

## Don't Create Another "Program"

So many organizations have been making the same mistake for hundreds of years. Anytime they introduce something new to their employees, especially when it has to do with customer service or sales, they introduce it and use the word "program." They go to the employees and say, "We've got a new customer service program." Here is the problem: I did employee surveys a few years back and found out that the perception of most employees is that a program has an expiration date of about ninety days. So when you tell employees that you have a new customer service program, the employee flips a switch in his or her brain that says, "Oh, it has an expiration date—it's going away in ninety days so why should I jump on board?" And of course it gets replaced by another program when the organization loses enthusiasm for the previous one.

This happens with both sales and service. It tends to be a swinging pendulum because leaders in the organization will say, "We've got a new customer service program," and then a few months later they'll admit they forgot about sales, then they will go back and create a sales program. So this pendulum swings back and forth and unfortunately it impacts their employees as far as their buy-in is concerned. Then, many organizations come to realize that the word "program" is ineffective and they became aware of the message that it sent, so they replaced it with the word "initiative," which was not a whole lot better (that one lasts about ninety-one days).

When we use the word "culture," it means that sales and service are woven deep within the fabric of the organization. When employees hear the word "culture," they know it's not going away. It's not going to be temporary. When you hear the word "culture," you're going to hear it attached to organizations like Nordstrom, Ritz Carlton, or Disney. These are organizations that are passion driven and they've all got great service cultures. If you were going to go to work at Nordstrom, Ritz Carlton, or Disney, you know you are going to be held to a higher standard because that's what the word "culture" indicates.

As leaders we have to be very careful because the words we use can actually be interpreted differently by employees and it can change their buy-in. If we change our vocabulary just slightly, we can sometimes change our culture dramatically.