

From Culture to Brand: The Key to Achieving World-Class Results

Preface

For many years we at World Class Benchmarking have written countless articles, books and associated materials for the benefit of our clients and those we serve. Finally, we've decided to put those best practices in a unique book that focuses on the relationship between building great brands and high-performing cultures. The following is an excerpt from a chapter on Place. For more information about how you can acquire a copy of this book when it's published, contact us today.

Front of the House/Heart of the House

In optimizing the Place, there are areas/activities your customers should never see. They may be:

- Areas unsafe or dangerous to them.
- Areas that do not pertain to the customer experience.
- Certain operational activities being carried out away from their presence.
- Discussions that should not be held in front of the customers.
- Areas that permit employees time away from the customers to “let their hair down”.
- Employees on a break.

Imagine the impact at **Walt Disney World** if a Guest were to approach Cinderella only to have her turn toward you smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee on her break. The effect would be stunning! Obviously, employees (including entertainers that portray fantasy characters) need to, at times, take breaks. In order to consistently give great service, they need to be able to get away from those they serve, whether internal or external customers. This break area may be a virtual place as well as a physical place, but the employee should be able to vent, handle personal needs, or simply relax without being “on” for the customer.

We refer to this situation as separating the “front of the house” (external customer facing) from the “back of the house” (employee only areas). In most organizations, the two groups are divided and rarely interact with each other – despite the fact that they both exist to mutually support the external customer experience. To begin the process of unifying these two groups together, many world-class businesses have begun referring to the “back of the house” as the “heart of the house” – providing the acknowledgement that the external customer experience would be impossible without the internal support team performing the tasks required to successfully deliver the promised products and services. Unifying these two groups into a single, high-performing team is the first step in creating a culture of world-class excellence. One vital aspect of this effort is to support the employees by clearly identifying what the external customer should and should not experience. This is also known as separating onstage from backstage. The key is to control the Place so the customers – external and internal - only experience what adds value for them. As simple as this concept may seem, it is one that few do well...and their business suffers for it.

Notice your typical retail operations. Their break area is often in the front of the building. What message does it send to have employees taking a break in full view if there are long lines with customers waiting? Bottom line: If the employee doesn't have a Place to vent, relax, or let their guard down, they will eventually do so – in front of the customer...undermining the value of the customer experience.

Sometimes, there may be a back of the house areas that are open to customers. One example of this might be a general manager's office. When the operation requires this situation, there must be an additional element of public presence in the sense that they are clean, and that they contribute directly (and don't distract) from engaging customers.

Points on Place:

- What is considered "public" in your business? What is considered "behind the scenes"? How do you separate these areas?
- What activities need to be done in public, but should be carried out before or after the customers or compliers have arrived?