

# Lessons from Cirque Du Soleil

Ramki

# What is Cirque Du Soleil?

- Company from Canada
- Founded 1980's by a group of street performers
- Due to financial difficulties initially got a Government grant in 1983
- Started making profits from 1984
- Initially performed in Quebec and Ontario
- The moved to USA in 1987
- Contemporary circus- nouveau cirque

# Ownership/ management

- Owner 80% -Guy Laiiberte
- Co founder: Gilles Ste Croix
- 20% held by Isthimir world capital and Nakheel, UAE
- CEO: Daniel Lamarre
- HQ: Montreal, Canada
- Pre-requisite for employment: willingness to push limits

# Cirque today

- 22 shows
- Employs more than 5000
- 100 M viewers in 300 cities -40 countries
- Employees seek to contribute artistic works that
  - **'invoke the imagination, provoke the senses and evoke the emotions'**
- **Annual revenue \$1B ; Profits \$250M**
- World's best circus show!

# Las Vegas shows

- Multiple permanent shows in Las Vegas
- 9000 people every night
- 60% of Company revenue from Las Vegas
- 5% of visitors see the shows
- 97% occupancy!

# Awards and records

- Bambi
- Rose d'Or
- Drama desk-3
- Gemini-3
- Prime Time Emmy-4
- Star on Hollywood hall of fame
- Record for ticket prize
  - Iris show sold for \$253 in LA's Kodak (now Dolby) theatre
- Michael Jackson show sold 200k tickets within 24 hours of going on sale

# An ex-employee about Cirque

- Working at CDS was great,
- management trusts it's employees to work without supervision,
- the stress level is very low,
- yet everyone is productive and gets the job done efficiently.
- Friendly co-workers and bosses alike.

## CEO quote

- “If you want to do a break through
- Don’t look around
- Look ahead”



# No cutting corners

- Outfits designed by Kim Barrett who created outfits for The Matrix
- Care comes first and no cost is saved in safety related matters
- Synthesis of circus styles from around the world , with Cirque's own theme and storyline

# Tenets of Cirque

- Great expectations
- Surrender to your senses
- Treasure hunting and creative transformation
- Nurturing environment
- Constraints challenges differences and consumer expectations
- Risk taking: do you ever get burned?
- Keep it fresh

# Great expectations

- Every one has creativity within them
- Tapping into that creativity is like exercising in that it needs to be practiced daily
- Lessons for us:
  - Do we have great expectations from all in firm?
  - Do we communicate this well?
  - Do we do this like exercise (at least as it should be!) on daily basis?
  - How can we raise the bar? And
  - Keep raising it?

# Surrender to your senses

- Paying attention to senses encourages every one to develop intuitive instinct
- All new ideas and experiences need to be captured as they occur even if they seem not valuable at that time
- Lessons for us:
  - Do we pay attention to senses? (very important in our profession as well- audit etymology- audiere- itself means 'to hear')
  - Do we note down ideas and experiences then and there?
  - Do we use a note pad or use smart phone to write or speak into and record?
  - Do we share ideas and experiences?

# Treasure hunting and creative transformation

- Cirque roots in street performance
- Indication of the type of individuals it seeks - or hunts
- This is the **heart** of Cirque;
- The first members of Cirque were open minded risk takers. They were free spirits who were mostly self taught and who lived a nomadic lifestyle and they were considered as 'marginal' to society. Yet they exhibited a tough business sense.
- Successive generations of artists, artisans and technicians have reinforced these qualities.

# Treasure hunting contd.

- Lessons for us:
  - This is the heart of any business which wants to distinguish itself
  - I keep saying this often
  - We can't import 'culture'
  - We need to grow as much as possible from within
  - Preserving our culture and hence 'hunting' for people who 'are like minded like us' is the key

# Nurturing environment

- Building a nurturing environment that is conducive to productivity , creativity and personal growth.
- Ideal working environment is a 'fantastical playground'
  - that has rules but allows artists etc to see the world thru the eyes of a child.
- It recognizes it is difficult to be creative in isolation.
- Cirque wants collaborative creativity.

# Nurturing environment contd.

- Lessons for us:
  - Do we see the world thru the eyes of a child- meaning are we looking at everything afresh or we look at it thru our old colored looking glasses?
  - Do we realize that ‘collaborative creativity’ is the greatest asset the firm can have?
  - Are we team players? (Think BAT)
  - Are we nurturing the environment in a way that creative juices flow and there is no stifling of new ideas?



# Constraints , challenges, differences and consumer expectations

- Constraints force employees to become more resourceful and more creative.
- Constraints produce solutions that might not have been thought of before
- Global perspective –works in 5 continents

# Constraints , challenges differences and consumer expectations

- Lessons for us:
  - Do we fear constraints and differences?
  - Do we challenge constraints? Face them squarely?
  - Do we find new solutions to work around all the problems we face?
  - Are we thinking GLOBAL?

# Risk taking

- Creativity is about risk taking
- Try new things and share experiences with others.
- In taking risks mistakes can occasionally be made but employees can learn from mistakes.
- Risk with relevance
- Lessons for us:
  - Do we encourage risk taking?
  - Are we tolerant of mistakes arising thru creativity?
  - Do we use 'kaizen' or continuous improvement?

# Keep it fresh

- By developing new creative products , Cirque keeps products fresh.
- This helps ensure product maintains durability and longevity.
- Consistently different
- Constant employee feedback is taken.
- Cirque leaders sit in audience night after night watching the show and listening to what the audience has to say about the performance.

# Keep it fresh contd.

- Lessons for us:
  - Are we adequately listening to employees and customers?
  - Do we keep ears to the ground and listen?
  - Do leaders and partners constantly seek customer feedback?
  - Are our products (reports ,presentations etc) fresh and adopt new formats and ideas?
  - Do we constantly bench mark these?

# Latest mobile based customer service solution

- Cirque du Soleil implemented SOA (Service oriented architecture) with an eye to improving customer and employee service.
- SOA helped Cirque create a new mobile solution to integrate with email and ERP systems using existing IT assets, managed through a Web Browser dashboard.
- Cirque was able to experience greater business flexibility gained through real time connections to critical scheduling and a centrally managed inventory.
- Streamlining processes, increasing flexibility and improving remote employee productivity has helped Cirque reach out to bigger audiences in more cities around the world.

# My comments on the show “O” I saw in Las Vegas

- O is one of the best stage shows I have ever seen
- It has generated over \$1B in revenue from 1998
- **It has 1.5 million gallon of water on stage kept at 88 deg F.**
- The pool takes 12 hours to fill!
- The depth of pool ranges from few inches to 17 feet!
- You should see how this amount of water just comes on stage and vanishes like magic next moment

# My comments on “O” contd.

- Acrobats fall from mind boggling heights into the pool!
- Cast includes a Olympic swim gold medalist and 150 technicians and 85 cast members from 30 countries and all of them are scuba certified divers!
- 14 technicians work under water all the time during a show!
- They are doing this 1.5 hour show for 15 years now



# My comments on “O” contd.

- They use seven independent lifts to ensure all the water vanishes or comes back at a moment's notice
- Technically also this is a great feat
- Artists jump from 60 feet above into the pool!
- Awesome is an understatement

# My comments on “O” contd.

- See the trailer of “O” in
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm11jzx7Ka0>
- We can learn from their eye for perfection and innovation
- Cirque has taken the ubiquitous circus to world class art level

# EMPLOYEES AS ASSETS

- This is no lip service
- All types of perks
- Everything –laundry, meals, medical care, education –taken care of
- If employee injured, Company finds a job
- Employees do their own make-up- thus have another skill to take away

# References

- Promoting Creativity Is Cirque du Soleil's Business Strategy -Article by JJ Smith- Manager SHRM Online's Global HR focus area
- The Spark: Igniting the creative fire that lives within us all- By Cirque Du Soleil
- Cirque du Soleil Employee Reviews Indeed.com
- How can SOA improve business efficiency and productivity –IBM
- Cirque Du Soleil: Life is one big balancing act- Telegraph
- Cirque Du Soleil shows big brands how to be remarkable and magical - Forbes