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UPLIFTING SERVICE

The Proven Path

*to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues,
and Everyone Else You Meet*

RON
KAUFMAN

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“UPLIFTING SERVICE: The Proven Path to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues, and Everyone Else You Meet”

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CHAPTER 3

The Proven Path

When he was just nine years old, a boy migrated with his family from Lithuania to Cape Town, South Africa, in hope of a better life. He was a sports enthusiast, playing soccer, swimming, and lifting weights. His story seemed destined for an uplifting ending—a gutsy young person who overcomes adversity to change the world. Without a doubt, Louis Washkansky did make a contribution to our lives, but not in the manner you might expect.

When he was old enough, Louis joined the military, served during wartime, and then became a local grocer. But Louis' health declined sharply during middle age. He became a diabetic and, suffering from heart disease, survived three heart attacks. His third heart attack led Louis to Groote Schuur Hospital in South Africa, where doctors patiently explained that his congestive heart failure was untreatable. He was going to die fairly soon, and there was little, if anything, the doctors could do to save him.

Louis was willing to try anything to save his life. There was one radical new procedure the doctors wanted to attempt. It was his only chance at survival, but carried a devastating level of risk. The procedure was invasive and long, and it had never been done

before. Louis agreed, and initially the procedure worked. He survived the surgery but died 18 days later from double pneumonia because of a weakened immune system.

Despite what it may seem, this wasn't a failure but the beginning of one of the medical profession's most dramatic advancements and innovations. This is the story of the first human heart transplant, performed by Dr. Christiaan Barnard.

The "why" in this story was obvious to both the patient and the doctors. The goal and challenge were clear. And the need for speed was urgent. The only thing not yet clear was "how." Dr. Barnard had a theory of what might work based on research and other organ transplant procedures. Yet, this was the first human heart transplant, and Barnard knew that Louis Washkansky, like every human, was unique. There was potential, and there would be problems.

This heart transplant procedure has been fine-tuned and practically perfected since the 1960s. A very specific plan now exists to guide surgeons to successfully transplant a human heart from a cadaver into the chest of a living human being. Yet, the most important hurdle that must always be respected—and for which the procedure must be adjusted every time—is the unique presenting condition of each patient.

The same is true when an organization aims to build an uplifting service culture. Every organization is different. The service history, attributes, customer expectations, competition, and industry regulations will vary immensely from one organization to the next. A financial services company like Singapore's NTUC Income can't build a winning service reputation by mimicking the zany antics of America's Zappos. It wouldn't make sense for

Wipro, one of the world's largest information technology services companies, to build a butterfly garden in its corporate headquarters like Changi Airport. Even in the same industry, the playfully profitable culture of budget carrier Southwest doesn't match the luxuriously profitable culture of Singapore Airlines.

Yet when we distill what each of these companies has done to build their distinctive service culture, a clear map emerges revealing a remarkably common, practical, and successful approach. There is a proven architecture and a roadmap for engineering an uplifting service culture that the world's service leaders have been using for years. It works in every industry and geography. It works in high tech and high touch, in education, in professional services and industry associations, and even in government organizations.

And now, I am bringing to you this same proven approach to build a distinctive and uplifting service culture in your team, your organization, your community, and your world.

A Prescription That Works

"This is unreal," said Todd Nordstrom, poking his head into the movie theater at Changi Airport. "Why would anyone want to get on their next flight? You could hang out here all day. This isn't an airport; it's an adventure."

He paused, letting his eyes follow many travelers as they wandered through the colorful terminal building. Then he took a deep breath and sighed. "It's too bad all businesses can't offer phenomenal experiences like this. I mean, sure, a motivated company can provide great service, but not like this with all the beautiful architecture and incredible amenities."

Again, I smiled. “Actually, the Changi Airport culture shares exactly the same uplifting service architecture as many other leading organizations. Yes, every company is different, and every industry and culture has their own unique ways of doing business. I’ve been helping leaders transform their service cultures for more than 25 years, and the situations they face are different, but the architecture they apply to build an uplifting service culture is exactly the same.”

This architecture is a prescription that works. It’s a proven design, a way of engineering teams and activities, and creating the future. It’s a proven path for people like you and organizations like yours to consistently delight your customers, your colleagues, and everyone else you meet.

An Uplifting Service Architecture

A heart transplant has become a common practice, as do many endeavors after years of trial and error. Sony created the portable cassette tape player, and now music moves with no tape at all. American Express pioneered safe payments on the road with traveler’s checks. Today payments are made quickly and easily through many mediums worldwide. Following directions with a printed map has become the GPS app on your smartphone.

But when it comes to building a uniquely strong service culture, the path to success has been less clear. It seems more anecdotal, dependent on the passion of a team or some founder’s personality, and therefore less predictable or precise. At least that’s what many believe.

Across two decades of experience with large and diverse organizations, I’ve had the privilege to gain insights and build solutions with some of the world’s great service leaders. Over time I noticed

a common framework that described and defined their actions. Although each organization was different, their circumstances varied, and although their answer to “Why service?” was not the same, their “How?” was remarkably consistent.

This insight led me to deeper research to analyze the organizations’ common paths. It led me to ask many more questions of the organizations I worked with, about their past programs, their present actions, and their intended future. It led me to explore various angles and approaches from which an uplifting service culture could be conceived and successfully constructed. Ultimately, it led me to write this book, revealing the five key elements of an Uplifting Service Architecture that have proven effective and efficient over time.

WHY • LEAD • BUILD • LEARN • DRIVE

The Five Key Elements of an Uplifting Service Architecture

These five elements may appear simple, but understanding and making each an area of deep focus will be critical to your service success. Through this book, I will focus on each area in detail. And, I will ask you to take practical action steps in each area so you can build or improve your service culture right away.

1. Start with “Why?”

The previous chapter focused on three questions: Why improve your service? Why build a service culture? Why build an uplifting service culture?

These questions are powerful tools. It is vital that each person and team in your organization thinks about these questions carefully and answers them in detail. The three questions initiate reflection, consideration, and consolidation of ideas, leading to clear and well-defined goals.

Consider Xerox in the United Arab Emirates as an example for the first question. The massive document management company had an aggressive four-year goal to double in size, growing faster than the market while also increasing profit margins. They used excellent service as a key differentiator in the competitive marketplace and achieved their goals in spite of economic turmoil that upended all of their plans.

“The results speak for themselves: year-to-date revenue growth of 32%, 53% gross profit growth, and 52% net profit growth,” said General Manager Andrew Hurt, 10 months into one of the most financially difficult years the world has ever seen.

Those are impressive results for an aggressive economic answer to the fundamental question, “Why improve your service?”

Your company may have a very different answer. Maybe you want to improve employee engagement, build teamwork across silos, or attract and retain better talent. Maybe you want to increase your top-line revenue, bottom-line profits, or add more value to your shareholders. Maybe you want to differentiate and stand above the competition by adding more value through your service, or your expanding range of services. Maybe you want to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by building an uplifting service culture that delivers all of the above.

Whatever you decide, you will only find your answers when you and your team dedicate time to ask and answer the three major questions in the first section of this book.

2. Take the Lead

Uplifting service cultures are not built on strict policies dictated by leaders or by procedures controlled by managers. Instead, these cultures grow when *creating more value through better service* becomes the shared purpose within every aspect of your business, your interactions, and your transactions—from your boardroom all the way to your front lines.

Consider Parkway Health, a leading healthcare provider with 16 hospitals and 3,400 beds throughout Asia. According to CEO and Managing Director Dr. Tan See Leng, “We can have the best medical technology and facilities, but patients will not return if the service is poor.” He’s right. So Parkway Health deployed a top-down and bottom-up approach to improving service organization-wide—building fundamental service principles into the hospital operating system, sending all leaders, managers, and department heads through intensive service education, and certifying course leaders to spread the same message of uplifting service to every frontline staff member throughout the organization.

This coordinated campaign has enabled the growing company to view service challenges and new opportunities in a common way, yet from different levels and functional points of view. And because this initiative was promoted, supported, and launched at the same time from the top down and the bottom up, the company has demonstrated that it is possible for team members to lead service improvement from any position and at all levels.

We will explore this topic with examples and action steps you can take in the second section of the book, chapters 4 through 6.

3. Build with the Blocks

Of course, every organization is unique and structured differently. Nevertheless, successful service cultures share a similar structural focus when it comes to building an uplifting service culture. I call these “The 12 Building Blocks.” Some of the blocks in your organization may already be in place. Some may be weak and need extra attention. Others may not need attention now but will in the future, or vice versa. The goal, as in any architectural or engineering endeavor, is to prioritize and then strategically organize your activities and building blocks to eliminate weakness, while leveraging strength.

Microsoft is an intriguing example of this challenge in action. The company provides software to billions of customers and works with a network of more than 700,000 developers and partners. Microsoft has very strong building blocks to support an ongoing stream of new product and service launches. But even Microsoft understands the need to improve its customers’ and partners’ experiences (CPE). CPE is a work in progress at Microsoft, as it requires a shift in the long-standing developer-centric and features-oriented culture. Instead of product groups and business units rapidly launching products and then improving customer experience by reacting to feedback, Microsoft is putting in place new activities to build a more proactive and collaborative culture, enabling employees to reach across silos and across the company to create the next great experience together.

By contrast, at Singapore Airlines, activities in all 12 Building Blocks have been developed, aligned, and fine-tuned since 1969

into an art form that delivers extraordinary service and profits. This world-class service culture consistently delivers in a global industry routinely plagued by complaints of cancelled flights, inconsistent service, and unstable financial performance.

You will learn more about the strategy and techniques of both these companies, and many more from around the world, in the third section of the book, chapters 7 through 18.

4. Learn to Improve

Just as reading every diet book in the store won't make you lose weight, simply reading about service won't improve your service performance or your culture unless you actually change your behaviors. Real service education means that people learn to think and act differently in service so that their actions always create value for someone else. To achieve this throughout an organization requires a Common Service Language based on fundamental service principles that apply to all internal and external service providers, at all levels, and in every business unit, department, or division. But lessons aren't enough. There must also be exercises customized for the service situations facing each service provider, and then wide-scale buy-in across the organization for the attitude and practices of uplifting service.

Look at Nokia Siemens Networks. This proud European company serves telecommunications providers and partners around the globe with more than 60,000 employees spread across 150 countries. "Today, everyone has access to the same information," said the company's CEO, Mr. Rajeev Suri. "Technology is outdated faster than ever before and competitors can replicate everything except our attitude, and our service-focused actions.

A superior service culture is what will distinguish us from the competition.”

How do you educate a company of this size to take new action? In less than 24 months, Nokia Siemens Networks sent 650 members of its Executive Board and Global Leadership Team to service leadership workshops held in 14 cities around the world. Nokia Siemens Networks carefully selected and trained an elite group of 150 employees to become course leaders, who then taught a curriculum of world-class service education to more than 20,000 of their colleagues in less than 24 months. And they did this in 12 languages, creating a Common Service Language that works across the company and around the world.

This proven curriculum of world-class service education is given to you—with exercises you can use right away—in the fourth section of the book, chapters 19 through 24.

5. Drive Forward

Imagine hopping on a bicycle, cranking the pedals, and just when you start accelerating down a steep hill, you close your eyes and take your hands off the handlebars. It's crazy, I know. Yet, this is how many organizations approach new initiatives. They crank hard at the beginning, and then they let go. But leaders and organizations with successful service cultures don't let go—they hold on; they keep on cranking; they drive. Their eyes sparkle with the excitement of uplifting service goals. Their feet are firmly planted in the realities of today. With a clear focus on the future and the reality at hand, they steer their cultures forward in an ongoing and ultimately inspiring process.

“It’s fascinating to watch,” says Melvin Leong, Manager of Corporate and Marketing Communications at Changi Airport. “When people come to work here, whether in a restaurant, a retail location, an airline office or an immigration counter, first they go through the Changi Airport service training. Then, after they’ve worked here for a while, it’s almost like a light bulb goes off. They see the reaction from travelers. They see other employees improving their service. And that’s when it becomes real. That’s when people begin to own it for themselves. Yes, we have people who are specifically responsible for our airport service initiatives. But, it doesn’t take long before everyone realizes that they’re driving these initiatives, too.”

The airport builds an award-winning culture with a dynamic and frequently changing series of service classes, contests, recognition programs, communications, surveys, focus groups, and much more. You will learn how leading organizations drive their service cultures forward, and how you can achieve the same results or even better results where you work, in section 5 of the book, chapters 25 through 27.

How Does This Change Begin?

“OK, it’s obvious that Changi Airport is a great example of surprising, personal, and stress-free service, and I can see that everyone plays a part,” remarked Todd as he relaxed in one of the many massage chairs freely available throughout the airport. “But how do these things get started? What about the companies that have never really focused on service—much less an uplifting service culture? How does change start then? Can one person take the lead and change an existing culture?”

“Sure,” I said. “This is just the gateway to Singapore. Now let me take you inside to a place where you might least expect to find an uplifting service culture, where people go when there is an accident, or a problem, or even after someone dies. I’ll tell you the true story of how one man confronted the past and declared a cultural revolution and how every member of that organization made their service revolution come alive.”

Meet Ron Kaufman

Ron Kaufman is the world's premiere thought-leader, educator, and motivator for uplifting customer service and building service cultures. Ron is the author of 14 other books on service, business, and inspiration.

Ron provides powerful insights from working with clients all over the world in every major industry for more than twenty years. Ron is an inspiration to leaders and managers with his content rich and entertaining speeches, and his impactful, interactive workshops. He is rated one of the world's "Top 25 Who's Hot" speakers by *Speaker Magazine*.

Ron has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*. He is passionately committed to uplifting the spirit and practice of service worldwide.

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A breakthrough book
that will surprise, delight, and uplift you,
your organization, and your team.

In *Uplifting Service*, Ron Kaufman takes you on a journey into the new world of service. Through dynamic case studies and best-practice examples, you will learn how the world's leading companies have changed the game, and how you can successfully follow this path to an uplifting service transformation.

“Read this book, apply the steps. Watch your culture transform and your perspective on service change forever. Ron Kaufman has unlocked the mystery of service. Get ready for a magnificent journey into a new world.”

Marshall Goldsmith

Bestselling Author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“Ron Kaufman has pinpointed a massive wound in society, and offers a strategy to uplift the world around us. For mankind, it's transformational. For business, it's a clean and clear path to a sustainable competitive advantage. This book is long overdue, and will create a legendary shift.”

Thomas Moran

Director, Customer and Partner Experience
Microsoft Operations



Ron Kaufman, the founder of Uplifting Service, is the world's premiere thought-leader, educator, and motivator for uplifting customer service and building service cultures.

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