

10 Disciplines that Will Transform Your Operation

Arguably the greatest business book to appear in the last quarter century is Jim Collins' *Good to Great, Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*. In preparation for the book the author and his research team identified and examined 11 publicly traded companies that significantly outperformed their competitors for a period of 15 or more years to find out what made them so successful. The findings were sometimes surprising, often at odds with conventional wisdom, but definitive in that they were based on empirical evidence, not business theory.

One of the findings is that **all Good to Great companies had a culture of discipline**. Quoting from the book:

*"Much of the answer to the question of 'good to great' lies in the **discipline** to do whatever it takes to become the best within carefully selected arenas and then seek **continual improvement** in these. It's really just that simple."*

Here are ten disciplines for the hospitality industry that, when conscientiously and consistently applied, will revolutionize your operation.

1. **Service-Based Leadership**. Don't assume that your management team has the necessary leadership skills. Consistent, enterprise-wide leadership is necessary to ensure that the General Manager's vision is consistently communicated and thoroughly implemented. To avoid dilution of core values managers must be trained to a common understanding and application of leadership. Service-Based Leadership provides the example of service to all employees and creates the environment for employee empowerment.
2. **Organizational Values and Culture of Service**. Every employee must be immersed in a consistently reinforced culture of service based on well-defined values. Unless you establish the desired culture of service, one will arise on its own and invariably will be at odds with your vision.
3. **Benchmarking**. You can't improve what you don't measure. All departments must be benchmarked in detail. These benchmarks will tell you far more about your operation than just whether or not you made a profit. They will help you identify emerging issues, troubling trends, and inform your decision-making and solutions.
4. **Tools to Beat Budget**. The discipline of tracking your revenues and expenses in real time will focus the entire management team on meeting or exceeding budgets. It will also make budgeting for future periods far easier and more accurate.
5. **Continual Process Improvement**. Never rest on your laurels. Yesterday's accomplishments may have been good enough for yesterday, but being the best requires never-ending effort. Create a culture of continual process improvement to relentlessly pursue excellence. Your mantra, like that of your customers/guests/members, must be "what have you done for me lately?"
6. **Disciplined Hiring and Screening for Success**. Turnover is prohibitively expensive in the people- and detail-intensive arena of hospitality operations. The discipline of hiring well and getting the right people in the right seats will lower your employee turnover rate. Benchmark your turnover rate by department to continually analyze and improve performance in this critical area.
7. **Work Planning and Performance Reviews with Measurable Accountabilities**. To keep organizational development and progress coordinated and on track, every department head must

have a work plan with specific tasks, timelines, and accomplishments. These coupled with detailed departmental benchmarks will permit performance reviews to be based on measurable accountabilities instead of gut feel. When the entire management team is held individually accountable, performance naturally improves.

8. **On the Go Training**. Training is a necessity in an industry immersed in detail. There is much for employees to know and master, but with tight budgets and a pressing schedule of operations it is often neglected. One way to overcome this is to format essential training in small on-the-go sessions that can be taught in spare moments or pre-shift meetings. When material is prepared this way, it becomes a matter of daily discipline to pull out and review essential material. The final training discipline is to keep track of all training sessions so that over time nothing is overlooked.
9. **Customer Relationship Management**. Customers are the life blood of your business. How you and your staff interact with them is more important than anything else you do. Your relationship with your customers cannot be left to chance. It must be managed as carefully as your budget and requires a formal plan and thorough training of employees. In the final analysis, customer relationship management will determine whether or not you meet your budget and your mission of exceeding expectations.
10. **Employee Empowerment**. John Tschohl, founder of the Quality Service Institute, says,

"Without empowerment, an organization will never be a service leader. Empowerment is the most critical skill an employee can master and a company can drive in order to lure and keep customers."

Empowered employees are viewed as full-fledged partners in your quest for high levels of quality and service. They are encouraged to think, act, and make decisions on their own based on guidelines you define, but they must fully sense the enterprise's commitment to such empowerment. Simply saying that employees are empowered does not make it so.

Excellence in the service industry is neither easy to achieve nor commonly found. It takes commitment and "the will to make it happen." Jim Collins says being great requires disciplined people engaged in disciplined thought taking disciplined action day in and day out in the face of any adversity. But for those who choose to meet the challenge, the rewards are as great as the effort involved.

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