

New York Times Bestseller

UPLIFTING SERVICE

The Proven Path

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

RON
KAUFMAN

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

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CHAPTER 5

Leading from All Levels



It was 8 a.m. on Tuesday. Travis Hamilton, an independent filmmaker from Arizona, arrived at a well-known local health spa with a truck full of video equipment. Piece by piece he hauled his equipment through the front doors, across the reception area, and up a long staircase to an outdoor balcony overlooking an attractive courtyard.

His job that day was to shoot a television commercial. Any video work he could get his hands on, like this commercial, was how Travis funded his dream of creating an independent feature film. However, while most commercial production companies would send a team of people to help set up and manage a video shoot like this, Travis did most of this work on his own.

Although he had heard stories about this spa's reputation for personal service and elegant surroundings, Travis had never shot video in a spa before. Soft lighting highlighted the beautiful décor, warm and welcoming treatment rooms, and a flower-filled

courtyard. His job was to capture the experience this spa wanted to portray—impeccable service in a luxurious environment.

Travis lugged his equipment up the staircase to shoot the balcony, the first of many camera angles he would use in this commercial. When it was time for the next shot, he lugged his equipment back down the stairs for a series of close-ups, then outside for location shots, and later onto a rolling dolly for moving shots across the courtyard. And he did it all by himself.

Travis was extremely polite to everyone working at the spa. They were in the service business, and he wanted to fit in as a service professional. As he prepared each shot, he was careful that he was not rude in any way. He asked each employee for permission to set up the camera in his or her space. He asked the woman at the reception desk which outlets she preferred that he use to plug in his equipment. He asked the two actors if they were comfortable with each short scene before they moved on to the next. He made sure everyone was enjoying the experience.

Throughout the day, instead of telling people what to do, Travis asked. In fact, it seems the only thing Travis didn't ask for was help—except for one instance when he asked an older man quietly sweeping the floor if he would please hold that door open while Travis carried his equipment. The man agreed with a kind smile and then offered to help carry the equipment. Travis declined for the most part—except for a few larger items, for which he was most grateful. And, when the man handed him a cold bottle of water, Travis thanked him profusely.

At the end of the day, Travis took a deep breath and asked the receptionist if he could speak with the owner of the spa. He thought it was important to thank the person responsible for giving him

this work. He understood that smaller, commercial jobs like this allowed him to pursue his dream.

Up the stairs, down the hall, and to the left was the spa owner's office. Inside was a large mahogany desk with a beautiful leather chair, and a polished table was nearby. Travis anxiously entered. He wasn't accustomed to dealing with seasoned business professionals. He wasn't accustomed to beautiful mahogany desks, leather chairs, and polished tables. And he surely wasn't expecting to find the same man who had swept the floors and held the door for him to be sitting behind that desk.

The owner of the spa was the person who served Travis the most that day. He smiled and welcomed Travis to come in and sit down for a moment to rest. Travis smiled back. The man kindly inquired what Travis would like to drink, and later thanked him for his service with a handwritten note and gift voucher, so he could enjoy a treatment at the spa.

"Now I get it," Travis thought. "No wonder this spa has such an outstanding reputation for service."

The Seven Rules of Service Leadership

Leaders can't just tell people how to serve; every day they must show people how to serve and teach them why it's so valuable. It would be easy to say that Mr. Tan of NTUC Income simply insisted on delivering better service or that the leadership team at Changi Airport issued a government order and demanded world-class service. But that's not how it works. People in every level of an organization will not engage in making a service vision come alive unless their leaders are living it, too.

In my experience working with leaders of many of the world's outstanding service organizations, I've discovered seven essential rules these leaders always follow. Some leverage the power of one rule more than another, and you may do the same. But each of these rules is essential to lead your team to success. In the chapters ahead you will find many examples, ideas, and suggestions for putting these rules to work.

Rule 1: Declare Service a Top Priority

NTUC Income is a clear example of how vital it is to declare service—and continuous service improvement—a top priority for the organization. The company was already a very large and successful organization when Mr. Tan was hired as CEO. But being large and commercially successful wasn't enough. Tan made clear public declarations that uplifting service was no longer just part of the business; it was now a top priority in his plans for cultural transformation. In fact, he willingly provoked the status quo by calling it a revolution.

Consider the companies you know well for their consistently high quality service, organizations that have built profitable and enduring reputations: Nordstrom, Disney, Southwest Airlines, Singapore Airlines, The Ritz-Carlton, and more recently Zappos. These companies consistently declare service a top priority and are vigorous in delivering what they declare.

Declaring service a top priority means senior leaders understand that focusing on service improvement leads to commercial results. Profit is the applause you receive for serving your customers well. When middle managers declare service a top priority, the message to everyone is clear: procedures and budgets surely count,

but creating value for others counts the most. And when frontline employees declare service their top priority and delighting others becomes their goal, they uplift customer satisfaction—and job satisfaction, too.

You can declare service a top priority by putting it first on the agenda. You can declare service as a top priority to your customers and your colleagues in your speaking, writing, meetings, advertising, websites, newsletters, tweets, blog posts, updates, video clips, workshops, and daily actions.

Rule 2: Be a Great Role Model

Leaders are the people who others choose to follow, not those who simply tell other people what to do. By their own example, leaders inspire others to want to do what they do, too.

Let's consider just how large the impact of role modeling can be. A senior executive from Matsushita Electric (now operating as Panasonic Corporation) was visiting one of the company's manufacturing plants overseas. Because of his senior status within the organization, and because he had a legendary reputation for noticing small details, local employees cleaned up the plant and even rolled out a red carpet for his tour around the factory floor. Seven hundred workers in freshly cleaned uniforms stood shoulder to shoulder between the large machines. The executive, in a perfectly tailored pinstripe suit, walked slowly along the carpet, nodding with respect to the workers.

Then suddenly the executive turned, stepped off the soft red carpet, and walked slowly but deliberately toward one of the factory's largest machines. The executive's assistants whispered anxiously

to each other. This detour was not on the schedule, and no one knew what to expect. Seven hundred workers watched him intently, wondering where he was going, and why?

He reached the large machine, paused, and took a deep breath. The eyes of the entire workforce were now glued to this storied executive from the head office. Seven hundred workers watched in amazement as he bent down, reached his hand just under the edge of the machine, and picked up a paperclip he had seen out of the corner of his eye. He stood up and tucked the paperclip into his suit pocket. He took another deep breath, turned, and quietly returned to the red carpet.

The room was silent.

There was no scolding. There wasn't a word said. But the message of this action resonated for years. The senior executive could have asked one of his entourage to fetch the paperclip. He could have told an employee to pick it up. He could have scolded, instructed, and sent out a memo, but he didn't. Instead, he simply modeled an expectation that everyone is responsible for maintaining the highest standards of cleanliness in the plant.

I learned of this incident from a man who was in the factory that day and saw this with his own eyes. He was moved with emotion as he told me the story more than 15 years later. "After that visit," he said, "our factory was the cleanest in the country. It wasn't because we bought more cleaning equipment or changed any of our housekeeping procedures. That one gesture made such a big impact that we held ourselves—and each other—to the same incredibly high standard."

Rule 3: Promote a Common Service Language

In military service, building and using a common language comes naturally. Leaders are promoted through the ranks and share a set of clear terms with their troops: “At ease,” “Reporting for duty,” “Attention!” But most of us don’t serve in the military. In commercial and government organizations, language often evolves in functional silos, and in ways that don’t connect.

People in the finance department think turning out reports faster equals better service. But their colleagues in other departments might actually prefer some help in reading those reports. Those in procurement think that getting a lower price is better service. But their colleagues may be seeking stronger partnerships with vendors. Human resources may assume more vacation time is better service for employees, when what employees really want is greater flexibility in health care and other benefits. Manufacturing believes delivering a defect-free product is its finest quality service. But the marketing and sales teams may prefer a wider range of newer products. Marketing thinks its service is better when the number of leads goes up. But sales may say just the opposite: they want fewer, but better-qualified, new leads. Finally, the sales team says its service should be measured by the number of new or increased sales. But what the company may need even more is consistent sales volume throughout the year.

Disconnects can also occur between levels of an organization. Managers talk about service metrics, benchmark scores, and growing share of wallet. Frontline workers talk about today’s schedule, a colleague’s problem, an angry customer’s remark.

Everyone talks about better service from a perspective that makes perfect sense to him or her. What’s missing is a common language

to enable listening and understanding, clear distinctions to appreciate what other people want and value. To build a culture of uplifting service throughout an organization, leaders must promote a Common Service Language everyone can apply.

In section 4 of this book, you will discover and learn a new language that works beautifully for leaders and service providers in every function and position. “We need to polish those Perceptions Points before our service level drops below expected” (chapter 21). “Do we know which categories of The BIG Picture these new customers value most?” (chapter 22). “Let’s close the loop on this Service Transaction, then explore for new opportunities to grow together” (chapter 26).

Asking your team to upgrade service without enabling language is unwise and inefficient. Giving them a Common Service Language but not using it yourself would be foolish. If you want everyone on your team to deliver uplifting service, you must speak fluently and frequently about it. This responsibility cannot be delegated away to the department of corporate communications. Nor can your use of service language be mere lip service only. You must demonstrate your understanding and commitment with observable and admirable actions. Using the words without the deeds has no more impact than idle chatter. “Walking the talk” and “talking the talk” go hand in hand. When service leaders speak and act, people listen and choose to follow.

Rule 4: Measure What Really Matters

Many people get confused when it comes to measuring service. This is understandable, because you can measure so many things: complaints, compliments, expectations, levels of engagement,

relative importance, recent improvements, performance to standards, customer satisfaction, retention, intention to repurchase, referral, share of wallet, share of mind, and so much more. Once you count, track, interview, survey, focus group, or mystery shop, then you can deduce, derive, deep-dive, and try to decide what to do about it all. No wonder people get confused.

A service leader cuts through this confusion to measure what really matters. Start by recalling our definition: *Service is taking action to create value for someone else.* Then the two most important questions are these: Are your actions creating value? and, Are you taking enough new actions?

Some people will say this is far too simple, that many other measures must be taken into account. But let's explore this together, first from the top down, and then from the bottom up.

The ultimate objectives in business include top-line revenues, bottom-line profits, market share, reputation, shareholder value, and growth. These are all easily measured. But what happens before you can achieve your ultimate objectives? What is the leading indicator and reliable precursor to achieving those business objectives?

One way to predict higher share, reputation, and profits is to see if your index and survey scores are going up. When satisfaction scores, loyalty scores, share of wallet scores, and employee engagement scores are all improving, your ultimate objectives will improve, too.

What is a reliable precursor to index scores going up? One sure predictor of higher survey scores is a consistently higher volume of positive feedback. When kudos, compliments, and bouquets are

coming to you in abundance, then your index scores and survey results will rise, too.

But what must happen before the compliments start pouring in? What is the essential precursor to getting positive feedback in the first place? Compliments happen when someone has an idea to serve someone else better and then takes action to make it real.

And what is the precursor of new ideas and actions? It's new thinking and new learning about customers, service, and value.

Now let's follow this same sequence from the bottom up. New learning about service leads to new ideas for giving better service to others, which leads to new action, which leads to more compliments, which leads to higher survey scores, which leads to more sales, referrals, loyalty, and profits.

Too many executives track the ultimate objectives from a distance and wonder how to get better results. Uplifting service leaders are closer to the action; they know the bull's-eye to hit and the needle to move are where people are working with customers and colleagues each day. They measure what really matters from the bottom up: new learning about service, new ideas to serve other people better, and new actions to create greater value.

How many new service ideas have you and your team created this week? How many new actions have you taken?

Rule 5: Empower Your Team

Empowerment is a buzzword in business, and many leaders and employees seem to fear it. What they really fear is someone who

is empowered making a bad decision. If a leader is not confident in her people, she doesn't want to empower them with greater authority or a larger budget. And if an employee is not confident in his abilities and decisions, he often does not want the responsibility of being empowered.

In both cases, what's missing is not empowerment, but the coaching, mentoring, and encouraging that must go with it. If you knew your people would make good decisions, you would be glad to give them the authority to do so. And when your people feel confident they can make good decisions, they will be eager to have this freedom. Empowering others cannot and should not be decoupled from the responsibility to properly enable those you empower.

When Tan Suee Chieh at NTUC Income realized his middle managers weren't attending the new service courses and were not encouraging their team members to attend, he knew he could not force new ideas for better service on his people. He had to enable them and empower them to use those ideas and then appreciate the power of their actions. So he requested all middle managers to attend a full two-day service education course, and he personally opened each program by taking time to explain why he thought this was important. And then he came again to close each program, to listen to his managers and answer any questions.

Then he gave the managers an assignment they could only complete by engaging fully in the course content with the members of their own staff. He asked each manager to answer this question: "What changes will you make between May and October of this year that will put what you have learned into action?" That sounds like a simple assignment, but there was an enabling hook. The managers had to respond in a presentation with the members of their own teams, and they had to use the service language they just learned to

explain their proposed new actions. Six months later, in October, each manager and his or her team presented again, now showcasing the results they had achieved. It's the combination that works: enabling with education and personal support and then empowering with a challenge to work together and achieve new results.

Rule 6: Remove the Roadblocks to Better Service

I recently stayed at a luxury resort in California, where I presented a keynote speech about Uplifting Service for an annual meeting of franchisees. The property was gorgeous. The rooms were spectacular. The people couldn't have been friendlier. And the food was sensational. But then one night, I invited some friends who lived in the area to join me for dinner at the resort. Our waiter explained that there was a special menu that night—spotlighting several of the chef's special dishes. We all looked at the menu to see if anything was appealing, and, after a few minutes, the waiter returned to take our orders.

"We'd like to order from the resort's standard dinner menu," I said. I had fallen in love with the salmon salad during my stay, and two of my guests were vegetarian—with nothing to choose from on the chef's menu.

"I'm sorry, we're only offering this menu tonight," said the waiter.

"Really?" I asked. "But I love that salmon salad, and two of my guests are vegetarian. I'm sure we could order these from your standard menu? Or from the room service menu?"

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, obviously uncomfortable. "If you go back to your room and order room service, then you can order the salmon salad or anything else on that menu."

“But isn’t the food prepared in the same kitchen?” I asked.

“Yes, sir,” replied the waiter. “But we’re not allowed to serve anything in the restaurant tonight that’s not on this special menu.”

I understood the resort wanted to spotlight the chef’s evening specialties. But the restaurant had created a major roadblock for the people who worked there, and it’s not about the menu or the salmon salad. It’s about the customer experience and the simple fact that the waiter wasn’t given permission to serve. Imagine how thrilled and special we would have felt if he had said, “I’ll make an exception for you tonight. And for your guests, I am sure we can come up with something deliciously special.”

Most frontline staff members are taught to follow policies and procedures. Often they are hesitant to “break the rules.” Yet some rules should be broken, changed, or at least seriously bent from time to time. What roadblocks to better service lurk inside your organization? What gets in your people’s way? What slows them down? What prevents them from taking better care of your customers? What stops them from helping their colleagues? Service leaders ask these questions and remove the roadblocks they uncover.

Rule 7: Sustain Focus and Enthusiasm

It’s not difficult to declare service as a top priority. What’s challenging is keeping service top of mind when other issues clamor for attention. It’s not hard to use a new language for better service; what’s hard is using that language day after day until it becomes a habit. It may not be hard to track new service ideas and actions, but it can be difficult to keep them top of mind in the thinking of your team.

Sustaining focus and enthusiasm for service is vital when building an uplifting service culture, and world leaders seize every opportunity. When world-leading Singapore Airlines suffers business setbacks during events like the SARS outbreak, the attacks of 9-11, and dramatic financial crises, instead of laying off people in a knee-jerk reaction to cut costs, the company seizes the opportunity and brings its people in to attend new service enrichment courses. Think about that—when business returns to normal, Singapore Airlines employees are better trained and focused. They come out of each economic downturn even more committed to the company and to their customers: ready to serve with greater skills in languages, procedures, food, wine, and all kinds of special situations. No wonder it consistently leads the world in service.

Sustaining focus and enthusiasm is critical—in business, in life, and in service. This is not something leaders should view as a soft and therefore less important rule. Nor should it be entirely delegated to others. In fact, overlooking Rule 7 could be the mistake that derails all your plans and programs. How many diets fail because people can't sustain focus and enthusiasm? How many marriages fail for the same reasons? How many companies suffer from starting down a great path, but ultimately view the endeavor as a failure, simply because they couldn't sustain it?

There are many ways to sustain focus and enthusiasm for service, and the building blocks in the next section of this book will provide you with many examples. Or, you could share the stories you have already read with others where you work. What this book cannot provide is your sustained commitment to keep the focus and enthusiasm high, to put these ideas into action. That leadership must come from you.

Service Changes the World

“Everyone told me I had to try the chili crab,” said Todd Nordstrom.

“I’ll take you to East Coast Seafood across the street,” I replied. “There are many seafood restaurants there, and they all serve chili crab, and a lot more.”

He smiled. “I’ve heard it’s the best in the world.”

“Sure, but everyone who lives here in Singapore has a favorite restaurant for chili crab.” I said. “People here can be very opinionated when it comes to food.”

“So, which restaurant actually has the best?” he asked.

I laughed. “Todd, it’s all fantastic. But I choose the place with the shortest line and the friendliest staff. If the service is slow, or the staff are not smiling, I move on to the next place.”

“It’s all about service with you, isn’t it?” he asked.

“You better believe it,” I said. “Now you’re starting to see how I see the whole world. And you’re seeing why I want to show you all these companies and introduce you to all these people. Now you’re seeing why I do what I do.”

Todd paused. He gazed out my living room window with his hands in his pockets. And, until he responded again, I had believed we were having a casual conversation.

“I get it,” he said quietly.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Service changes the world,” he said, still facing the window.

I paused and smiled. I was surprised, and delighted. Todd was beginning to understand.

“Come on.” I said to my visitor and friend. “Let’s go enjoy the best chili crab you’ll ever eat.”

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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