

*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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LISTEN NOW  
ON AUDIBLE





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## CHAPTER 13

# Voice of the Customer

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Ready for a surprise?

At Changi Airport, even the washrooms can surprise and delight the most finicky traveler. Not only are the washrooms spacious and filled with soothing décor and music, but some of the women's washrooms also offer plush seating areas in front of large mirrors to spruce up before or after a flight. Across the hall, men are also surprised to find windows above the urinals, looking over the tarmac at aircraft taking off and landing.

What's not a surprise about the Changi Airport washrooms is the level of cleanliness. They are usually spotless, with every faucet and feature working correctly, every roll of toilet paper properly stocked, and every soap dispenser filled. That's because Changi Airport has integrated Voice of the Customer into a real-time, real-response system that ensures even the washrooms provide an optimal customer experience.

A computerized touch-screen in every washroom shows a photograph and the name of the washroom attendant. It also offers a timely greeting—good morning, good evening, or good

afternoon—and then asks the traveler one simple question: “Please rate our toilet.” Under the question are five large on-screen buttons with words and yellow faces, from a toothy grin for “Excellent” to a disappointed frown for “Very Poor.”

The attendant and the maintenance office receive this feedback instantly when a passenger rates the washroom as “Poor” or “Very Poor.” Immediately the attendant discovers and corrects whatever is not pleasant, not working, or not well-stocked. That’s 42 million opportunities for actionable input from its customers every year. And that’s only talking about the toilets.

Changi Airport knows the value of listening and responding to customers from all over the world. This is why there are so many active listening posts at the information counters, on the website, at the interactive kiosks located throughout the terminals, and most of all, through the eyes and ears of airport staff members who appreciate their customers’ compliments, complaints, and suggestions. Airport team members don’t get defensive when they hear a passenger’s complaint because they know this precious voice has been the source of countless insights and innovations.

Changi Airport managers also listen keenly to the voices of their partners in service through interviews, roundtable discussions, and focus groups. They communicate closely with the Police, Immigration, and Customs departments, with airline representatives, and with the hundreds of vendors, suppliers, and tenants who create the Changi Airport experience every day.

Voice of the Customer is a valuable and powerful building block for improving your service culture. The voice of your customers can contribute immediately and powerfully to a better service experience. For example, keeping a washroom clean and attractive is relatively easy, since there is only so much that can go wrong.

But at Marina Bay Sands, more than 4,000 toilets and hundreds of thousands of other things can be temporarily out of whack. “We began collecting customer feedback immediately,” said Tom Arasi of Marina Bay Sands. “When our doors opened and everyone was focused on simply operating for the first time, we knew that customer comments would be the fastest way to identify and address any problems. This was critical from our very first day of operations and it still contributes to our ongoing success.”

### How to Capture Your Customer’s Voice

To find out what your customers really think and feel, start by genuinely asking for their feedback and suggestions. Many people have learned that standard surveys yield little response, and many dedicated hotlines are ice-cold. Make it clear that your customer’s complaints, compliments, and comments will not only be collected and counted; they will be carefully studied, appreciated, and valued. Handing someone a customer feedback form is a request that is easy to ignore. But a vibrant program that says “Your Voice Counts!” “Tell us what you want!” or “We are listening to YOU!” is an invitation people will respond to.

Voice of the Customer is not a ranking, rating, or statistic. It is more qualitative than quantitative, and it is more of a subjective understanding than a purely objective measure. Voice of the Customer is the emotional commentary you need to study, and it is the expressive voice you want to hear.

For example, key drivers of satisfaction at Microsoft include product quality, value for money, security, accuracy, and speed of solutions. But that’s not everything the company’s customers and partners value. Microsoft carefully studies the millions of words and phrases people type into free-form comment fields every year.

Through careful analysis of these “verbatim” comments, the company discovered other drivers that also make a difference, including “Microsoft is easy to do business with,” “Microsoft cares about me,” and “Microsoft helps me grow my business.”

You can capture the ideas, insights, and impressions of other people by asking questions like these:

- What did you like?
- What didn’t you like?
- What would you like?
- What do we do that you really wish we didn’t?
- What would you like us to change?
- What did you appreciate the most? The least?
- What should we start doing? Stop doing?
- What should we do more of? Less of?
- What could we provide that was missing?
- Did anyone or anything let you down?
- What could we do to win more of your business?
- What could we provide that would justify raising our prices by 10 percent?
- What are our competitors doing that you think we should do, too?

These questions open the door to active listening. But that’s a long list of questions to choose from, and you might not want to ask them all. Choose the questions that work the best for you and for your customers. Then ask, listen, and learn.

San Diego International Airport applies this approach in a very simple manner with one large sign, a stack of attractive blue forms, and a collection box near the baggage claim carousel. The sign asks one big question: “How are we doing?” But the airport

doesn't just want to know how they are doing; they want to know what they could possibly do better. Inside the form provided to capture passenger input is again, just one big question: "What can we do to make your next visit more enjoyable?"

Every member of your team can solicit Voice of the Customer feedback simply by asking, "Is there anything we can do better for you next time?" This accomplishes three important objectives. First, everyone on the team becomes an active listening point. Second, you gather new ideas at the very moment of delivery, when people's impressions and experiences are fresh. And, third, you automatically encourage customers to think about repeating business with you because you are asking how to serve them even better . . . the next time.

Finally, don't just ask for comments and recommendations; make a promise to respond with action. Let the people you ask know when their answers will be reviewed and when you will respond or make changes. If you are using an online form, an interactive interface, or a written comment card, you might add this line at the bottom: "May we reply to you personally about this? If so, please provide us with your contact details here." Now it's obvious that you are listening, taking action, making changes, reviewing, and replying to every comment every day.

## The Joy of Customer Complaints

When things go wrong, customers complain. And that can be *good* for you and constructive for your organization because complaints can:

- highlight areas where your systems require improvement;
- identify where your procedures need to be improved, updated, or revised;

- reveal information that is lacking, is erroneous, or is simply out of date;
- identify team members who need more training or closer supervision;
- help highlight inconsistencies among shifts, departments, or locations;
- get important news and information straight to the top;
- educate everyone about what your customers experience and expect;
- help prevent complacency in a successful organization;
- help focus your attention, priorities, and budget;
- work as a trigger for new action, catalyzing positive change;
- keep you in touch with emerging trends and changing customer expectations;
- present new opportunities for raising revenue and solving problems;
- provide competitive intelligence by telling you what others are doing;
- identify which customers to invite into pilot runs, focus groups, and beta tests;
- give you content and current case studies for your service education programs; and
- provide feedback for you to publish, with your replies and action steps, in your Service Communications.

Most of all, complaints give you an opportunity to reply, respond, and win back customer loyalty. Most upset customers just walk away and complain about you to their friends and colleagues. The few who do speak up are giving you another chance. Take it.

## **Bringing the Voice Inside Your Organization**

The messages you hear may be positive or painful, contented or upset, unsettling or energizing, upbeat or downbeat, distant or

enthusiastic. What's important is that customers tell you how they feel. What's even more important is that you hear it.

“Customer complaints are the school books from which we learn.”

*Lou Gerstner  
former CEO of IBM*

To harness the value of your customer's voice, share it frequently and widely throughout your organization. If the input you gather is all routed to one department where it's collected and then consolidated into a report, it won't have an immediate impact on your service or an emotional influence on your team.

At Marina Bay Sands, the comments gathered each day from guests are shared the very next day with team members in their briefings at the beginning of each shift. This brings a wealth of insight to those who can do something about it, by responding to suggestions, solving problems, and implementing new ideas.

The voices you gather may come through formal means such as survey forms, hotlines, comment cards and focus groups, or through social channels like Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, and TripAdvisor. Wherever it comes from, whatever it says, the value you gain from the Voice of the Customer is only achieved when this river of input connects with a team that wants to hear it, understand it, and do something about it.

This building block is called Voice of the Customer, but these approaches can also be applied to your colleagues, managers, staff, vendors, suppliers, distributors, partners, and even with your friends, neighbors, and family members. When we listen to appreciate and learn, when we take action to address the concerns of others, we are improving and uplifting the ways we live together.

### Questions for Service Providers

- What have you learned from recent customer comments?
- What changes have you made—or can you make—based on customer compliments or complaints?

### Questions for Service Leaders

- Are you personally involved in Voice of the Customer programs?
- How can you bring the Voice of the Customer to every member of your organization?
- What recent investments and improvements have you made based on your customers' compliments, complaints, and suggestions?

## Tools *for Your* Journey

Get online companion tools FREE, including articles, videos, and easy to use guides revealing new ways you can take action now to begin uplifting your service today.

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[www.UpliftingService.com](http://www.UpliftingService.com)

# 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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