



The Ray Edwards Show, Episode 362

Creating Disney Magic With Lee Cockerell

- Announcer: [00:02](#) The Ray Edwards show, this is the podcast for prosperity with purpose.
- Ray: [00:41](#) Lee Cockerell is the former executive vice president of operations for the Walt Disney world resort as the senior operating executive for 10 years, Lee led a team of 40,000 cast members. I got this little business and even when I was in radio, I had like 150 employees at the top of the numbers game. 40,000 cast members was responsible for the operations of 20 resort hotels for theme parks to Waterparks, a shopping entertainment village, and the ESPN sports recreation complex in addition to the ancillary operations, which supported the number of one vacation destination in the world. Wow. That is. That's just a portion of the list of your accomplishments and things that you were able to do while you're at Disney and since you've left there and now you are helping other folks learn to create Disney magic. You're doing public speaking. You've written a book on leadership management and service called "Creating magic 10 common sense leadership strategies from a life of Disney and "the customer rules, the 39 essential rules for delivering sensational service." How do you find time to do all of this? Lee, don't you get tired.
- Lee: [01:20](#) Well somebody told me not to lay on the couch and watch TV after I retired. So I thought I better start. They something I've always wanted to write about, but I didn't think anybody would buy it. And then a literary agent read some of my work, said Y'all to write a book. I said, well, I don't know how to get it published. He said, I'll take care of that. And I got Disney to agree to let me. Uh, they wanted one too and they let me put this on the

cover. It sells more books with Disney on the cover than it does with Lee Cockerell, so I thought that was a good plan. At first books at 18 languages now around the world. Just sold it to China, Russia and a WHO knew? I mean literally if you'd have told me I was going to write a book, I barely read one, let alone write it. So it just happened in it. It was really. I'm pretty disciplined. So when I write a book, I go to Starbucks 6:30 in the morning, I read the paper and then I come home and I write from 8:30 to 10:30 every day, seven days a week, two hours. Discipline is how you do it because most people think they're gonna finish and they don't, they never finished because I get brain dead from trying to write. So if a good two hours is about the most I would ever do it.

Ray: [02:25](#) You decide you're going to finish, you have a plan and you do it.

Lee: Yeah.

Ray: Wow.

Lee: And when you get to give you one year to finish and uh, so you got to finish.

Ray: [02:34](#) So was discipline one of the keys to being successful at running the Disney properties?

Lee: [02:39](#) Absolutely. I mean I'm very organized and I had a very good system for keeping up with every time, but I would say the main thing that I did better probably was, I'm very careful who I hire. I tell people that's the most important thing you do in your business. So you bring into the company. So I, as we say, I used to tell people Disney hire slow and fire fast and you'll be more successful. So I would say we hire better, we're having more clarity we trained better so you know what you're doing and we have a better culture. And I, we boiled that down to hire them right, train them right, and treat them right. Then people will do a good job for you. So, but discipline is a big deal. Now. I've been teaching time management for 35 years because today most people are disorganized. I'm sure you work with people every day that don't do what they say they're going to do. They don't call you back, they forget. And I wish they were teaching it in high school and college because a lot of kids are, they don't know how to deal with the world when they leave home and everything's coming at him. And that's coming at us faster today than ever. So uh, and I had a good attitude because I didn't have a college degree. And when you don't have a college degree, it's pretty good idea to have good attitude will help you.

Ray: Wait a minute, you don't have a college degree?

Lee: I went for two years, but I forgot to go to class and I tell this story. My mother was married five times and she married husband number four. He had money so I got to go to college, but I didn't have very good study habits.

So I went up to Oklahoma state, screwed around for a couple years and then I went in the army because in those days you had to go in the army or be in college. And so it worked out pretty well. When I meet guys from Harvard, I say if I had gotten a college degree I could have got a good job. So that annoys them. So I don't say that very often.

Ray: But it's funny. So let me ask you, what's it been like going from running a huge organization to running a really Solo entrepreneur kind of business? What are the differences?

Lee: I love it. Let me tell you. People say, don't you Miss Disney? I say, no, you can't imagine what I had to put you recessions and cost management and more profit or more friendliness and more cleanliness. And I love being by myself. That's why I don't have anybody working with me I do everything. I don't want any people. If anything, some mistake in my business, I made it and I'm so. I love it when I tell people if you stay out of a big company very long, you can't go back because it's so you're so free and you feel so empowered to do your thing. So I, uh, I love it. And uh, been doing it for 12 years.

Ray: You can have an idea today and you can do it tomorrow.

Lee: Right.

Ray: I think you do a good job. From what I've seen so far, you do a great job of creating the same feeling of magic that I feel through Disney, through their operations. I mean, even if I go into a Disney store, which is probably one of the most removed from the ecosystem, maybe I'm wrong about that, but it seems like it would be far flung, but it still has that Disney feeling, that Disney magic about it. How do you create magic in a small business where you've got a couple of employees or maybe just one, but you still want to get that same magical feeling across? How do you do that?

Lee: You know, for me and I tried to do it in my businesses to be really reliable and keep my promises. If I tell you it'll be ready by noon, it will be. I try to think with all my clients, am I doing enough for them? Am I being enough for them when they, oh, so oftentimes I'll book something

and then the last minute give two more presentations while I'm there and I just said, okay, no problem. And it just works out. People like to work with me because I'm flexible. I don't just come in and give a speech and walk out the door and get back on the plane. I usually go the day early, I sit in the event so I can hear what they're talking about. It helps me with my speeches. Uh, whatever they want. I tell him my feet gets you, all of me, you can say it and so use me as much as you want. And I think most people like that because I get to know them really well and many of my clients hire me two, three and four times. So I guess that's the reason

Ray: That says volumes. It's easy to get people to hire you one time. It's another thing to get them to hire you a second time or third time. And just the things you just described are so unusual. I've dealt with a lot of speakers who like kind of helicopter and a helicopter out. They have no idea what the event's about, who the people are and I love that. You don't do that. How do you, I mean, how, how do you manage? That's a lot of work on Lee's plate. How do you manage to run a successful business and to keep the magic happening like that and still be able to have time to rest, to exercise, to spend time with your, at home, with your family. How does that all work?

Lee: [07:07](#) Oh, I'd say I practice what I preach. I time management. I work out almost every day. I have strength training twice a week. I schedule it, my wife and I named it Prehab so we don't have to go to rehab. We're building bone density. Uh, so I don't fall and break a hip. No, that's the beginning of the end. You want to talk about wasting time. So I schedule what I'm doing and if I don't want her to do something, I don't schedule anything during that period. And uh, I think everybody needs to know the top three things or four things you're going to do every day before you do anything else. So when I was at Disney, I was involved in the hiring, the training and the culture. When I retired, Priscilla told me my had three new ones to where she said, number one, take care of yourself. So you can take care of us. Number two, take care of your family. Number three, take care of business and if you have any time left over, then you can help Kim Kardashian with her problems. But don't get involved in wasting time

Ray: [07:58](#) and there's many opportunities to waste time. There's no shortage of people.

Lee: [08:01](#) It's a big problem for people. It's a huge problem. Actually.

Ray: [08:05](#) I have a solution I learned from my wife. I was complaining about how often my phone distracted me

and she said, you know, they have an on off switch on them.

Lee: Yeah. They have more common sense then we do.

Ray: That's, that's true in my case. Anyway, I know that for sure. I've heard it. One of the things that people talk about when they talk about Disney and the magic of the magic kingdom, it's the culture. How do we create a culture if we only have two or three employees or maybe it's just us and our customers is there. Is there a culture in that situation?

Lee: [08:33](#) Should be easier. Actually, I think there's a culture and a family and when you're just married to each other or at one child, you know, and I think what we thought about culture meant to us at Disney was hoping that we had created an environment in a culture where everybody woke up morning, wanted to come to work instead of have to come and I would say the key item as we worked on is making sure we had a culture and an environment where everybody matters and they know they matter. And that's something that we miss. We don't tell them. That's my wife said, if you love me, tell me. Don't keep it to yourself. And if you appreciate your people, tell them everyday we all miss opportunities to appreciate and recognize and encourage people and it costs nothing. And then in fact it'll help your business and it'll help your turnover and will help other people feel better about you. So I think we just don't. I don't know what happens when we get into business. We start thinking people are objects instead of they got problems to slack. We do and they want them. They want to know they matter and the best way to make sure they matter, tell them so you can test that out on your wife when you hang up today.

Ray: [09:38](#) Oh, I've. I've already tested it and it's good advice. The number one reason people leave a job is not because of the salary, is because they don't feel appreciated.

Lee: [09:48](#) Absolutely. That's absolutely true. And yeah, people don't leave companies. They leave people leader who doesn't ever appreciate it. I'm never says anything paused. He doesn't build her self esteem and self confidence and all the power we have to use it for good or for bad.

Ray: If you are Consulting with a company, a small business, and you went in and visited with them and they said, we've got problems. We don't have enough business coming in. We don't have enough customers. We, uh, we have trouble with our employees not showing up for work on time. How would you start them back on the road to

being on the right path? What would be the first thing you tell them?

Lee: [10:23](#) Listen. See the person who owns the company first and have the discussion and why this was happening, and do they have a problem with confrontation? Why do you have these people working for you that come to work late and why do you let this happen? You know who they are, why aren't you dealing with it? And by the way, if you can't deal with them for \$1,500, I'll fire them for you. You know, I mean, I have a firing for people who can't handle, do hard things. You got to learn. I tell people, if you can't do hard things, don't have children and do not be a manager and do not own your company because if you can't make hard decisions, and have hard discussions and then I would get everybody in the room and restart. Let me tell you, every employer said that will say, look, let me give you some clarity here. Just like your mother did. Let me be clear with you. This is where we're going going forward. You could either be here or not be here and I mean the problem is we're not clear with people. We let we let them get away with it and then we wonder why they, you know, I mean, we own it. If you have rude. Mr Marriott tell me once they've had flies in your restaurants because you like flies, get rid of them, right? Just like if you have rude children it's because you like that. We own it. It's right there we're the problem, not them, not the employers. We're the problem if we got them.

Ray: [11:43](#) I believe that. I truly believe that Tony Robbins says the number one impediment to most businesses growth is the leader, the mindset of the leader.

Lee: [11:52](#) Absolutely. Let me meet the parents. I'll tell you what kind of kids they are trying to get me to hire. You become like the environment and culture you live in.

Ray: You are. You're such a wealth of knowledge and wisdom and one of one of the things I love about you is your enthusiasm for what you're doing. Many people reach a point where they've retired and they want to just sit back and kick back and take it easy and they retire not only from their job, they retire from life and you have done the exact opposite. Can you talk about the importance of that a little bit?

Lee: Yeah, sure. I mean, people ask me, why do you still do this? Why are you speaking or are you going around doing seminars and blah, blah, and I said, because people clap and I have a big need to be loved.

[12:36](#) I'm insecure. I need people to tell me I'm great when I play golf, nobody claps, so I quit doing that and so it, it's. I get satisfaction out of it because I've come to the

conclusion we need more teachers and less bosses, so I try to teach and then people will appreciate you when you boss people around. They don't, so I get a lot of satisfaction and We all want it. I mean, frankly, deep down we want to be appreciated. I want to matter just like anybody else and so it just. What am I going to do? Like on the couch and watch gun smoke or something. I don't know what's on TV.

Ray Just that's good. That's a good thing. It's on TV. Something. I love what you said about we need more teachers and less bosses. That's profound. It's everybody has profound,

Lee: Most bosses are very insecure people, the ones that are running around intimidating people and they couldn't be teachers because they don't know much, so there's.

Ray: [13:33](#) There's the source of most of their problems as you have already identified earlier, so you've got to. You've got a podcast called creating Disney magic, which I love too. Fantastic podcast. Everybody should listen to it. It should be on your must listen to podcast list and you've got the book called Creating Disney Magic and you've got a. see the other book is called-I have it right here in front of me. Customer rules, and then you do speaking. How do people get in touch with you if they want some Lee Cockerell magic in their life, how do they get in touch with you?

Lee: Well, they can go on my website, LeeCockerell.com or they can call me at four, zero, seven, nine, zero, eight, two, one, one eight, and we still have groceries, but I wouldn't- Would not mind having a booking because I always liked more money, and I'm easy to get ahold of.

Ray: [14:16](#) Now when people call that number to get a screener.

Lee: If I don't answer that means I'm either on an airplane, I'm giving a speech or I'm asleep and that's what the voice mail says when I wake up, get off the plane or finish the speech. I'll call you back.

Ray: So you answer your own phone.

Lee: Yeah, sure. Everybody's got a credit card and if I want to get ahold of it and it could be dancing.

Ray: Again, profound. There's a whole culture today of outsourcing and kind of putting layers between you and the public and so people have people that answer their email to take their phone calls, returned their phone calls, that write their letters, that write their thank you notes that send their gifts out and I wonder sometimes

do, do people even know who I am really? Or is it just your staff that knows who I am?

Lee: Yeah. Those Christmas cards you get or preprinted from a lot of waste.

Ray: Yeah.

Lee: No, they're annoying actually they're annoying

Ray: I honestly, I'll tell you that this is the absolute truth. When I see those, I just throw them in the trash. Unless you can personalize and individualize, you can't be successful anymore. Agreed. I really got to figure it out.

Ray: [15:21](#) Yeah. Well, this has been such a pleasure and we could talk for hours because you've got so much to share. I recommend people get your books creating magic and then the customer rules and then they go to your website at leecockerell.com. And what's that phone number again?

Lee: Four zero seven dash nine zero eight two, one, one eight. No.

Ray: Test them out and call that number, but only if you're actually going to book him and I got it right here. He's waiting for your call. Lee Cockerell is standing by to take your call. Lee. Thank you so much.

Lee: All right, take care.

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