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Making The Disney Way: Your Way

Guest was Bill Capodagli

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# Making The Disney Way: Your Way

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## **Transcription of Interview**

**Joe Dager:** *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Bill Capodagli. Bill is one of the most recognized storytellers on the cultures of Disney and Pixar, educating audiences with Walt Disney's original success formula of 'Dream, Believe, Dare, Do' that is used by entrepreneurs and Fortune 500 companies alike. I'm honored by your appearance, Bill. I see that you have the storyboard behind you. So, as we talked before, you sort of walk the walk.*

**Bill Capodagli:** What we do. Thanks for having me, Joe. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Joe:** *Thanks for your participation and excited about the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of The Disney Way. When did you first publish the 1st edition?*

**Bill:** Well, the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, I think the publishing date is 1997, but it was like December of 1997. So, 1998 was the first year.

**Joe:** *An understatement maybe to say it was well received. It has lead to several other books but what did you really think excited people back then?*

**Bill:** I think it was the culture of Disney. I mean everybody is, and we've all grown up on Disney and Disney has created one of the best-known brands in the world. For business people to be able to identify with that brand and then see how their secret of, Walt's secret of 'Dream, Believe, Dare, Do' could apply to just about any business around. I think that's the thing that really enticed organizations and leaders to read about it.

**Joe:** *I have both of the first 2 editions. I justified the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition because I had to buy the Kindle version. I justified it to myself. I also have the Field book, Leading the Speed of Change. I have attended Disney training. Why do I want to buy that 3<sup>rd</sup> edition?*

**Bill:** Sure, the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition deals with; after the 1<sup>st</sup> edition had come out, some of our criticism was that "Oh gee, this is something that you helped with other companies, and we featured some of our prime clients in that like Whirlpool and Bristol-Myers and such. So, after about 7 years of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition coming out, we looked around for companies that we were working with that have embraced these principles, and that's how the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition came into being. Companies like the accounting firm of Ernst & Young, the Men's Warehouse, Four Seasons Hotels, all those that embraced Walt's principles of 'Dream, Believe, Dare, Do'.

This edition, when McGraw-Hill approached us about a year ago and said "Gee, do you have any new clients and new stories and how about implementation, how can people do this?" Over the past years, we've been working with a lot of startups and a lot of organizations that were trying to really change their culture, really trying to revamp their culture to become more customer-centric. The same week that McGraw-Hill asked us to think about revamping the book into the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, we got this call from a little company out on the West Coast and they said that they really loved our book and invited me to come out and talk to their startup organization, and I was scrambling at the time I got this

e-mail, and I didn't recognize the name. But, when I came back, and I talked to my wife, who is my co-author, she says "You don't know who Tyra Banks is?" When I saw her picture, of course, I remembered, who she was. When I thought about that I talked to Tyra, and I said: "Would you be willing to be featured in our book as a startup organization if I came out and helped you for the better part of a week get things going?" And, she said, "All right, I'd love that." And, she has, and it was a great experience.

**Joe:** *Well, maybe some of my listeners don't know who Tyra Banks is.*

**Bill:** Well, Tyra Banks is a supermodel, a talk show host, a producer. She is a very successful The World's Top Model and an actress. Now, she is the CEO of a cosmetic company called Tyra Beauty and rather than just put her name on a product like many celebrities do, she went out and went to Harvard Business Training for 3 years, not an MBA but she learned about business from the Harvard Business School of Training, and she is putting together this company that she wants to be her legacy.

**Joe:** *'Dream, Believe, Dare, Do' that motto as you call it 'The Disney Way,' how was that motto put together? Was it something that Walt Disney actually did or was that naming it something that you just created to organize the approach?*

**Bill:** Well, legend has it that he was once asked what his secret to success was, and he said he would dream of things that have never been done before. He would test those dreams against his beliefs and values. He would dare to take the risk to make those dreams come true and lastly put plan skills, so those dreams do become a reality. 'Dream, Believe, Dare, Do' when we started examining the Disney Company, it all fit into place. Walt was very true to his values. He did dare to take the risk. He was on the verge of bankruptcy and many times and always came out of it. I believe from Walt's death in 1966



to 1984 when Michael Eisner and Frank Wells came into reawaken the sleeping giant of the company, for those years they really didn't dare. They had a lot of the dreams of Walt, and they still believed in their beliefs, but they didn't dare to take the risk. Everybody stood around and said, "What would Walt do?"

**Joe:** *There is a process to this isn't there. When I use the Disney Way Field book, I'm sort of looking at similar things that Toyota, the Toyota Way, I mean there's a lot of similarities to success, is there not?*

**Bill:** There is. I've taught Six Sigma, and I was in consulting for many, many years. I was trained by Dr. Deming for 1 year. We sponsored The Deming Institute when I was at a large consulting firm. My staff, and I were all trained by Dr. Deming and put on seminars with him and such and I would take clients to see Disney, to see their total quality management process. The people at Disney would tell me, they'd say "Well, we don't have a TQM process here." I said "Yes, you do. You just don't know you have it."

**Joe:** *Yeah, it's so interesting because it just a little bit different way, and more of that is just the words that that are used, the show thing and the plussing. I see so much similarity and like I said, The Disney Way Field book could practically, okay, not to demean either book here, could be very similar to The Toyota Way field book.*

**Bill:** It is. It is by all means.

**Joe:** *I always thought that the Disney Way was the precursor to Design Thinking, Lean Startup, the innovation models of today. Is it, do you see that? Am going down the right path?*

**Bill:** Well, I do. I do, I mean the storyboard in concept, people talk about mind mapping now. I mean it's, basically storyboard and such and the voice of the customer. Walt's thinking about the customer and knowing the customer, trying to solve customer problems, trying to make that customer experience, as special as he could are all things that companies are striving for today.

**Joe:** *Let's just go to that storyboard for a second. Everybody's building customer journey maps, and they're doing service blueprints, and they're making 3M a fortune on post-it notes, okay, in what they do. But, that storyboarding concept, that's something that is engrained in cartooning and started back with Walt back when he, how did that evolve, I guess I'm asking. Did it start with Mickey?*

**Bill:** Well, yeah, it actually did when Walt started his cartoon studio back in the '30s. The way that studios were back then, they would have these stacks of drawings around the studio, and you thumb through them and remember those books when you were kids, you would thumb through, and you'd see the characters actually move. Rather than do that, Walt had his artists with their sketches on boards and hung these boards on the walls so that he could see the story unfold. They could talk about the dialogue. They can move scenes around, and his cartoons had much more detail than the cartoons of his peers at that time, so he had hundreds and thousands of more drawings and before they would start the very extensive process of hand drawing the thousands of cells, he wanted to make sure that storyline was correct and, hence, the word storyboarding came into being. And then, the motion picture industry and advertising industry picked that all up. The first movie that was actually storyboard was 'Gone with the Wind'.

**Joe:** *Oh, that's very interesting. Did Walt take that same concept then and then moved it into a business practice? And, to build Disneyland, let's say.*

**Bill:** In the late '50s and '60s, early '60s he turned that into a problem-solving technique, where he would ask a group of people about a problem or concern and have them all write their cards on one idea per card, put it up on a wall and move things around. I like to call this my idea landscape because you see the ideas kind of unfold and such.

**Joe:** *Well, that's, an idea landscape, that's interesting. In my training at Disney, they always talked about getting the headers right, and then organizing and then kind of the dots on the cards. Can you just touch upon that because I think there're so many similarities to the Customer Journey, and that's such a big thing with UX and designers these days?*

**Bill:** When you throw out an idea to a group. One of the things we do with groups many times are 'what are the barriers to providing Disney like service in your organization.' That could be what we call the topic card in that, and then everybody starts writing ideas down on 5x7 or 3x5 cards, and the facilitator picks them up, shuffles them up and then they start posting them on the board, and they start clustering them by like topics. When you get 3 or 4 in a cluster, then you ask the group "What do you want to call that?" That becomes the header card. So, at the end of this storyboard, you'll have maybe a dozen or so header cards and all the barriers and hundreds of detail cards on 'what are the barriers to providing service'. We do something else with the groups, and we give them little dots, these sticky dots, and we usually give them 3 or 4 dots, red dots, to put on the header cards on the topic that they feel is one of the biggest barriers and then blue dots to put on the detail cards. In the matter of about an hour, you get a group of people that really focus in on what are the top 2 or 3 barriers that they need to change in order to start providing a more customer-centric culture for their organization.

**Joe:** *I thought that was some of the best training that I've ever had. What do you think one of those secrets in the Disney Way that makes that model sustainable? And is it still evolving?*

**Bill:** Number 1, I think, one of the things that a lot of organizations don't realize, and I look at my own career in consulting over the past 40 years, and I started with organizations doing industrial engineering, and anyone can come in and make a lot of improvements in an organization and save money in a short period of time. But, that's not sustainable if you don't have the proper culture.

What I learned from Dr. Deming and from Disney, both, is that the culture needs to be right. I mean you need to start trusting the people, and you start needing to put great teams together. One of the co-founders of Pixar, Ed Catmull, I just love what he tells us about teams. He said "You can give a great idea to a mediocre team, and they may screw it up. But, if you can give a mediocre idea to a great team, they'll turn it into a great product." Putting together a culture where people's ideas are valued, and they're respected, and they're trusted is one of the most important things, and when people know that they're being trusted to do their work, they'll rise to levels that surprise even themselves many times.

**Joe:** *Putting those people first is the Disney Way? That Disney Way is really getting people involved the right way? And, expanding on their excellence.*

**Bill:** Exactly. And, letting people know that "Hey, we're trusting you and to deal with customer problems in the best way you can." I mean one of the things that really amazed me when I was interviewing some of the customer service people at Disney, that they had at their disposal a half a million dollars of tickets and cash to solve customer problems at



their disposal. I said, "Well, do you have some limit? I mean if you give out a thousand dollars of tickets to somebody, do you have to get that approved?" And, they said, "No. We have to justify it. We have to document it. We have, and everything. Make sure that we're not giving out tickets to our brother-in-law and sister-in-law and things like that." But they trust the people to make the right decision.

**Joe:** *Well, one of the things that I think about Walt Disney and I think about Steve Jobs, some of the icons are credited with knowing their customers. How did they develop that innate knowledge and how did they transform that to an organization; learning about customers?*

**Bill:** I think what the secret to both of those men and very different in many of their styles but I think they were interested in solving customer problems. I mean Steve Jobs didn't go out and say "Gee, I want to make a better Walkman." He went on and said "Hey, I carry around dozens of CDs and how can I get music? How can I solve that problem?" Same thing with Walt Disney, he looked at amusement parks and said "Gee, these things are dirty and ugly, and parents don't like going to those. I want to put a place together where parents and kids are going to have a great time."

**Joe:** *I think it's so true. I remember a statement by Steve Jobs that I'll probably not get it quite right, but he said when he was comparing Zune and some of the things Microsoft was doing, he said "Our people like music." And, what he was, I think what he meant by that is that they were involved in making the great user experience that they liked. That they're just making it like they would want it for themselves?*

**Bill:** Right and I think the other similarity between the 2 gentlemen is their love for the aesthetics, love for making it look good and feel good. I mean part of the Apple experience

is opening up your product. When you go to an Apple store, and you buy something, the clerk will actually give you the package. They'll say "We want you to open it up. We want you to experience the packaging and the joy of actually opening it up."

**Joe:** *So true because when you think of Walt Disney or Disney World or Disneyland, you get off the train, and you walk in and the first thing you smell if I remember correctly, is like fresh baked cookies somewhere. Isn't that true?*

**Bill:** Cookies and popcorn, yeah.

**Joe:** *Yeah, yeah. I mean you, that experience is right there when you just walk in, right?*

**Bill:** Right and everything. I mean Walt used to send a gentleman, John Hench, to the park for one day, once a month, all day to look for colors that didn't work. So, I mean colors, smells, everything was important to the experience.

**Joe:** *You've encapsulated so much in the Disney Way book, what has been something that you've taken from it? Why do you continue writing that book? One, you probably make money on it, but I mean, but you have to have a passion for it.*

**Bill:** Well, I think that passion for this edition is seeing some of these companies that are less well-known or just starting up or are really trying to change their cultures. My co-author, my wife, and I have really enjoyed doing it. We had enjoyed featuring an organization which we've worked for, for 3 years, a government organization that has just had outstanding results, Ottawa County, Michigan and they have just totally embraced the Disney Way, they call it the Ottawa Way in their organization. And, third element that I wanted to include in this book is a brand new chapter that we call 'The Real Pixie Dust is

Love' and we talked about Walt's passion for his customers, for his people and for his product and the fourth part of that chapter is for himself because a person has to feel good about what you're doing, feel good about themselves in order for them to really deliver that world-class customer service.

**Joe:** *I think you said something that was really unique there that I don't hear from a lot of people, and I've always kind of expressed an idea that you never become Lean, you never become a Lean company until you stop calling it Lean, and you call it your own.*

**Bill:** Right.

**Joe:** *And, you just said it's not the Disney Way? It's the Ottawa Way, and it jumped out at me.*

**Bill:** Yup.

**Joe:** *And, that, because that's so important to embrace that because that's when it becomes a culture, right?*

**Bill:** It does, it does. They need to embrace it. They need to; it needs to be theirs.

**Joe:** *I look at your website, and you're just returning from a speaking tour, I think, that you did to maybe promote the book. Are you still out giving speaking engagements?*

**Bill:** Most definitely. We're doing speaking keynotes and working with clients to help them implement to become more customer-centric in their cultures.

**Joe:** *Okay, well, what's, is there anything you'd like to maybe add about the Disney Way that I didn't ask and some deep secret that's maybe not even in a book?*

**Bill:** Well, I think you touched on it, Joe. That people need to internalize this. I said, "You can't copy a culture that's right for Disney or the Four Seasons or Ottawa County." You need to define a culture that's right for your organization then make it work, and there's no other way of putting it. It's hard work but the results can be phenomenal.

**Joe:** *Well, and I think you hit that point, and that's what everybody does. When I go from the marketing side, they're always looking for a template to use that was someone else's.*

**Bill:** Right.

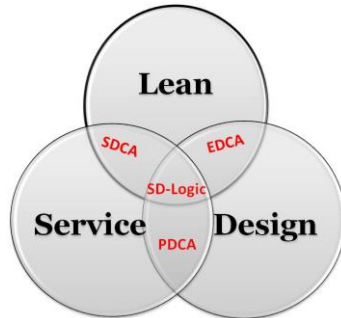
**Joe:** *I've enjoyed this time very much, Bill. What's the best way for someone to contact you and learn more about The Disney Way?*

**Bill:** Sure, at our website, [www.Capojac.com](http://www.Capojac.com).

**Joe:** *I encourage everybody to take a look at The Disney Way. I can't think of a better way to spend the weekend than reading that book, okay.*

**Bill:** Thanks, Joe. You're very kind.

**Joe:** *Thanks again. This podcast will be available on the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 website. So, thanks everyone for joining us.*



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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