

*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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and Everyone Else You Meet*

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## CHAPTER 7

# Common Service Language

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Using and promoting a Common Service Language is the first building block in your uplifting service culture. Why does this building block come first? Because human beings create the world in which we live by using language. We create meaning with language, and we can change our world by inventing or adopting new language.

Here's an example. Singapore is a fascinating mix of races, religions, and cultures with four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil. A friendly common language, "Singlish," informally unites the country. Speakers are famous for putting "lah" after certain words like "OK-lah" and for short, punchy phrases such as: "So how?" "Can or cannot?" and "Why you so like dat?" Singlish is concise and efficient. Its speakers are focused on achieving the goal of any interaction. And it works. But it is not endorsed by the elected leaders of the country. Instead, the government conducts "Speak Good English" and "Speak Proper Mandarin" campaigns to encourage a more fluent and globally competitive workforce.

Singapore's leaders may not encourage Singlish, but they do understand the power of a Common Service Language when it comes to building service culture. Consider the problem faced by the Singapore Public Service—a wide-ranging system of government with 127,000 officers in 15 ministries and more than 50 statutory boards. Imagine a citizen, a tourist, or an employer with a question, trying to figure out which office to call? All too often, callers would make an attempt, only to hear a public servant say, “Sorry, you’ve called the wrong office.” That’s not world-class service.

So Singapore's Public Service leaders created a new phrase—and a philosophy—by implementing a policy called “No Wrong Door.” Today, if you call the wrong government office, a public servant will take personal responsibility to transfer you to the right officer in another government agency, and he or she won't let you go until you have been successfully connected. “No Wrong Door” highlights the power of a Common Service Language: it's simple, memorable, and effective.

Singapore Airlines is widely recognized for consistently impeccable service standards. The company is also a world-class case study in the development and use of Common Service Language. In the 1970s, the airline adopted service as its core differentiating strategy with the aspiring tagline, “Service Even Other Airlines Talk About,” and created the popular Singapore Girl icon as the in-flight personification of this promise. In 1987, the company wanted to raise service standards on the ground to match their well-deserved reputation in the air. A new phrase and educational program was created called “Outstanding Service on the Ground” (OSG). All over the world, Singapore Airlines employees learned the meaning of this acronym and how to put it into action. Although the program was phased out a decade later, the

common language persists in telex messages like this: “PLS DAPO OSG PAX @ LAX.” Translation: “Please do all possible to provide outstanding service on the ground for this passenger on arrival at Los Angeles International Airport.” In the late 1990s, a program to succeed OSG was created called “Transforming Customer Service” (TCS). And in 2003 a new program for cabin crew was launched highlighting the company’s defining aspiration to provide service that far exceeds the competition: “Service Over and Above the Rest” (SOAR).

Consider also how Microsoft added a Common Service Language to help create more desirable resolutions for its customers. For many years Microsoft has tracked “first contact resolution,” a measure of how quickly it resolves an issue the first time a customer or partner makes contact. First contact resolution metrics are common throughout this satisfaction-driven software company. Dashboards show in numbers and percentages how many problems are resolved in less than 8 hours, between 8 and 24 hours, longer than 24 hours, or not resolved at all. When Microsoft learned the language of uplifting service, it added a new column called “Service Classification.” Now, alongside the impersonal statistics is a rating of the customer’s experience using some of the terms you will learn in section 4 of this book: *criminal*, *basic*, *expected*, and *desired*.

With the addition of this new service language, managers are asking new and sometimes unsettling questions. Instead of purely task and technical queries such as, “How can we reduce this number by 10 percent to hit our quarterly target?” they are now asking questions about the customer and partner experience: “This dashboard says that only 66 percent of our customers are getting what they desire. Then what is everyone else getting? And what are we doing about it?”



## What's Your Common Service Language?

Your Common Service Language may become as famous as Disney referring to its employees as cast members or Subway calling its employees sandwich artists. Your language may become so strong that it permeates the organization and even society at large. Before Starbucks became popular, the most common phrase associated with coffee in America was the “bottomless cup.” Today, all over the country and the world, customers order grande, non-fat cappuccinos, with extra shots, and dry.

Many organizations don't realize they already have a Common Service Language—and in some unfortunate cases it's not positive at all. The manager at a radio station I consulted with once joked, “When listeners complain, we instruct our people to say, ‘When the bill arrives for your listening pleasure, just don't pay it.’” That's terrible language for a leader to employ or to ask his or her employees to use.

To build an uplifting service culture, your Common Service Language is a critical building block to clarify meaning, to promote purpose, and to align everyone's intentions and objectives. It should be easy to understand and easy to apply in real service situations. It must make sense for internal and external service providers and for team members at every level of the organization. Your Common Service Language should be meaningful and attractive—a shared vocabulary to focus the attention and the actions of your team.

Parkway Health has developed its Common Service Language much further along the proven path. They have created five core service values, each one connected to the word UP, reflecting its intention and aspiration to be distinguished in the medical field by its uplifting service culture. The articulation of these

five values includes language that is appealing to the head, guiding to the hands, and uplifting for the hearts of nurses, doctors, lab technicians, orderlies, and every Parkway Health team member. This is Common Service Language hard at work, reminding everyone each day what to know, what to say, and what to do.

Naiade Resorts was the name of one the largest hotel groups in Mauritius, with nine resorts on the islands of Mauritius, Reunion, and Maldives. It recently completed a dramatic transformation to a new brand and style of service called “Island Light.” Its vision is “Each Moment Matters” in fulfilling its uplifting purpose of “Helping People Celebrate Life.” The brand transformation from Naiade to LUX\* Island Resorts was an extraordinary project involving new images and artwork and 50 creative scenes, including secret snack bars, spontaneous ice cream stands, and free phone calls

## STAND UP

I pledge that I CAN (and I WILL) **take personal responsibility** to provide superior service to all my internal partners and external customers

## SUIT UP

I will pay special attention to my **personal grooming, dress code, verbal, and written communications**

## SPEAK UP

I will create a **positive first and last impression** by always being the first to extend a **greeting, smile and a word of thanks** (where appropriate)

## STEP UP

I will seek to understand the **service value** of the people whom I serve and will strive to **exceed** their expectation on all occasions

## STAY UP

I will seek to deliver service **consistently** at the **desired** level and look for opportunities to be **surprising and unbelievable**

home for guests. Transforming the attitude and behavior of more than 2,500 employees was equally ambitious and required its own special image and a new language. While a beautiful butterfly captures the color and elegance of the new LUX\* brand, the remarkable transformation from a caterpillar to the butterfly characterizes the challenges for each resort team member. Paul Jones, CEO of LUX\* Island Resorts, is fond of posing this question to his team: “As you serve our guests and each other today, are you a caterpillar or a butterfly?”

### **Questions for Service Providers**

- Do you know the Common Service Language in your organization? If you don't yet have such a language, can you help create one?
- Do you use a Common Service Language every day? How can you use this language more frequently or creatively to make your service culture stronger?

### **Questions for Service Leaders**

- Have you developed a constructive and effective Common Service Language? If you have not yet done this, who will help you create it?
- Do you actively use and promote a positive Common Service Language? Do you “talk the talk” so your team can hear you use it every day?
- Have you embedded a Common Service Language into your systems and procedures? Does working in your organization naturally guide your team to hear, read, and use it?

# 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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