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TO: Families of Disney Guests with Substantial Cognitive Impairments

FROM: Andy Dogali

RE: Disney's Intentional Discrimination Against Guests with Autism; Brief Discussion

It is quite disturbing to know that Disney's DAS creates a horrible experience for Disney's guests with moderate to severe cognitive impairments, such as impairments arising from autism and similar developmental disorders. Even more disturbing is the evidence that Disney *knew in advance* this would be the case – that the DAS would be terribly discriminatory toward autism families – and Disney deliberately rolled out the DAS anyway. The evidence includes dozens of internal Disney communications in which Disney expressly acknowledged that autism families would not be accommodated by the DAS, and which confirm that Disney decided to ignore this expected result and implement the DAS anyway. Guests with severe cognitive impairments were deemed an acceptable sacrifice.

As the DAS concept was being developed, from the spring of 2012 through the summer of 2013, Disney employed a team of persons whose entire job was to address Services for Guests with Disabilities ("SGD"). The SGD personnel repeatedly warned Disney's Industrial Engineers ("IE") and Operations ("Ops") personnel that the DAS would not accommodate the needs of persons with substantial cognitive impairments, such as many persons with moderate to severe autism:

My biggest concern with the discussion...is how a new policy/process/dance card will impact... (in particular, [guests] with Autism...when I say Autism, I mean those Guests who truly have no concept of time and "coming back later" to an attraction. [Jones/SGD, May 30, 2012]

SGD never stopped pushing Disney's IE/Ops personnel to recognize that the DAS would fail guests who could not understand the concept of waiting:

The one concern I want to again raise...is the impact it will most definitely have on...those with cognitive disabilities such as Autism...where the concept of "time" or "waiting" is an issue. [Jones/SGD, May 15, 2013]

Guests with Autism will be the most impacted group as the concept of "time" or "waiting" (even if done virtually via the "dance card") is challenging for many with this disability. [Hale/SGD, May 17, 2013]

SGD's Continued Concerns That Were Not Addressed [include]... How to handle Guests with certain types of Autism where waiting in line is not a reasonable [sic] on their disability and what our "fall back" plan might be if this becomes a bigger issue. [Jones/SGD, June 15, 2013]

Before and after the DAS was released, Disney's SGD disabilities professionals argued that an opportunity to make advance arrangements should be offered to guests with autism, by giving those guests an opportunity to "pre-load" the DAS card with a number of attractions the guest could visit without suffering a substantial wait time. Autism Speaks, with whom Disney communicated for purpose of saying it had consulted with the autism community, suggested precisely the same approach. Absent a pre-loaded card, SGD pushed for creation of some other back-up plan to grant exceptions for cognitively-impaired guests who need it. All these proposals to mitigate the discriminatory impact of the DAS were rejected.

We need to list specific significant directions that we don't agree with...We need to maintain an override process for any custom accommodation...In addition to the DAS card, Guests visiting the parks with non-apparent disabilities (including Autism) would be encouraged to use the standard FastPass process and standby queues (there would be no other alternatives for these Guests). [Hale/SGD, June 15, 2013 (emphasis added)]

I also agree... about needing an additional tool for service recovery. [Minnick/SGD, June 15, 2013]

I'm in the process of framing up some possible ideas for what our strategy might need to be if/when we find ourselves in a situation that requires us to modify our DAS card process for those on the Autism spectrum. [Jones/SGD, June 17, 2013]

"Back-up plan for Autistic Guest" seems like a 'reasonable' approach. [Jones/SG, June 30, 2013]

SGD generally supports the manual back-up plan at both DLR and WDW. [Jones/SG, July 3, 2013]

The engineers and operations personnel consistently chose their own business concerns over SGD's disability-oriented concerns.

*[W]e do not believe we should launch a separate process for [autism].
[Sweetman/Ops, July 6, 2013]*

I think our time should be spent developing a strong service recovery approach, and apply it when necessary regardless of the individual's needs. [Gossett/Ops, July 6, 2013 (emphasis added)]

[SGD is] primarily displeased that there will not be a formal exceptions process to pre-fill the card. [Armor/IE – September 4, 2013]

Ultimately, the SGD personnel realized the IE/Ops personnel were absorbed with profits and not guest service, and particularly not disabled guest service, and simply did not intend to listen to disability-focused input.

Park Ops (Alison in particular) continues to state "there is no appetite [for] any kind of service or green light card beyond what has already been discussed. [Jones/SGD, June 15, 2013]

Based on how this whole process has gone with Park Ops, I believe we all can agree that "feedback/comments/suggestions" are not really being considered with a whole lot of weight from anyone. [Jones/SGD, July 4, 2013]

They will only change after they personally experience the issues first hand. [Appleton/DLR to SGD, July 4, 2013]

Ultimately, after thousands of complaints were received by Disney:

I do think someone needs to admit the new system does not work for Autism families. All disabilities are not equal. [Betty Lowery, Manager, Community Relationships, Walt Disney World Community Relations, February 10, 2014 (emphasis added)]