



The Spirit to Serve: Marriott's Way

J.W. Marriott, Kathi Ann Brown

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In the bestselling tradition of The HP Way, The Spirit to Serve describes how one of the most successful hoteliers of the twentieth century built Marriott International from a respectable \$50-million-a-year enterprise into the mammoth \$9-billion multinational giant of today.

Told in the words of J. W. Marriott, Jr., The Spirit to Serve distills years of hard-earned wisdom and experience into twelve timeless lessons that managers at any level can implement in their own business lives.

The Spirit to Serve: Marriott's Way Details

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Bryon E says

My two favourite concepts and chapters in this book are:

"Preserve Order Amid Change" and "Preserve Change Amid Order"

While I'd say that Management skills are important.

Frequently I see that too many management skills are an impediment to being a good leader, as those Management skills are often used to maintain the Status Quo, rather than be the foundation that Continuous Improvement is built on.

So, I like Bill Marriott's (of the hotel chain fame) statement in his book The Marriott Way - The Spirit to Serve "Preserve Order Amid Change" and "Preserve Change Amid Order". The importance of balancing Management and Leadership, that in my experience too often tips to the over management side.

Danny says

This is a great business book and really explains how one man's philosophy transformed a company into a hospitality empire. "Take care of your employees, and they will in turn take care of the customers." It's no wonder I have worked for the company for 6 1/2 years.

Nephi says

Interesting review of the Marriott Corporation's history and rise to power. I would have liked to hear more stories of how it got started - lots of info on how Mr. Marriott believes they succeeded - things like treating employees like customers, standard work, customer focus, listening, etc.

Erin says

Did you all know that this book is sitting atop the Book of Mormon in many Marriott rooms?

Sergey Kochergan says

Easy reading on the success of Marriott imperium.

Henrik Haapala says

- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Systems: "Maybe we are a little fanatical about the way things should be done. But for us, the idea of having systems and procedures for everything is very natural and logical: If you want to produce a consistent result, you need to figure out how to do it, write it down, practice it, and keep improving it until there's nothing left to improve. (Of course, we at Marriott believe that there's always something to improve)"
- Being hands-on manager: "If a manager is hands-on, more likely she's also on top of her business. She can pick up immediately on problems, concerns, or issues and take care of them before they fester or grow. Conversely, a manager who doesn't know his staff by name, who doesn't spend the bulk of the day walking the heart of the house, will eventually have problems. He's just not going to have the same rapport with associates or the knowledge base to make decisions as do his hands-on counterparts."
- Staying within circle of competence
- Overconfidence or "arrogance creep": "Perhaps the most important check against overconfidence in an institution is the quality that protects human beings from the same fate: a sense of humor. Being able to laugh at yourself once in a while is a good thing."
- Important qualities for corporate culture: good listening skill, attention to detail, putting employees first, maintaining equilibrium between the forces of change and the status quo.
- "No tree grows to the sky" - beware of adverse market conditions - and prepare

Diversifying into strengths: theme parks

Deborah says

An inspiring book.

Melissa says

I found this book in a box of old stuff, so I read it. If you own a hotel...or maybe even another business...this book might interest you. I don't. It didn't.

Willem Koenders says

Wonderful view into the Marriott story. Autobiographical.

Ember says

This was a book I recently read on the plane to and from a work trip. I think it's older but was still interesting and I learned more about Marriott!

Lisa says

One of the easier to read books about business. I enjoyed the little known facts about the Marriott business and the life lessons Mr. Marriott includes throughout.

Brian says

As someone who stays in a lot of hotels and Marriott's in particular I found this book a fascinating look at the it means to be in the "service" industry which is the true focus according to the Marriott's. From having basic procedures in place so that employees can focus on the customer to treating employee's right so they want to do their jobs and focus on the customer. Marriott views itself as a full service hospitality outfit so more than just hotels but also a significant food arm as well as managing retirement properties, time shares and its franchised off shoot brands for budget travelers, business travelers and long term travelers in the form of Fairfield Inn, Courtyard Inn, and Residence Inn. Overall if you are looking for a solid business book from organizations that manage large volumes of employees there are some great lessons here as well as interesting look at how this hotel chain evolved.

Will Siskey says

Service at its finest. Great read for managers, leaders, coaches, businessmen and others to get back to management basics and connecting with the people you interact with. Bill makes it an enjoyable read as he reflects on the journey to building the Marriott brand. You get to see what it is like when a man values the people around him more than he values himself. Good things happen. (The book also carries a somewhat nostalgic effect if you're a frequent traveler and stay with Marriott. He mentions many locations in his stories of decisions, service, growth, etc., it is kind of neat to look back at those after staying there and knowing their stories.)

Bob says

Based on a suggestion by a colleague at work, Ali. Overall the book seems to be more of a manifesto of Marriots current way of operation, rather than a historical path showing why and how they came upon this design. Because hospitality industries need to focus on customers, but don't have too many changes, unlike a lot of industries in SV, the philosophy is appropriate.

1. What I found amazing about Marriott is his hands-on approach. I have found that managers who become people managers and are not willing to get their hands dirty, typically work well in slow moving companies. Marriott does exactly this. He goes on unconventional ways of gathering information like secret shopping, reaches down all the way down the beauracracy, goes and personally interviews the customers even though he is the CEO, puts thorns on the his own company. What I found amazing is his philosophy, is his ability to cut his own losses, sell off companies to somebody more motivated and talented to run some parts of his business, ability to live the uncomfortable life, when he could have just had a very smooth sailing life living off his fathers wealth. Haven't heard many people being able to do that. I am also no sure how true this narrative is, given that its written by Marriott and could be a marketing propaganda.

2. The importance of systems: What he means by systems can also be called automation. SOPs etc are

important for efficiency purposes. This is very true in age old industries like the hospitality industry, where there is no much technological disruption happening. <-- I think though when you apply too much manually curated systems in a fast moving industry, this just leads to disaster. An example of this is Netflix's CEOs previous company True Software. In a podcast with Tim Ferriss, he discusses that he set up elaborate SOPs and systems to operate based on in his company. After a while, there were so many manual SOPs and systems to work through, that nobody smart enough wanted to work there. So there were systems without people to work through the systems. In order to overcome this issue, he basically went to the other end of the pool, where there are very few systems in Netflix's culture, he pays the people way higher than normal, but also has a extremely higher barrier to entry to only allow the people who almost have the CEO personality to get things done. I am guessing the reason for this is probably because, NetFlix is fighting very established incumbents like Disney etc, and they need people who are that independent and don't necessarily follow rules. Most startups need that kind of people only at the beginning, but it maybe that NetFlix needs that kind of independent CEO types even as it scales way past the initial stage. This is probably why it has been able to scale so fast, despite incumbents trying to beat them.

3. Treat your employees well: Its interesting that because Marriott is a hospitality industry, it places high emphasis on employee well being, and recognizes employees who do their job well and create that sense of belonging. They take care of the kids of their employees, when they are sick, listen to their employees, make their employees feel heard etc. Even when they have to layoff 1000 people, they make sure they are secure and have future options. This motivates their employees to take care of their customers. This is way of doing business seems to be very similar to how software businesses run. Perhaps, it comes down to that in both these industries you are dealing with individual customers. Even though, it seems software is a highly technical problem area, and it is, most software is fundamentally designed for a single end-user, not another robot. As such, customer service is a unstated job description of software development, and the people who become great fundamentally understand this. So in both these industries, you have to design your culture around `appropriately` rewarding your employees. Most software companies do offer a wide range of facilities like child care, free food etc. Netflix on the other hand offer very high compensation packages, and high flexibility, but doesn't necessarily take care of your kids etc. This kind of flexibility in job description only works for a very selected group of self-driven people, not for the majority. NetFlix thus selects only these people by eliminating everybody who doesn't fit the needs of the culture. Its also probably a marketing tactic to distinguish itself, as I can't think of a company which won't need a combination of both. On the other hand, if you end user is really another business or in b2b companies, even though you are dealing with a person at the end of the phone conversation/meeting, you degree of empathy matters much less, I guess, atleast in the short-term. Perhaps, because business customers tend to be much more logical than individual customers. As a result, b2b industries such as hardware companies or enterprise software companies tend to do the exact opposite and place the customer first. This is also probably why few talented people want to work in them, and why individual customer oriented industries tend to be leading edge and growing much faster these days. So, the conclusion from this maybe that even though in the short term, for b2b companies, it maynot matter too much whether they take care of their employees or not, if they don't take care of their employees in the long run, they will leave and thus suffer as a whole industry. The challenge however is the tradeoff between short and long term business profits. If you really put employee first, your performance will drop. Then your competitor who places customer first will win in the short term. Since b2b industries tend to have relatively smaller number of customers, and once a competitor has an account, its hard to switch, this probably leads to the downward spiral where everyone in the ecosystem successively treat their employees somewhat worse than its competitor, while trying to gain `customer trust`, thus leading to the `employee last` strategy. The solution to this could be whole sale automation, and only have NetFlix-type employees.

4. Listen well: pay attention to not only what is being said, but also to the body language of the speaker. Even if you listen well, sometimes it hard to really understand. You have to go around finding facts, and also take action. He mentions that he gives an equal time to everybody. This is in stark contrast to `Ray Dalio's` way of listening based on believability based decision making, where he only listens to people who are

believable regardless of whether they are in his close circle or not. What Marriott is probably doing is that he is listening to not only to his direct reports but randomizing whom he is listening till the bottom end of the ladder, which maybe why he is able to make good decisions. He has this questions, which for some reason I use a lot 'What do you think?'. Its actually a very good open ended question, and I came upon this as well in my own journey. It doesn't ask whether the idea is right or if the idea is wrong. It just asks somebody to go on a open ended rant on the idea. As a result, people tend to be more open to criticizing your idea, which is great. What I found even better is to ask people to actively criticize your idea something like 'What am I not thinking of? Why should I not do this?' Its usually much easy to see the pros of a decision, because you came upon the idea due to some combination of reasons, and you are incentivized to drum up the idea because of your own psychological needs. Its much harder to see the negative aspects of your decision, and people usually hate telling you why an idea won't work, because people don't like disappointing other people, especially higher ups (whose approval they need for promotion etc).

5. Success is a team sport: As a big slow moving company, you probably depend on a lot of people. People who can get things done, are creative also come with larger egos, independent thinkers. If your company is not growing as fast (hospitality industry has been growing at 2.6%, similar to inflation growth rate, which means basically 0% inflation adjusted growth rate), and there are no opportunities for these individuals, its better to not recruit them at all. There are some people who want a stable job, who may be a better fit for your org. I think, Marriott Jr, never had to growth the company like his father did., probably why he has this advice. His philosophy seems to be inline with war-time CEO vs peace-time CEO advice from Ben Horowitz. War-time CEOs tend to be bad peace-time CEOs. Marriott Jr. seems to be a peace-time CEO, while his father was probably more of a war-time CEO.

6. Never believe your own hype: Agree 100%. Its very easy to get caught in your own idea and not get feedback from other people about the downsides. It gets more treacherous because if you are a manager with direct reports, your direct reports are probably not going to say anything against your idea, unless the culture actually encourages it.

7. Listen to your heart: If you are a big business, you will have to make a lot of decisions. Because hind-sight is always 20/20, you will have some regrets. However, you shouldn't spend a lot of time obsessing over these decisions. He seems to be very good at realizing what type of business is a good fit for the culture of Marriott, and if its not a good fit, he is fine with finding somebody in the company to lead the company and let it be its own unit. Its probably hard to have 2 business units which have completely different needs or modes of operation.

Darrell says

Read bits and pieces of this book. Basically tells Marriott's philosophy into running his business.
