**GCCHM Leadership Certification**

**Level VII, Course #1**

**10 MINISTRY LESSONS FROM WALT DISNEY**

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**(Presenter’s Notes)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Whether you like it or not and whether you agree with everything its people do or not, you have to admit this: The empire of Mickey Mouse has touched millions of children and their parents around the world. Chances are very good you’re in that number.

Take this little test: Ever bought one of the mouse’s videos or DVDs? gone to a movie made by the mouse? bought a toy for your child made by the mouse? watched a TV show produced by the mouse? been to the mouse’s Web site?

Unless you just arrived from another planet, you answered yes to one or more of these questions. And if you have children, there’s a good chance you’ve even been to see the mouse at his house in Florida or California. If that’s the case, you’re not alone. In 2001, over 39 million people visited the mouse in Florida. Over 17 million visited the mouse in California. And over 17 million went to his park in Tokyo. Yes, indeed, the mouse has made a worldwide impact on children and families.

On a recent trip to Walt Disney World, I looked around at the excited faces of the children and parents who were anxiously waiting to enter the gates. What was the mouse, Cinderella, Frozen, or any other Walt Disney characters doing to attract all these children and parents? Why would these families spend hundreds or thousands of dollars to come here? What caused the smiles and the excitement on their faces?

As I walked through the gate, I asked myself, “What lessons can we take from Walt Disney that will help us more effectively spread the most important message in the world to children and their parents?”

**#1: BIG DREAMS (VISION)**

Story: It was said that when Walt Disney was out there in Florida looking for some land for some of his pet projects, he saw this huge piece of swampland in Orlando that attracted him. He scouted around and immediately he had a dream to make this place into a wonderland for children. He had a big dream! But his family members thought it was a crazy idea. But Walt Disney had a dream; a Vision!

**Proverbs 29:18:** “Where there is no vision, the people perish…”

**What Are Big Dreams (Vision)?**

• Vision is looking beyond what is and seeing what can be – Two pastors, Jud Wilhite and Mike Bodine had a huge impact in the Central Christian Church in Las Vegas. The city of Las Vegas is known as the “Sin City”; a city of extreme gambling…extreme entertainment…extreme hotels… extreme food buffets…extreme heat…and extreme sin.  They had a vision to make their church that would reach people who were far away from God—drug addicts, prostitutes, strippers, alcoholics and others whose lives had been wrecked by sin.  They inspired the members and together they reached out to help and serve these people who have no previous church affiliation, but encountered God’s grace and have their lives transformed.  Membership grew to thousands as people catch the vision from God who enabled them to look beyond what   is and see what can be.

• Vision compels you – if it doesn’t compel you, it won’t compel anyone else.  Nelson Mandela’s words, “It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”  After giving this speech, he spent the next 27 years in prison for his beliefs.  People were so inspired by his vision because they saw how much it inspired him

• Vision takes you out of your comfort zone – it will stretch you.  It can only be done with God’s help.

• Vision connects you with people – The reason 250,000 people showed up to Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech in Washington was because they connected with the vision he was sharing.  When you have a compelling vision, it will reverberate with people.

• Vision moves people to action– Walt Disney’s team became obsessed with making his vision happen.  Except for sleep, they spent all their time making the vision happen.  They worked days, nights and weekends without a complaint.  Not because they had to...it was because they wanted to. They were moved to action by his vision.  A compelling vision motives people to climb any mountain with you.

**Vision into Action**

* Through prayer and strategic thinking, get a vision for your ministry.
* Align your children’s ministry vision with the overall vision of your church -- we are not called to “build a children’s kingdom” inside the church.  We are called to build the church.  One church…one vision.  When your children’s ministry vision aligns with the overall vision of the church, it creates synergy and power.
* Formulate a plan that will bring your vision into reality.
* Communicate your vision with passion.
* Keep revisiting the vision even when faced with obstacles & snags along the way.
* Stick with the vision.

Walt Disney was born in 1901, and from an early age he had a passion for animation. Like all of us, Walt’s passion was tested by difficulty. He was hired to work at the Kansas City Star newspaper as an animator, but he was laid off. He then started his own animation studio but eventually had to file for bankruptcy. Then one day something happened that would change everything. In the early 1940s as he was watching his children play on a merry-go-round, a vision was birthed in his soul. He saw a place where children and their families could go to have fun together.

Disneyland’s opening day turned out to be a logistical challenge. Walt had sent out 6,000 invitations, but 28,000 people showed up. The temperature shot up to 110 degrees, and only a few water fountains worked. Ladies’ high-heeled shoes got stuck in the newly laid asphalt! Several rides and attractions broke or didn’t work, and there wasn’t enough food. Newspapers called the opening day Black Sunday. But Walt stayed with his vision, and Disneyland quickly became an extraordinary park. Within 10 years, 50 million visitors had entered and enjoyed the fruit of his vision.

What would happen if we caught a fresh vision from God for our children’s ministries? What if we began to passionately pursue that vision? What if we pursued it through difficulty and challenges until we saw it come to pass?

**#2: COOL ENVIRONMENTS**

* Create eye-catching backdrops
* Cool environments

**#3: CREATIVITY**

**Creativity into Action**

* Research – internet is a great source; type in tag words that reflects your thoughts and ideas.
* Brainstorm! – do this with your team.  You will find that all of your collective creative juices will cause an EXPLOSION of creativity!!! One suggestion can lead to so many ideas.  Bounce around your ideas and keep an open mind.  You will begin to think about things you had not considered!
* Name it and Brand it – Once you have narrow down the theme, come up with a name and they should always relate to one another.  Once your branding is established, the next step is to create a logo.  It will then become more personal.
* Give your old ideas a new and fresh look.
* Don't be afraid to discard traditional ideas and methods of doing things.
* Create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, and interpretations.

**#4: SEEING WITH KIDS’ EYES**

Kid-Friendly Things

* Add bright colors to your rooms.
* Decorate different areas with child-friendly pictures, designs, etc.
* Build props to enhance the worship areas.
* Use 3-D elements to bring your environment to life.
* Add mural artwork.
* Use kid-friendly furniture like throw pillows, beanbags, mats, etc.

Disney’s colors are bright, bright, and bright — kid-friendly for sure!

Sad to say, but the opposite is usually true in many churches. Children are marched into a beige room and set in brown chairs. Often, it’s because the adults who picked the colors picked them based on adult tastes. But if you want to say to children, “We love you, and we prepared this with you in mind,” then decorate with colors they like.

**#5: FIRST–CLASS CUSTOMER SERVICE**

* Formulate an effective system to give guests a first-class touch.
* Enlist greeters to give guests special attention. Choose friendly, caring people who can make guests feel at ease. Station these people at key entrances.
* Be Happy…make eye contact and smile!
* Greet and welcome each and every guest.
* Train your team to personally walk guests to the rooms rather than pointing the way.
* Give volunteers authority to make your guests happy empowers them.
* It’s important that people come before policy -- more important to take care of people than following procedures to the letter.  As long as breaking policy doesn’t compromise safety or our values, give your volunteers the authority to do so.
* Leaders must set the example of good customer service themselves – Even Jesus, the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords, the CEO of all CEOs, showed that we ought to put our best foot forward and serve all people.

Use These Phrases:

* Let me find out for you.
* It’s my pleasure.
* I would be happy to show you.  Follow me.
* Let me find the person responsible for that.
* He’s currently teaching our kids’ class.  I would be more than happy to let him know you stopped by and give him your message.

Employees each have a badge that shows they’re there to serve. We were greeted with smiles and a here-to-help attitude. It was the little, first-class touches that impressed us. Even when we bought souvenirs, employees delivered them to the front gate for us to pick up that evening.

Walt Disney World employee Jim Cunningham says, “It’s 10 percent product and 90 percent service. It’s the type of service received that usually determines the decisions customers make.”

No matter how much follow-up we do with visitors to our church, if people have a bad experience on their first visit, they probably won’t come back. We must invest time in making sure the first experience they have with us is a first-class one.

One of the things we need to move toward at our church to give a first-class touch is a host program. We want every new family who pulls into our parking lot to be greeted by a host family. The host family will be in the same stage of life as the guest family so they’ll have common interests. The host family will stay with them during their entire first experience at our church. They’ll walk with them and help them check their children into classes and then sit with them during the adult worship service. After the worship service, they’ll walk with them to pick up their children, walk them out to their car, and thank them for coming before they leave. A day or two later, the host family will call the visiting family to ask if they have any questions about the church and to thank them again for coming.

**#6: CAPTURE KIDS’ ATTENTION**

When you visit Disneyland or Disney World, the most exciting parts is watching the excitement on kids’ faces.  Even with long lines of waiting, kids don’t mind it.  They kept going until they feel exhausted into their beds that night.

Even with a small budget doesn’t mean it can capture kids’ attention.

**How to Capture Kids’ Attention?**

•**Aim High –** gear your lessons and music to the oldest kids in your room.  Give the oldest kids in the room leadership positions. Don’t talk down to them.

•**Honor their Attention Span –** it’s shrinking today.  In 1968 the average political sound bite (footage of a candidate speaking uninterrupted) in the presidential election was 43 seconds.  In the 1990s, it had dropped to around 30 seconds.  The constant interfacing with television, video games and online content has caused the attention span of today’s kids to get shorter and shorter.  Adjust your clock to hold attention span.  Instead of trying to hold kids’ attention for 60 minutes, just hold them for 5 minutes twelve times.  Most discipline problems come from programming that doesn’t honor ids’ attention spans.

•**Make it Fun – teach interactively and use activities that are exciting and hands-on.**

Children and their parents have fun with the mouse! I’ve met many adults who say they’ll never go to church because their parents made them go as a child, but I’ve

never met an adult who says he’ll never go see the mouse because his parents made him go as a child. The truth is you don’t have to make someone go where they

  enjoy being!

Some well-meaning people think children shouldn’t have fun at church. Yes, children need to be taught to worship God in reverence, but we also need to let them worship

God as children with fun, excitement, and energy. When your church is meeting the needs of children in a fun and relevant way, kids will wake their parents on Sunday

 morning, ready to go. When the opposite is true, children won’t want to come to your church.

Are children saying your church is boring? Hint: If they are, it probably is. Are you constantly telling children at church to “sit still and be quiet”? Do parents tell you their

 children wake up excited about coming to church?

•**Tell Stories –** All kids love stories.  Jesus used stories effectively when He talked to hundreds of people.

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•**Use Visuals and Sound–** music and sound effects heighten kids’ attention.  Use all the senses like touch, smell, taste to let children experience their learning.  Use puppets, animals, etc.

   *“Of all the inventions for mass communication, pictures still speak the most universally understood language.”*  -- Walt Disney (*If Disney Ran Your   Children’s Ministry by Barry, Smith, and Hudson)*

•**Interactive and Participatory.**

•**Get Emotional –** Tell stories that evoked emotion.  Facilitate discussions that involve emotions, like “How do you think Daniel felt when he was thrown into the lion’s den? Set up emotional moments like asking them to decide whether to give their favorite candy away to some poor children or keep it for themselves.

**Leverage Technology**

**–** Today our Generation Z kids are tied to technology:

  25% of kids are using the internet daily by age three.

  50% of kids are using the internet daily by age five.

  60% of all bestselling educational apps are geared towards preschool children

  30% of apps on parents’ devices are downloaded by their children

  38% of kids two and younger have used mobile devices.

 **#7: CONNECT WITH FAMILIES**

* Parents and children have fun together.
* Parents and children can spend time together.
* Parents and children create memories
* Both are highly engaged and involved in activities.

**George Barna’s Research**

In his book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions:  Why Children Should Be Your Church’s #1 Priority,” Barna reports:*

* Children between 5-13  32% probability of accepting Jesus
* Children 14-18  4% probability of accepting Jesus
* Those older than 18   6% probability of accepting Jesus

**Ken Ham and Britt Beemer’s Reports on Church Dropouts**

From their book, *Already Gone:  Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It,* they report on the 20-29-year-old evangelicals who attended church regularly as children, but no longer do so.  Their findings are startling.

* 95%   attended regularly during elementary/middle school
* 55%  attended during high school
* 11%  were still going during college

**Alarming Picture:**

* 40% of these children dropped out during their elementary and middle school years.
* We failed to make an impact during their elementary and middle school years.

**Impact of Families**

* Parents have far more time with their children than church ministers – on average, parents will have 3,000 hours per year with their kids.  The church will have about 40-50 hours per year.

If we want to reach children, we must engage with parents, connecting them spiritually with their children and equipping them to lead their families in the things of God.

**#8 TEAMWORK**

* Work hard to create a culture of family and fun within your team.
* Take time to share the philosophy and mission of your ministry with new team members before placing them in service.
* Give your new team members a spiritual gift and personality test so you can help them find their unique places of service. This leads to people enjoying their place of service and gives them “stickability.”
* Provide regular training for your team to help them grow in their leadership and ministry skills.
* Keep communication lines open with your team. Give team members opportunities to give you feedback and share their ideas.
* Regularly honor, encourage, and award team members.

In Florida alone, Disney employs over 50,000 people to make the magic happen. Walt said, “You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world…but it requires people to make the dream a reality.” Realizing their people are their most valuable asset, Disney goes to great lengths to train, equip, and care for them. Extensive training and interviews take place before placing people on the team.

Each new person is brought up to speed on philosophy and mission. Training, communication, and care are high priorities. Every team member is respected. Everyone wears a name badge. Work is fun. They even have a private lake for swimming, sailing, and fishing. There’s a plethora of ways in which performance is recognized. Awards, team member of the month, and peer recognition systems abound.

It’s not what you can do by yourself in children’s ministry, but it’s what the team of people you gather around you can do to make it happen. The success of your ministry depends on the strength of the team you build.

**#9: COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE**

**Importance of Excellence**

* Excellence honors God (Col. 3:23; 1 Cor. 10:31)
* Excellence inspires people.
* Excellence doesn’t mean expensive.

**Excellence is…**

* Orderly classroom with everything in place.
* Clear and easy to read signs.
* Children’s space is clean.
* Schedule regular walk-throughs of your buildings. Go through classroom areas and restrooms and make notes of areas that need special attention. Prioritize that list and knock it out one item at a time.
* Training people by example to pick up pieces of paper lying on the ground.
* Organize a work day to do spring cleaning at the church.
* Programming should be age-specific.
* Take care of little things like name badges, welcoming, follow through, etc.

If you drop a piece of paper at Disneyland, an employee picks it up. Before the park opened, Walt took a hot dog, ate it while walking, and counted the steps. So even to this day, the trash cans are 17 to 25 steps apart — just the right distance to throw away a hot dog wrapper when you’ve finished eating.

In the same way, our children’s ministry areas need to be clean and tidy. No matter how new or old your building is, there’s one thing you can do — keep it clean. What a poor testimony it is for people to see sloppy classrooms and stinky nurseries.

**#10 CHANGE**

* Honor the past and learn from the past—but look to the future.
* Update, revise, replace, and change what’s not working.
* Constantly look for ways to improve what is working.
* Are you willing to look for fresh ideas outside your comfort zone?
* Is your ministry changing?  Is it adapting?  Does it speak the language of today’s kids or is it stuck in the past?

**Phrases you won’t hear today’s Kids say:**

* Hang up the phone
* Look in the yellow pages
* Check the TV guide
* Check the map to find our direction
* My Walkman keeps skipping!
* Let me drop off this film to be developed

**Change…**

* Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate after each event.
* Gather feedback.
* Never graduate.
* Resist complacency – it is easy to put our ministry on cruise control and become content with the way things are...settle in…get comfortable.  There should be a sense of urgency to reach many who have not heard of Jesus.

Walt Disney had the same mindset of Paul who said this in Philippians:

*“I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize*

for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”   Philippians 3:14.

Like Paul, we must press forward, moving, stretch, striving to fulfill the mission of God.  Our ministry must continue to press forward as long as there is another child to reach…another family to share the Gospel with…another single parent to encourage…another preschooler to share Jesus’ love with…another pre-teen to help ground in their faith.

**Walt Disney**

*“Past traditions are important…but CHANGE is the dynamic that sparks growth.”*

May these lessons from Walt Disney Company help you apply them to your children’s ministries.  It’s about challenging us to do better where we are.  It’s about excellence and reaching for your dreams.