

Häagen-Dazs International Franchisees' Renewed Focus on Employee Training Results in Increased Customer Satisfaction, Employee Retention and Sales

SUMMARY

International ice cream manufacturer and marketer Häagen-Dazs needed help implementing and introducing a new training and brand-awareness program. Members of the company's marketing and operations team, as well as international franchisees, experienced tailored *Disney Institute* programs that explored the links between employee satisfaction, guest satisfaction and operational results. After implementing many of the lessons learned at the *Walt Disney World*® Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., franchisees report increases in sales revenue, growth, customer approval and employee satisfaction.

FULL STORY

Finding the Spark

For years, Häagen-Dazs has been known as an international manufacturer and marketer of super-premium ice creams. Customers in more than 50 countries have come to equate the brand with excellence. But despite its reputation as the creator of the "luxury" ice cream experience, the half century-old company discovered that not all of its employees fully understood the company's history, rich culture and the importance of communicating those attributes to customers.

"We needed to make our employees passionate about the brand," explains Guillermo Sadir, Häagen-Dazs' senior training and operations manager. Sadir and his franchise owners knew that if they could excite their employees, that excitement could translate into higher morale, improved customer service and increased sales.

The firm had recently introduced an international training program, its Branded Customer Experience, but as Sadir admits, "it was often a tough sell to get an 18 to 25 year old new employee in Latin America or South Africa to connect with the Häagen-Dazs brand and our culture. Many were hearing but not listening. What we needed was a spark to set the training program on fire."

Sadir, along with 40 managers, franchise owners and operators from Latin America, the Caribbean and South Africa, came to *Disney Institute* to find that spark.

Celebrating Employees

After consulting with the Häagen-Dazs team, *Disney Institute* recommended a carefully tailored series of programs incorporating content from Disney's Approach to Quality Service and Disney's Approach to People Management.

Disney Institute facilitators showed the Häagen-Dazs audience that much of the fabled "Disney magic" could be applied to scooping ice cream. "We're not going to tell you how to run your business because you are the experts at that," *Disney Institute* Facilitator Tom Madden told the group. "But we are going to show you some things we do that we think you may be able to use when you go home."

For example, on a behind-the-scenes experience to the *Magic Kingdom*® Park, the group heard Madden explain how every Disney Cast Member (Disney-speak for employee) understands that regardless of whatever job they may have been hired for, their real goal should be to create "special moments," a key element of the Disney culture. It was an "Aha!" moment for the Häagen-Dazs visitors. "We realized that every person coming into one of our shops is

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also celebrating something or rewarding themselves, and our employees should do everything they can to make that moment special,” says Sadir.

In the Utilidors, the underground service tunnels beneath the *Magic Kingdom*® Park, Sadir and his team saw firsthand how Disney communicates with its Cast Members, even posting photographic examples of clever ways to greet and interact with guests. Another poster displays acceptable and unacceptable examples of grooming. “We learned that we needed to tell our employees a lot more of what we expected of them,” says Sadir. Later as the group watched a video about the history and culture of Disney, they realized how important it was to immerse even a potential employee in a company’s culture.

Back in the seminar room Madden and co-facilitator Fernando Beltran led the group through *Disney Institute*’s Chain of Excellence, a model that illustrates the importance of treating employees as you would treat customers. “It’s a three-legged stool,” said Beltran. “Employee satisfaction leads to guest satisfaction which leads to operational results.” The presentation also emphasized the importance of hiring for attitude instead of aptitude. “We can teach skills but we can’t teach attitude,” Madden told them.

At the end of their visit, Sadir and his team were fired up. “You could see it in their eyes,” he says. “They couldn’t wait to get back to their countries and implement many of the practices they’d learned.” As Trinidadian franchise owner/operator Robert Hadad told Sadir, “*Disney Institute* has changed my life!”

Taking the Lessons Home

It turns out that Robert Hadad was not exaggerating. Since completing the *Disney Institute* training, Hadad reported double-digit growth in his business and is doubling his number of shops. “And that’s in a time when retail business in much of the world has been slowing down,” says Sadir.

The franchisee has been inspired to put into service a new “Cast Member” instruction program (he’s adopted the

Disney term), provide new uniforms, and has implemented many of the techniques Disney uses. He and other franchisees even put large mirrors in employee areas of the shops so employees can inspect themselves before they go “onstage” à la Disney. “That says a lot about the value of these *Disney Institute* sessions,” says Sadir. According to Sadir, franchisees also report a jump in customer satisfaction.

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Häagen-Dazs has re-launched its Branded Customer Experience and even introduced the word “magic” into its corporate vocabulary. “We now talk about creating magic in our shops. That’s a direct quote from Disney,” says Sadir. Also inspired by Disney, Häagen-Dazs has produced a video, “The Häagen-Dazs Essentials

Program,” that details the firm’s history, explores its culture and tells potential employees what is expected of them. “We realized we weren’t connecting emotionally with new hires,” says Sadir. “This will do that and help raise our employee retention rates.”

Häagen-Dazs franchisee Zaid Surtee from South Africa reported that his time at the *Disney Institute* was invaluable: “*Disney Institute* truly epitomizes what we should all be striving for. It was a magical experience.”