

I have yet to meet anyone who is operating an entertainment center who has too much free time on their hands or too much money in their checking account.

In reality, none of us have enough time to get everything done or enough money to complete them.

So what's the solution? First we have to figure out what's truly important to our success and what's not. We must then focus all of our resources on what is truly important.

As Jim Collins describes in his book, "Good to Great," the companies that successfully became great had a list that was just as important, and maybe even more important, than their "to-do list." This other list was described as a "stop doing list."

The good to great companies rigorously focused on eliminating tasks and projects that were not squarely focused on each company's **core stuff**. Time and money that was being used on **non-core stuff** was ruthlessly reallocated to focus squarely on the company's core stuff. In other words, the core products and services their customers wanted to buy and the company could sell at a profit.

This article is all about the core stuff that attracts customers to our centers

Core Stuff:

How and where to focus time and money.



A unique laser tag experience.

and causes them to willingly give us lots of their money.

It is important to realize that spending time and money on non-core stuff

is causing us to neglect the core stuff that makes our centers successful in the first place.

If we don't focus most, if not all, of our time and money on our core stuff, then we will sooner or later put ourselves out of business.

In order to understand what our core stuff is, we must first understand the difference between core stuff and non-core stuff.

NON-CORE STUFF VS. CORE STUFF

Non-core stuff is all the things that fill up our workday and especially our to-do lists. They are important (or at least we think they are), but no customer would ever pay us to actually do them. In fact, many of our customers probably wouldn't even care if we stopped doing them and some might be very happy if we did.



Pool tables appeal to an older crowd.



Guests enjoy a game of Cyber Sport.



Outside attractions include mini golf and go-karts.

Some possible examples of non-core stuff are all the Twittering, Facebooking, and E-mailing we do. Non-core stuff can also be the time and money we spend on motivating our staff and teaching them to learn even more elaborate ways to go above and beyond from a customer service standpoint.

It's not that these things aren't important. The problem is that we don't have the time or money to do all of them.

We have to understand that choices must be made. If we want to add something new to our to-do list, then we must also remove something from our to-do list and move it to our stop doing list.

To be very specific, we have to focus our time and money on the core stuff that actually compels or stimulates our customers to jump off the couch, drive to our centers, and happily give us their money.

Core stuff is all the things our customers actually pay us a lot of money to do or experience when they visit our entertainment centers.

Each of our centers is different in some way, so we have to take the time to identify what our core stuff is or should be. We must make sure our core stuff gets the time and money required to make it the best it can be. Our core stuff has to be so good that it drives people into our entertainment centers and allows us to generate strong and consistent profits.

It's important to note that our success directly corresponds to our customers' response to our core stuff. If our customers are consistently attract-

ed to return to our centers, then our core stuff is working.

The following quote popped out of a conversation I recently had with Neil Hupfauer, one of the two founders of Main Event. I can't remember the specific reason he said it, but after he said it I couldn't stop thinking about what it really meant. I knew it was important, but it took me several weeks to digest its full meaning. Here's the quote:

"Customers will put up with an amazing amount of poor customer service to have fun."

At first it sounds like we were talking about an entertainment center that didn't care very much about providing its guests with even a reasonable level of customer service, but that's not what it meant to me. This quote also helps us to understand what an entertainment center's core stuff really is.

Here are two examples that validate the quote:

The first relates to the amusement park Cedar Point in Ohio. If you have ever been to Cedar Point, then you should be able to easily identify Cedar Point's core stuff. If you said roller coasters, then you would be 100 percent right. I believe Cedar Point has more roller coasters than any other amusement park in the world.

However, Cedar Point has long queue lines especially for its biggest, fastest, and newest roller coasters. People sometimes stand in those lines for up to three hours. That's right: A guest actually stands in line for up to three hours to have three minutes of fun. This example basic-

ly validates the quote above.

This doesn't mean Cedar Point doesn't care about customer service. What it does mean is that Cedar Point created such an awesome roller coaster experience that its customers are willing to stand in line, which isn't exactly fun, for up to three hours for just three minutes of totally awesome, exhilarating fun.

Now, based on the example above, think about a visit to Disney World or Disneyland during peak vacation time. I think most of us can quickly visualize and "feel the pain" of what this specific day at the park would be like.

A visit for a family of four, even with a couple of fast passes, would mean standing in line or waiting to stand in a line for five to six hours of an eight-hour visit to experience 45 to 60 minutes of fun.

Here's my point: Disney's core stuff is creating these unbelievable themed experiences that attract people from all over the world. Customers are so committed to experiencing Disney's best attractions that they are willing to stand in line for five to six hours during an eight-hour visit. Why? Because Disney's core stuff is worth the wait.

What does this mean for us?

This means we can suck at a lot of little things or even one or two big things. BUT, and this is a very important BUT, we can't suck at the core stuff that attracts customers to our centers.

STRIVE TO BE FAMOUS

In fact, we have to strive to be world famous for the core stuff that we

do for our customers.

If not world famous, then we have to be at least locally famous for the core stuff that we do for our customers. If we are locally famous, then we don't even have to worry about Twittering, Facebooking, or E-mailing to get our customers to visit our centers.

If we become world famous or even locally famous, then our customers will be doing 99 percent of our selling for us.

What's your core stuff?

It's probably different for every entertainment center, but here is a sampling of ideas that will help you think about what your core stuff may be for your entertainment center:

- Playing, riding, and experiencing your attractions
- Venue to hang out with friends
- Cool place to have a party with friends, family, or co-workers

- Hot spot to meet new people
- The place to create shared experiences
- Quick escape from home or work
- Good times, laughing, and lots of smiles

It's important to remember that when business gets tough, we tend to focus more on the non-core stuff. Non-core stuff is more time focused or just busy work. Our core stuff requires both time and money to maintain. To save money, we stop spending it on the one

thing that can save us, which is our core stuff.

Please don't forget your core stuff and never stop investing the majority of your time and money on continuously improving it.

And don't forget: "Customers will put up with an amazing amount of poor customer service to have fun."

So, please—don't kill the FUN! It's the only thing keeping our doors open! ▲

Photos from LASERTRON's BLOCK PARTY Entertainment Center in Buffalo, N.Y.



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Indoor Playground Equipment, Soft Toddler Play, Climbing Walls, Tuff Stuff Soft Sculpted Foam, Ballistic Ball Shooters, Custom Theming, FEC Development

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