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Soc 1, 12:10-1:35pm

13 March 2019

### Bring the Magic to Life at Disneyland

Growing up just like many other children around the world, I was exposed to the Disney brand through movies, television, toys and their theme parks at an early age. My mother absolutely adored all things Disney and instilled that into me growing up. I had Disney Princess costumes, Mickey Mouse toys and monthly trips to Disneyland. As the years went by, my family size grew and Disneyland became more of a luxury due to the costs. Although I couldn't go to Disneyland much like I used to, my love for all things Disney was something I always carried with me. As soon as I got a job at fifteen though, I saved up and bought myself my very own Disneyland annual pass. I went to Disneyland more frequently and began to appreciate it more for what it was. It was like experiencing it again in a whole new way. I loved seeing how the nightly fireworks beautifully lit up the sky above the castle or the sweet smell of waffle cones as you enter the park along Main Street USA. As I began to go almost every other weekend, I wondered what it would be like working here and being apart of the magic. It became a dream of mine that I couldn't wait to achieve. Now, I've been apart of bringing the magic to life at the Disneyland Resort for three years.

Working at Disneyland is unlike any other job. It is like becoming part of another culture because of the "ideas, values, practices, and material objects that allow a group of people, even an entire society, to carry out their collective lives in relative order and harmony" (Ritzer 64).

When you work at Disneyland you carry out many norms, values and practices in your every day work life. You become apart of the big show known as Disneyland and you are called a cast member, not an employee, because you are the cast that supports the show. The consumers are not to be called customers, but guests and when in guest view that is considered “onstage” like a show, and vice versa with “backstage”. You have to point a certain way and always smile. You cannot have visible tattoos, your fingernails must be trimmed and colored neutrally, and your hair must be styled and cut conservatively. These values are reflected on the first page of the Disney Look Book stating, “Your attitude and performance are direct reflections on the quality of our Disney show. Often, it’s the seemingly little things that detract from our guests enjoyment — chewing gum, having poor posture, using a cellular phone or frowning. Of course, smoking and eating onstage are also strictly prohibited. All of this adds up to one of the most important aspects of your role in our show: good stage presence,” (3) By adhering to the norms which are enforced with sanctions that are important to the Disney brand, you are participating in a culture.

Being a Disneyland cast member is a prime example of a sub-culture. George Ritzer, author of *Essential Sociology* defines sub-culture as, “Any society includes many subcultures... that develop around particular styles of life and share special vocabularies,” (71). As a cast member, you develop special vocabulary that you can only share with other cast members because they are the only ones that will understand. An example of a special vocabulary word would be the term “GC”. GC stands for guest concern at Disneyland and is a term that I use frequently off and on the clock when speaking to my fellow cast members. According to Ritzer, “for those who are not members of the group, an idea, a value, a practice, or an object may have little meaning, may mean something completely different, or may even have no meaning at

all,” (64) If I were to use the term in a sentence at school, no one would understand it unless that are apart of the Disneyland cast member culture. You become very close to your fellow cast members because of the struggles you face together as well as the funny stories that come with the job since you can relate to one another in a way that you can't with people outside of the culture.

Many are intrigued by the Disney Cast Member culture. In fact there are many clickbait articles throughout the internet titled “20 Must-Follow Rules If You’re a Disneyland Cast Member” or “23 Secrets Disney Employees Won’t Tell You.” Disney is very protective of its brand and image. If you post a photo backstage or share backstage secrets that is termination worthy. Because of the mystery of the backstage world, many are extremely fascinated and curious what happens behind closed doors. At Walt Disney World, there is a tour called “Keys to the Kingdom” where Disney will actually take guests in select backstage areas to highlight some behind the scenes magic. I found that a guest made a comment about the tour on Facebook that was hilarious, but also an interesting perspective on how guests see cast members. The guest said, “Best tour ever. The cast members are actual people that use cell phones and eat and listen to music. Lol. It was cool to see them in ‘real life.’” I found that interesting because it perfectly illustrates how guests see us cast members. We are held to such a higher standard that we almost don't seem “real” to guests. I always get an excited reaction when I share with strangers that I work at Disneyland, followed by several questions wondering what it is truly like to work there or silly questions about popular myths such as how Walt Disney's head is frozen and kept under Sleeping Beauty Castle. It's mainly very secretive due to the fact that Disneyland is seen as a show and many are intrigued what happens behind the scenes simply because they cannot see it.

Because of the quality of entertainment Disney produces as well as their high standards, many are fascinated how it all comes to life.

As a Disneyland cast member you have to maintain a certain look as part of the show. With your designated costume you are to wear your name tag at all times. I chose my Disneyland name tag as my cultural artifact to represent the Disneyland cast member culture because of how important it is to us cast members. These name tags are unique and set us apart from guests visiting the Disneyland Resort as well as other employees across the world. Your name tag is a very special part of your costume and it signifies you have officially become a Disneyland cast member on your first day of training when Mickey Mouse personally hands it to you. The Disney Institute Blog shares how meaningful our name tags are because of how they “foster connections with our Guests. Beyond the approachable oval shape and the Cast Member’s first name, they also display our hometown city and state. By conveying this little bit of extra personal information, it creates opportunities for conversation: “*Do you know so-and-so from my hometown?*” or, “*How often do you return home?*” This friendly interaction can create an instant bond between Cast Members and Guests.” (Disney Institute) Our name tags allow us cast members to interact with guests and to help them when in need to ensure they have the best experience.

Disneyland name tags have been around since the park first opened in 1955 and, “have been created in different shapes, colors, materials and sizes as a source of pride and tradition” (Disney Nametags are a Symbol of Company Heritage) for cast members since then. The history of the name tags actually goes back to the founder himself, Walt Disney. Jack Spence in his article, “Disney Name Tags,” shares how “Walt wanted his cast members to treat the

‘customers’ [a banned word at Disney] like they were ‘guests’ in their own home. He wanted a casual informality at Disneyland. Everybody is friends at a Disney theme park. He also wanted the cast members to know that all of their jobs were important when it comes to creating the ‘show.’ It doesn’t matter if you wash dishes backstage or conduct VIP tours for heads of state; everyone’s efforts are needed, important, and valued. Being on a first name basis with all was a leveling tool,” All cast members wear name tags, even if you are corporate because again Walt wanted that sense of community. By wearing these name tags, we become more approachable and friendly to guests and our fellow cast members. This was very important to Walt and is still shown today throughout the Walt Disney Company values.

Name tags are so essential that there is even a full section in the employee handbook about them. The Disney Look Book says on name tags that, “We are a first-name organization. Your name tag should be worn with pride in an upright, readable position on the upper left shoulder area of the outermost layer of clothing. Based on costume design, this placement may occasionally vary... Name tags should be kept in good show condition with no visible chips or scratches...All names on company name tags shall be the Cast Members’ full, legal, first or middle name or a derivative of their name. Cast Members are permitted to have their hometown city and state or country engraved on the name tag,” (6) Disney strives to ensure their cast members always look sharp and presentable ready to assist guests. As Chuck Schmidt said in his article, “Either way, name tags show that the person wearing it is a representative of the Walt Disney Company, and that in itself is reason to be proud,” (Disney cast name tags are a source of pride).

As a member of the Disneyland cast member culture I have developed fond memories working for the Mouse. It has allowed me the opportunity to interact and connect with so many different people from around the world that enter through those main gates. I have made many friendships, including my boyfriend of four years, and the chance to make a positive impact on family vacations. I've even been fortunate enough to visit Walt Disney's personal apartment above the firehouse. I remember the sense of pride and excitement I had when I first received my name tag from Mickey Mouse on my first day of training. I am immensely proud and honored to be apart of Walt Disney's vision for Disneyland. Every time I get to put on my costume and pin my name tag to the left, I feel as though I'm making Walt Disney himself proud, which is something that I truly treasure and couldn't be any happier to be apart of.

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