



## CHAPTER 9

# ENJOY THE RIDE

## Get in Line and Hold on Tight

**D**id you know that you're more likely to die falling out of your bed than riding a roller coaster? (I'm thinking these odds change if you are a cast member riding coasters after sandbag testing but before the guest-ready decree. But let's not dwell on that.) You see, roller coasters are much safer than your fear would allow you to believe. You know the *clickety-clank* you hear when you climb that first near-vertical hill of death? That's not the sound of a rickety, threadbare chain straining to haul your body to the top; it's the sweet sound of a safety mechanism that stops you from rolling backward.

The wonder of the roller coaster is that we wait forever in line to willingly hop on something that we imagine could *possibly* kill us—or more likely, make us sick. We climb in, buckle up, check the safety bar one more time, and then we're off. New sights, sounds, and unforeseen experiences hit us with astonishing speed. One moment we're inching up the ascent, adrenaline pumping. We briefly exhale at the top before plunging downhill, catching a little air between the coaster's seat and our own in the descent.

Sudden turns throw us against the side of the car and into each other—and then we’re rolled upside down. We suppress occasional waves of nausea. We might even want to get off the ride, if only we knew how. But as we pull into the loading platform, typically three minutes later, we look around to discover we’ve made it! We catch a breath, have a laugh, and shake off some lingering jitters. And then we get in line to do it all over again.

If there is a better metaphor for life (or a more clichéd one), I don’t know it. I could have been the anonymous author of this thought: “Life is a roller coaster. You either can scream every time you hit a bump, or you can throw your hands up and enjoy the ride.”

## Get in Line

Every adventure starts with getting in line—making the decision to go for it. Each day we wake up, make the decision to get out of bed (remember, possibly riskier than riding the Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster), and then we make additional “get-in-line” decisions throughout the day. Some of those are inconsequential and routine; others are more significant, requiring more conscious thought. Regardless of the relative magnitude, we decide every minute of every day to get in line. Over and over and over again.

If you’re someone who craves control—and to a great extent, I think we all do—then your consciousness of even the smallest decisions allows you to participate in life with your eyes wide open. We all have some authority over the choices we make. The opposite of this conscious control is *reacting* to all the interruptive, distracting, and sometimes frightening decisions that scream for our attention all day long. When we react, sometimes blaming

our emotional responses on the thousands of decisions vying for a nanosecond of our attention, we hand over control. But there's a third possibility—a choice other than seizing control or merely reacting. We can choose to stand beside the ride just out of line to consider our options. By watching the faces of coaster riders and the mechanics of the cars as they whirl by, we think we'll find ourselves better equipped to decide. And we wait. And ponder. And wait some more.

In his book *Just Do Something*, Kevin DeYoung talks about the difficulty of decision making in a glut of choices. (Do you want fries or apple slices, sweetened or unsweetened tea, ketchup or mayo, and have you thought about pickles?) We suffer anxiety and paralysis over limitless options, fearing that among the many options available to us, we might make a poor choice. DeYoung shares that the word *decide* originates from the Latin *decider*, meaning “to cut off.”<sup>2</sup> Yup, if you get in line for California Screamin', you might miss the three o'clock parade. But here's the thing—if you stand out of line, agonizing over your decision, you're going to miss the parade anyway.

Deciding not to decide is *itself* a decision. If you're not in, by definition you're out! As DeYoung says, we can be “. . . full of passivity and empty on follow-through. We're tinkering around with everyone and everything. Instead, when it comes to our future, we should take some responsibility, make a decision and just do something.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, get in line or get moving to the next adventure.

Personally, I want to get in line, seize the moment, and go for broke. Dick (Cook), the beloved hit-driving, creative head of Walt Disney Studios at that time was my best teacher on the subject. He was all in—always! His philosophy about Studio projects was

this: “Why do it if we’re going to do it halfway?” That philosophy shaped everything from a film’s initial concept through production, distribution, marketing, and promotion. If Dick gave a green light to a project, rest assured, it would not be derailed. We were going for a hit. (As someone who started his long Disney career running Disneyland locomotives, Dick knew something about keeping things on track and engineering a success.) He taught me to show up, jump in, and do my part to make it great.

What if you decide to ride the coaster—but wait . . . there’s more than one line? Most roller coasters in Disney theme parks offer riders three lines. (Seriously? *Another* choice?) You may select the customary line, the long one you mosey into with your entire group. Then there’s the FastPass line, which requires advance planning to acquire said FastPass and return at the appointed time. Finally, there’s the single-rider line reserved for the solo adventurer riding the coaster for the twentieth time. I’ve spent time in each of these lines and decided there isn’t a right or wrong one. The ride is still just as exhilarating. So get in line. Any line. You won’t regret it. Take the job, wander the unbeaten path, enroll in the crazy class, order something you’ve never tasted before. Be open to the possibilities.

## Love the Line!

Having chosen to get in line, do you love the line? Likely not. We like to hate lines. They’re too long, too slow, and we’re just so hot and tired. Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Dick Larsen—nicknamed Dr. Queue—is the guru on all things related to line waiting, including something called “queue rage.” He says



queue rage happens most often when people sense unfairness—when someone jumps ahead in line without waiting their turn. Dr. Queue is quick to praise Disney because our theme park attractions tend to overestimate posted wait times. And when your wait is shorter than expected, you win.<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, I've learned to love the line because waiting has a purpose. For me, queue rage is more of "queue engage." I've learned to appreciate the anticipation, as well as the preparation and introspection that accompany waiting. In the waiting, I am teachable, and during those teachable times I consider possibilities I might otherwise have hurried past. When you wait, you dig deep. You question (which is a *good* thing), you wonder, and you also might pray. During the waiting, I ask for insight, wisdom, and courage for the ride ahead.

Reminding myself to love the line also keeps me from "destination addiction," a preoccupation with the next place, next job, next partner, next *anything*. It's the habitual reliance on this thought: "When [insert what you most want at that moment] happens, *then* I'll be happy and life will be easier. As long as we believe that happiness is somewhere else, it will never be where we are. Don't wish away the wait. Waiting in line can be as much fun as the ride itself. Disney packs surprises for folks waiting in line. You might get squirted with water from a ship captain's tomb while waiting to enter the Haunted Mansion. You could spy Tink as you work through the queue for the Peter Pan Adventure or chat with a sassy Mr. Potato Head at Toy Story Midway Mania.

One of the longest lines I ever loved was the line to meet Anna and Elsa at Epcot's Norway Pavilion. Disney's animated film *Frozen* had just been released and my niece, Curly, like thousands of other little girls, fell in love. She was five at the

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time and obsessed—truly obsessed—with Anna and Elsa. In Disney World that Christmas, character visits with the sister duo were crazy. Everyone wanted to meet the pair. Since I worked at Disney, and since Curly's family had traveled all the way from Oregon to Orlando, I *had* to deliver the goods. The rest of the family, Baby Mike's, was invited but they couldn't handle the pressure. So Curly and I had to take on Disney World by ourselves.



At last, Curly meets Elsa and Anna. Just as excited—Auntie Jody, photographer.

The two of us hatched a plan well in advance. The night before the anticipated meeting, we set our alarms for zero dark hundred, and set out our *Frozen* wardrobe ensembles. That morning Curly and I made our way to Disney World and got in line to enter Epcot, part of the first group in the park. Hand in hand, we hightailed it through Mexico and straight to Norway. One dad, dripping with sweat from his exertion, beat us to our destination. He had been up half the night to make sure he got there first. The park

opened at 8:00 a.m. for a meet and greet which was scheduled for 10:00. By 9:00 the line closed. Guests were wailing, throwing themselves on the mercy of the cast members to intervene. (The big guests, not their children. Serious queue rage.) Curly was beside herself with excitement. By the time it was our turn, she said, “Auntie, I am sooo excited I can’t breathe. I think I might die.” Finally, Curly got her princess pictures and hugs. With stars in her eyes, she laughed and danced. We’ll never know, but I wonder if the moment would have been as monumental without the wait? I think not. It was well worth two hours chilling in Norway to witness her joy. (The cold never bothered me anyway.)

## Store All Personal Belongings and Buckle Up

Heed the warnings to discard your trash and stow your treasures before you ride—which would be simple if we could easily discern trash from treasure. Take for instance, Disney souvenirs. Some of us are tempted to keep Disney straws and napkins only to discard them later. Mickey Mouse ears, of course, you keep forever. I have my own method for sorting it all out, dividing life’s belongings into three categories: treasure, trash, and trail mix.

Here’s how I see it. Treasure is what we keep—those precious items, experiences, and memories that make us smile. These are worth preserving because a lingering moment with these touchstones both reminds us of our past and fortifies us for the ride ahead. We all have treasure that evokes memories and love. Joanna Gaines from HGTV’s *Fixer Upper* says, “Stuff is home.” (Do you love them as much as I do? Among the treasure

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her husband saves are notes that Joanna leaves in his overnight bag when he travels. Love.)<sup>5</sup> I'm not saying material things can bring lasting fulfillment or deep-seated joy, but every big ride has a souvenir shop—at least at Disney. Every experience offers us the opportunity to select a special remembrance. I have all kinds of treasures, including handmade gifts from my mom and dad, a Disney scrapbook that Fifi made for me, and mementos from the family farm. My largest treasure is my Grandpa Carbiener's "one-horse open sleigh" in a place of honor inside my home. And the littlest treasures are notes and artwork from the many kiddos in my life. Some of my most precious keepsakes aren't things at all, like the wise counsel given to me from my Disney friends and mentors, like Val (Cohen), with a JD degree from Harvard Law and a black belt in smarts and strength of conviction.



As a surprise, cousin Ken unearthed, restored, and covered 900 miles to deliver Grandpa Carbiener's sleigh to our door. Oh, what fun it is to ride and sing . . .

## Oh, the Places You'll Go!

It's hard to believe I'd never heard about this Dr. Seuss book until sister Fifi sent me a copy and said, "You must read this. It is magical and oh, so encouraging." It was her go-to book in her teaching days, and she referred to it often. I have always loved Dr. Seuss for so many one fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish reasons:

**One Fish:** I think Dr. Seuss is so cool. This man, Theodore Geisel, known as the children's storyteller, had no children yet has influenced millions and continues to do so today. That is so ironically wonderful. Because John Dreyer and I have no children of our own but instead many fabulous babies of family members and friends (ranging in age from one month to their thirties), that speaks to me in a personal way.

**Two Fish:** After a successful career in advertising, Theodore Geisel turned to writing. His first book was rejected twenty-seven times, but he never gave up. I love that tenacity.

**Red Fish:** Dr. Seuss spoke to the child in all of us in the same way that Walt Disney created family entertainment for kids of all ages. Geisel said of his work something Walt could have said of his own: "I never write for children. I write for people."<sup>7</sup>

**Blue Fish:** Seuss wrote and illustrated *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* as his swan song—the last book he ever wrote—while he battled cancer. And what a benediction it was. I hesitate to give away the punch line, but you probably know it anyway: "Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So . . . get on your way!"<sup>8</sup>

You can't enjoy or even find your treasure if you don't get rid of the trash. Use this rule of thumb from artist and designer William Morris, "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful." Stacy has this expression framed in her home. When her folks died within sixteen months of each other, leaving her to sort through their life's belongings as the estate's executrix, she realized, "If it doesn't serve a purpose or bring you joy, let it go." Let go of stuff that weighs you down, saddens you, or clutters your life. Move on. It's okay to hold on to a nostalgic item that reminds you of the people, experiences, and times you loved, but don't drag along the heavy stuff.

That takes care of trash and treasure. But what about the in-between stuff that hasn't yet developed into treasure but isn't exactly trash either? I call this the trail mix, and it's perhaps my favorite part. These are the issues, questions, and experiences that are different on any given day and always all mixed up. Sweet, salty, crunchy, and complex. Trail mix is what we walk with and chew on as we sort it all out. For me it's an ongoing, lifelong pursuit and well worth carrying on the journey. I can save it for now and sort it out later. Trail mix always has treasure potential.

## Hold on Tight and Enjoy the Ride

Are you ready? You're about to take a wild ride on a train powered by something other than its own engine. You see, unlike a train, roller coaster cars speed along with momentum generated upon release from a chain lift at the top of a terrifyingly steep hill. Or they're launched—like a rocket—from home base. Regardless of our start, the ride is much the same. We scream through twists

and turns and force ourselves to take a look at the view from frightening heights. Sure, we think we'd like to know what's around every bend, but I'm convinced that much of the ride's enjoyment is in how it amazes and surprises us. (Isn't that what Pocahontas would say? "Just around the river bend. . . .") Would you *really* like to know every twist and turn? It's more fun to be amazed and surprised. But *do* expect to be bumped, and maybe a little bruised and sore. Just when you're not certain you can handle another stomach-flipping drop, remember that the biggest drops give us the most power for the upward climb. Or, as I like to say, "Without a hill, there is no thrill!" If you doubt that, recall what it's like to spin endlessly in a teacup. (No wonder the Hatter is mad.)

## Wildest Ride: Grand Opening Team

In my Disney career with its twenty-two stops along the way, perhaps the best thrill ride was serving on the grand opening team for Euro Disneyland (or EDL, now called Disneyland Paris). While others were immersed in park construction, our team focused on synergy and four weeks of events that culminated in a grand opening extravaganza for celebrities and dignitaries alike. I quickly learned this assignment would push me to the limit and back—most certainly a launched coaster. Good thing, because we needed some pneumatic power to get to the top of that hill.

For starters, the construction was pedal to the metal to finish by the publicized opening date. The park had been modeled after our others but not duplicated. Imagine the challenge of creating a breathtaking castle (made with fiberglass stones and forced perspective, no less) in a region dotted with the real deal.

## Ride Review—Euro Disney

When I returned from my wildest-ride-truned-weight-loss camp, also known as my stint with the Euro Disney Grand Opening Team, I chewed on my experience. This was my takeaway:

- \* Are there things I would do differently? (Like handing out something other than thousands of size-specific sweatshirts?) *Yes.*
- \* Did I learn there was more than one right way to do things? (Or, translated, the American way isn't the only right or only way?) *Indeed.*
- \* Did I stumble? (Like having too few languages represented at the private events?) *Oui, ja, and si.*
- \* Did I survive? (All ninety pounds of me at opening?) *Yes to that. Never again saw that number on a scale.*
- \* Did I thrive? (Did this lead to my next job at corporate in Synergy?) *In fact, yes!*
- \* Did the team make all the difference? *Of course! What an amazing, get-it-done team—a diverse cast of many talented and hardworking people. Many hands, many minds. Yay, team! (Hats off, oh great leader, Philippe [Bourguignon].)*
- \* Did I make lifelong friends? *Enthusiastically and gratefully, yes! (Big shout-out to fantastic Nancy [Valeri], my partner in the adventure.)*
- \* Did I gather many treasures (like learning I could do it; finding family ancestors in Alsace; experiencing teamwork on steroids)? *Oh, yes. Lots of them.*
- \* Was it a ride I will remember for a lifetime? *Absolutely.*
- \* Will I continue to draw on those lessons and experiences? *All the time.*
- \* Would I get in line for another ride like this? *No doubt.*



The same challenge played out in developing Main Street, U.S.A. Its beloved Victorian-inspired architectural elements that looked like scenes from *Mary Poppins* were interesting and unique in the United States, but in Europe, where that look was actually the genuine article in so many towns and villages? Maybe not. So the imagineers rethought and recreated everything from castle courts to hotels and dinner shows for park guests. All of that extraordinary effort pressed up against an April opening date chosen to take advantage of favorable weather and peak tourism seasons. Hitting that date required an infusion of personnel. For the final five months of construction, five hundred of us from Walt Disney World were redeployed to EDL.

Typical rehearsals and opening day preparations were conducted in construction zones. The finished product for opening day was like wet ink on paper. The infrastructure to support the advance team was bare bones, to say the least. (As an example, our accommodations were the Davy Crockett Campgrounds. Nice, but not exactly five star.) EDL was built in Marne-la-Vallée, a small farming town about twenty miles east of Paris. In the birthplace of haute cuisine, finding places to eat late at night when we finished our work was more than a challenge. *C'était impossible!* (An extreme weight-loss program was a preopening byproduct.) We'd assembled a throng of multinational cast members who shared English as a common language. But under pressure, without sleep and in the confusion, we reverted to our mother tongues. And we ar-tic-u-la-ted our words and spoke *loud*, as if volume might improve understanding. We gestured too. (Surprising how many gestures are universal.) It wasn't always pretty or especially effective. All eyes were on this \$4 billion project, in Europe second in cost only to the Chunnel.<sup>6</sup>

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And not everyone in France was super supportive of Americans, Disney, or Disneyland Paris. (One French writer called the park “a cultural Chernobyl.”) The pressure to succeed was ginormous! There were days when I thought I wouldn’t make it. The hill was too high and I was too weak and undernourished. But then, you know what? The ride became larger than me. The multi-national, gold-medal team pulled through. The project was complete. And we were stronger for it.



The first car given away in celebration of Walt Disney World’s fifteenth anniversary. I may have been more excited than the winner.

## Roller Coaster

While I would get in that Disneyland Paris line again and again, there are some drops in life’s roller coaster ride that you never forget or can’t easily recover from, followed by highs you never

counted on. Take the first year I went out for the Disney World Ambassador position. At the announcement ceremony, I stood on the castle stage with the other three finalists. The music played. Mickey presented the roses to the previous ambassador. And then the scroll was unrolled to reveal . . . *someone else's* name. Devastated is not a big enough word to describe how I felt at that moment. My mind raced with what I could have said or done differently in the interview process. My parents and family had flown in for the ceremony, so of course I felt that I had let them down. But then in the depth of my disappointment as I was walking off the stage, I was offered my career-changing job in Marketing. And I was encouraged to try again for the post the following year. Which I got. With a look in the rearview mirror, I can see that I was better equipped a year later, and that year was Disney World's fifteenth anniversary celebration year—all too exciting and a perfect fit for me. As the girl who held twenty-two different positions in thirty years at Disney, I think I've earned the right to say just get in line and prepare to be amazed.

## By The Way, Scream!

Do you know the best thing about roller coasters? Roller coasters give you permission to *Scream!* As loud as you can. Don't hold anything back. Yell like you mean it for the entire ride if you like! And don't stop. Live life out loud. Why not? Take a chance on a wild ride that could scare you senseless or make you sick—or possibly give you the best time of your life. Honestly, while the odds are solidly against it, wouldn't you rather die riding the world's greatest roller coaster than falling out of bed?

## If These Walls Could Talk

### RAIL TESTING

One of the “jobs” available to those of us in the Team Disney Burbank executive offices was test-riding new attractions. Once the ride was certified for safety, we could become living test dummies, allowing the imagineers to tinker with speed, sound, and other effects before guests would take a turn. Before Disneyland California Adventure (DCA) opened, I took the opportunity to ride the rails all . . . day . . . long. Forgive the indelicacy, but we were human “puke-a-meters.” Can you picture riding roller coasters, Ferris wheels, and other moving cars repeatedly, in “casual” business attire, with your boss and colleagues, all without popcorn or soda?

I figured the worst would be the fastest coaster in the new park, California Screamin’. Oh, I was so wrong! That was my favorite. The worst—absolute worst—was the innocuous-looking Ferris wheel-like ride called the Sun Wheel (now called Mickey’s Fun Wheel). In one ride, imagineers somehow manage to alarm all of your phobias simultaneously. Not only does it take you sixteen stories high in typical Ferris wheel gondolas, but it also offers the option of riding in moving gondolas that slip and swing along rails, allowing you to slide from the center of the ride to its perimeter and then back again. You are seated in mesh-enclosed gondolas, so you’re not going to fall out, but without a seat belt or harness or even a handle to cling to, you experience every sensation that would tell you that you are, in fact, going to fly off the rails to infinity (and beyond). So disorienting is this ride that it provides guests with motion sickness bags. Now, there’s a souvenir for you! My favorite review of the ride was this one: “I have never seen true terror in my wife’s face prior to that ride. She tried to find something to hold on to and was so scared, she made them stop on the way down to let



us out. I was laughing so hard and she refuses to go on it ever again.” A close second was the guest who said he’d rather skydive than go on the Fun Wheel again.<sup>9</sup>

Now imagine experiencing this ride over and over again, seated next to people you’d really like to impress. If Disney had a hazing tradition, this could be it. It’s worth remembering in life that the scariest-looking ride could be the one you want to be on. Just going around in circles can be a far worse fate.

Sample Chapter. Not Meant to Be Shared.