

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

ISBN 978-981-07-1832-9 — hardcover (Singapore)

Published in Singapore by Ron Kaufman Pte Ltd.

Printed by Tien Wah Press (Pte) Ltd

Originally published in the USA by Evolve Publishing, Inc.
www.EvolvePublishing.com

ISBN 978-0-9847625-5-2 — paperback

978-0-9847625-0-7 — hardcover

978-0-9847625-9-0 — ebook

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CHAPTER 20

The Six Levels of Service



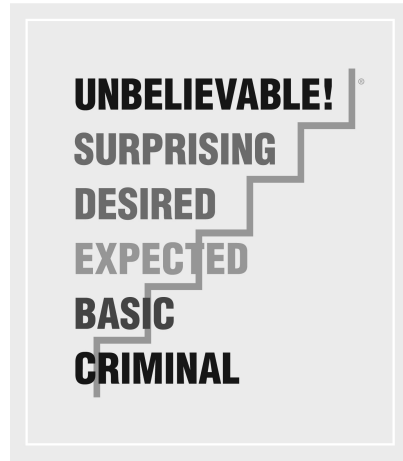
Yanti Karmasanto was shopping in her hometown of Jakarta, Indonesia, after lunch. She wandered into one of the large shopping malls that had popped up where a farm had stood when she was young. Music poured from every shop in an unpredictable medley of tunes. As Yanti passed one storefront, the music inside suddenly stopped and the shopkeeper let out a growl. She looked inside and saw something most of us have not seen for years, if ever. The shopkeeper had been changing the music in his boom box. As he pulled out an old cassette, all the thin metallic tape spilled out in a dusty mess on the floor.

Do you remember that? Are you old enough to remember phonograph records that could be accidentally scratched? Or eight-track tapes? Cracked CDs? Do you remember when you had to go downtown to buy new music, before you could simply download it to your phone or computer? Today, music is skip-free, scratch-free, and never gathers dust.

Of course, it's easy to see how technology is constantly changing throughout our lives. Companies that manufacture products understand that they must always be introducing something new, faster, easier, or better to keep their customers engaged. If they

don't, they will be left in the dust when their customers upgrade to the next new product.

But very few companies understand that service is exactly the same—it's always changing, and it's your job to stay ahead of your customers, ahead of the competition, and ahead of the curve. Service is not about what you do, the processes you use, or how well you follow procedures. Service is about the experience and the value you create for someone else.



Let's start by figuring out your current level of service. Whether you serve external customers or internal colleagues, your service will fit into one of the Six Levels of Service. Consider your level of service from someone else's point of view. Is your service:

Criminal: Criminal-level service breaks a service promise; it violates even minimum expectations. Customers remember to never use a company with this kind of service again, and are sometimes angry enough to contact you and complain about it. And if they don't tell you, they will very likely tell others. This kind of bad-news service gets plenty of airtime and can go viral online in an instant.

Basic: Basic service is disappointing; it's the bare minimum. This level of service leads to frustration—it's late, slow, incomplete, or impolite. But when it's over, thank goodness it's over. And your customer may not complain. However, he or she may well tell friends to avoid your company, and will certainly remember not to come back for that kind of service again.

Expected: Expected service is nothing special. Your customer might come back to you, but only if there are no better options. This level of industry-standard service used to be considered acceptable. After all, the outdated definition of customer satisfaction was simply “meeting expectations.” But in today’s world, that level doesn’t win any loyalty.

Desired: Desired service is what other people hope for and prefer. This level describes service that is delivered just the way another person likes it. For one person, this could be extra fast, flexible, or friendly. For another, it might be very personal, or it might involve a range of prices, packages, or options. Desired service brings people back; it gives them what they value in the manner they desire.

Surprising: Surprising service is something special, like an unexpected gift. Surprising gives your customers more than they expected, making you an individual or an organization that attracts a following and stands out from the crowd. Customers come to surprising service providers again and again, and they are glad to tell their friends. But delivering this surprising level of service is not just a matter of enthusiasm and excitement. You must actually understand what the person you are serving really values.

Has anyone ever given you a gift you truly enjoyed—one that you were genuinely surprised and delighted by? Remember how good it felt? And has anyone ever given you a gift that was not such a wonderful surprise, but instead it actually created an awkward moment? Maybe they gave you something *they* valued and were sure that you would love it. Or they gave you something you *used* to value, but your tastes and interests had moved on.

What is the difference between these two situations? In both cases, someone else chose, bought, wrapped, and presented

you with a gift they intended as a nice surprise. In one case, the person succeeded. In the other case, the person failed. The difference was not in their intentions; it was in their understanding of your needs and desires. Surprising service does not mean enthusiastic leaps of joy from excited service providers—unless that is what your customers or colleagues want and value. Surprising service means knowing what another person appreciates and values most, and then giving them more than he or she expected.

Unbelievable: Unbelievable service is astonishing and fantastic. This level of service people never forget. These experiences may even become legendary, fondly shared by loyal customers and talked about with pride by colleagues. These are acts of deeply passionate service providers and organizations that pride themselves on delivery of extraordinary service.

One home security alarm company in New Zealand prides itself on ABCD Service: Above and Beyond the Call of Duty. Whenever these teams visit homeowners for installations, system checks, or upgrades, they will not leave the home until they have done two extra tasks that help the homeowner but have nothing to do with the security system. They might fix a leaky faucet, oil a squeaky hinge, or help repair a broken chair or window. These extra service moments have nothing to do with the efficiency of the 24-hour home security system, but everything to do with this company's strong commercial success and *unbelievable* service reputation.

Six Levels of Internal Service

These Six Levels of Service help you see the world from your customer's point of view. They apply to every person in every position

and in every moment of service, including when you and your colleagues serve each other.

Suppose you ask a colleague for help and he ignores your request. So you ask again, but he says, “I’m really busy.” You need his help to answer a customer’s question, so you reach out one more time. He gives you something so you will go away, but the information is wrong and now your customer is distressed. That’s a criminal level of internal service. Suppose you ask another colleague for help to finish a project. She does what you ask, but does it late and incompletely. So you have to go back to ask a second time to get what was missing. That’s not a good experience, but eventually you get what you need. It’s a basic level of service. When you ask a colleague for help and he gives you what you need on time, that’s normal in most business situations. It’s expected.

Now let’s explore the higher levels. Imagine a co-worker gives you the information you need quickly and with a smile. And then he says, “If you need anything else, just ask. I’ll be glad to assist you.” In most working relationships, this would be desired. Taking this one step further, suppose he answers your questions and provides a bit of extra information that is relevant to your request. You didn’t ask for this, but what he tells you makes your work easier and more successful. Your colleague’s extra effort is unexpected and appreciated. It’s surprising.

Finally, imagine your colleague tells his department colleagues about your request and they all decide to help you get the job done, faster, more completely, and better than ever before. That’s an unprecedented level of internal service. It’s unbelievable.

The Stairs Are Always Sliding Down

The big challenge with these Six Levels of Service is not discovering where you are—you can find that out by asking honestly and listening carefully to those you serve. The real test will come because the stairs themselves are not fixed; they are always moving like an escalator—going down. What starts out as surprising soon becomes desired. And after a while, it's just expected, or even basic. Then, before you know it, everyone is wondering what's new.

The escalator of service standards is accelerated by competition. Other service providers are always looking for new ways to climb to the next level, to create an even better customer experience. As a result, customer expectations are constantly rising. Standing still becomes slipping down when your competitors are moving up. Even doing what's expected is no longer satisfactory to succeed. This sliding escalator phenomenon makes service excellence a moving target. There is only one way to be consistently excellent in service—you must always be stepping up.

When a company reaches the top of its field, staying there means stepping up more than ever. At the Singapore Airlines Cabin Crew Training Centre, one visitor from Korea asked in admiration, “How does Singapore Airlines stay on top all these years? And how do you plan to keep the lead while other airlines work so hard to beat you?”

Mr. Sim Kay Wee, former Senior Vice President of Cabin Crew, answered clearly: “One hundred percent is not enough. When you reach number one, you need 120 percent. And here's why: If you fly on a mediocre airline, your service expectation may be only 50 percent. If the cabin crew is in a good mood, they may actually deliver 65 percent. Then what is your opinion of the service? It's up 15 percent.

“But if you know Singapore Airlines is number one,” he continued, “what is your expectation of the service? Maybe 110 percent. If our cabin crew delivers service at the 100 percent level, then what is your opinion of our service? It’s down 10 percent!”

“This is the challenge of being number one,” Mr. Sim concluded. “If you are in the lead and want to stay there, 100 percent is not enough. You need every member of the team to keep stepping up even higher.”

Stepping up or slipping down happens inside organizations, too. If one department steps up to a higher level of internal service and the other departments don’t follow, then by comparison the other departments are slipping down. If you make a personal service improvement in your service attitude or skills, then you have stepped up another level. By comparison, if the people you work with just keep doing the same old thing, then by default they would be seen as slipping down. Promotions are earned by stepping up at work every day. Strong partnerships are created when everyone steps up together.

What Level of Service Should You Provide?

What level of service should you seek to deliver on a daily basis? Avoiding criminal and basic levels should be obvious, because these will degrade your service reputation, driving away good customers and colleagues. Delivering expected service may be adequate, but it’s just one step away from basic. Providing desired service means giving people what they want, the way they want. That’s an admirable and achievable standard you should aim for every day.

When should you go beyond expectations and give surprising service, or even stretch to unbelievable? First, whenever you want

to create a long-lasting impression and a powerful service memory. Second, when you want to demonstrate your ability to blow away the competition or positively blow your customers' minds. Third, when you are bouncing back after something has gone wrong, providing a surprising service experience is a good recovery technique. And finally, whenever you see an opportunity to give spectacular levels of service without increasing your costs or hassles, then by all means do it. Chances are your competition will discover the same opportunity moments later, but you will get there first. Every moment can become a positive moment when you step up to provide a higher level of service. The only question that matters is this: Will you lead, or will you follow?

Questions for Service Providers

- This week, keep track of the service you receive. What delights you? What disappoints you? Notice how each service provider uses, or loses, the opportunity to give you a higher level of quality service.
- How can you acknowledge the people who give you uplifting service? Can you write a compliment? Post a nice online review? Leave a tip, or share an extra smile?

Questions for Service Leaders

- Can all your team members explain why stepping up their service makes good business sense? Can you explain so each team member is inspired to take new action?
- Which customers can you invite into a meeting with your team? What questions will you ask so they will candidly tell you about your service?

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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978-981-07-1832-9 hardcover (Singapore)