one of our values, but you missed a golden opportunity to show that it really is one of our values.

**Pete:** Great example. Dennis, this was fun.

**Dennis:** I sure enjoyed it and it did go by quickly. I hope I hit the things you wanted to hit as we went through this.



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**Pete:** You did, it was fantastic. The last thing I want to make sure that you get out there to folks is how can people find out more about you?

**Dennis:** The best way is to go to my website [SnowAssociates.com](http://SnowAssociates.com) and if they want to email me its [dennis@snowassociates.com](mailto:dennis@snowassociates.com). The website is really a link to everything else; I've got two books that I've written, my blog and so forth. They can access all that through the website and then get to me also.

If people have questions they want to email me with or if they would like to call me, again all my contact information is at the [SnowAssociates.com](http://SnowAssociates.com) website.

**Pete:** That was great, thanks for sharing that.

**Dennis:** Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today.

**Pete:** It's been wonderful and you do have such depth of experiences and it really came out in what you were describing and you also managed to boil it down to a couple simple principles for us. I'm grateful for that and I'm sure the listeners will get a lot out of today.

**Dennis:** I hope they found it helpful.

**Pete:** Thank you so much. Take care Dennis and to all the guests today, thank you for joining the Institute of Success and Goal Achievement check back every single week, [i-saga.net](http://i-saga.net).

Take care, everyone.