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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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and Everyone Else You Meet*

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## CHAPTER 21

# Your Perception Points

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Keri Childers did not like this situation. Her all-in-one office printer, scanner, and fax machine had stopped working. It was a big machine that stood on the floor. It was still under on-site warranty, so a technician would be coming into her home office to provide the necessary repair. Someone she didn't know. The doorbell rang and the service technician presented himself, his company ID, and the service repair order. So she let him inside, and that's when the unexpected happened.

When she led him to the faulty device, he put down his bag full of tools and then pulled out a white pair of gloves and put them on. To her surprise, he asked, "Before I get started, may I move some of these other things out of the way? I wouldn't want to knock them over accidentally while I work." She smiled as he carefully moved away a standing lamp, two framed photographs, and a neatly organized stack of books.

Then he reached into his bag, took out a small blanket, and laid it ceremoniously in front of the machine. "I don't want to scratch or stain your floor," he said. Then he opened the machine, took out his tools, and diligently went to work. Thirty minutes later, when

the repair was done and tested, Keri signed the paperwork and thanked him very much.

“Sure thing.” He smiled. “We are glad to be of service.” And then he reached into his bag and pulled out yet another unexpected item: a small spray can of lemon-scented furniture polish. “Would you mind if I touch it up before I go?” he asked. Keri nodded and watched in surprise as he lightly sprayed the front and sides of the machine, rubbed them down with a cloth, and put everything back in his bag. Then he put the white gloves on again and moved her lamp, photographs, and stack of books right back in place.

After the technician left, Keri’s office was filled with the pleasant lemon fragrance. One of her children bounded around the corner and asked, “What’s that nice smell, Mommy?” Keri answered, still smiling to herself with some amazement, “It was from the repairman, honey. And what a nice surprise.”

### **Service Is Delivered in a Sequence**

All service is delivered in a sequence, a natural series of moments that include a beginning, middle, and end. For example, buying a new office device is a transaction involving shopping, comparing, possibly negotiating, eventually deciding, ordering, and making payment. Having the new device installed is a related but different transaction. This one involves scheduling; unpacking; installing; loading software, paper, and cartridges; testing; and, finally, confirming the whole thing works. A repair call is yet another transaction, also with multiple points of service along the way.

Each sequence of service you deliver is called a Service Transaction. The moments when people experience your service and

form their opinions are called Perception Points. All of these Perception Points are evaluated—consciously or unconsciously—on the Six Levels of Service. Some may be very pleasant and surprising, as Keri discovered. Others could be so usual or expected that you hardly even notice. And some points could be disappointing. How many Perception Points must fall below expected to damage your service reputation?

The honest and frightening answer is—just one.

Suppose you read a good review about a new restaurant on a website—that’s a positive first Perception Point. But when you call to make a dinner reservation, the individual answering the phone is not cheerful or helpful. So you make a decision to go somewhere else. And here’s the disturbing insight. All the other people who work at the restaurant and need customers to make a living don’t even know this problem happened. Just one disappointing moment delivered by one of many employees—waiter, chef, hostess, manager, dishwasher, and busboy—destroyed the dinner reservation.

On the other hand, how many Perception Points need to be surprising to make your dinner a special treat? Again, the answer is just one. And that’s good news! If everything else is as expected, but the music is delightful, or the dessert is something special, or your waiter is terrific, any one of these can make your evening special, and inspire you to want to come back.

What does this mean for every organization and every service team? What does this mean for you and your colleagues? Each person is counting on others to deliver their Perception Points of service *at least* at the expected level. But because the stairs are always slipping down, each person must also be actively



seeking to take the next step up. In a culture of uplifting service, this is exactly what you and your colleagues will be doing every day.

## Mapping Your Perception Points

You can map the Perception Points in each Service Transaction you deliver. Chart them in a circle from start to finish. Mapping your Perception Points is not the same as charting the processes you use—your service systems, tools, and procedures. Rather, Perception Points are the individual points where customers form their opinions about the service you provide and the experience you deliver.

Perception Points can be mapped in every transaction with your external customers and with your internal colleagues. For the external view, consider your customers' experience when they are interacting with the different parts of your organization. For the internal view consider your colleagues' experience when they are interacting with you.



Perception Points at the beginning of a transaction form vital first impressions—the ones you never get a second chance to make, or recover. Perception Points toward the end shape lasting final impressions. And all the Perception Points in the middle, of course, connect the two. Many organizations don't appreciate the number of Perception

Points that can be identified, studied, and improved. Remember, it just takes one low point to spoil an interaction and one nice moment of surprise to make the experience memorable.

You can study your Perception Points in sequence, by theme, by category, and even with your senses. And each point of view can be helpful to find new ways of stepping up. First let's explore your Perception Points from a thematic point of view:

**Your People:** What opinions are formed by your team members' professionalism, personality, dress code, eye contact, body language, voice tone, vocabulary and pronunciation, product knowledge, process knowledge, punctuality, flexibility, and level of confidence in your organization, their colleagues, and themselves?

**Your Product:** Every point about your product shapes and forms opinion. What perception do customers have of your product's features, performance, design, durability, ease of operation and maintenance, availability, compatibility, upgradability, power consumption, and price?

**Your Packaging:** In some cases and cultures, packaging is as influential as what is inside the package. Is yours well-designed, functional, and attractive? Is it recyclable, reusable, or disposable? Whether presenting a meal, a carton, a contract, a gift, or a proposal, your packaging may be as important as the content.

**Your Place:** If your place of business has a physical location, is it well located and well lit, with good signage, convenient hours, and easy access for differently abled people? If your place of business is online, is your site easy to navigate, fast to load, attractive, pleasantly interactive, secure, and up-to-date? If you do business at your customer's location, are your vehicles well marked and your people well attired?

**Your Promotions:** Marketing shapes the public's perceptions and expectations of your service. Is your offer compelling? Is your advertising attractive? Do the public faces of your organization project the service image you desire?

**Your Policies:** Do your customers feel welcomed, tolerated, or punished by your policies for pricing, payment, warranty, guarantee, maintenance, delivery and returns? Are your policies sensible and easy for customers to understand? Do they make doing business with you a pleasure or a pain? Do they make you appear trusting and trustworthy, or cynical and selfish?

**Your Processes:** Is your service fast? Do your lines run long? Are you speedy or slow in responding to questions and requests? Is your process one-stop, one-click, or a single point of contact? Do you handle all the details, or ask your customers to do the work? If your process includes using the telephone, how long do customers wait on hold? Are your employees' voices warm and friendly? Are messages taken clearly? Does anyone ever call back? Can your people solve a problem on the spot?

## Exploring with Your Senses

People use all their senses when forming opinions about your service, as Keri and one of her children discovered with surprise. You can use this to improve your service in many ways.

**What do people see?** Review the photos, fonts, and colors on your website. Create an email signature that projects a positive image. Update old items hanging on the walls. Throw out whatever is no longer current. Replace every light bulb that isn't working. Scrub the handrails and sweep the sidewalks. Cut away dead leaves on your office plants. Put on a

fresh coat of paint. Get a haircut. Shine your shoes. Clean and press your clothing. Look around again with fresh and curious eyes. What else can you do to polish your Perception Points and improve your visual image?

**What do people hear?** What voices, words, tones, tunes, and volumes do your customers hear at each Perception Point? Is the background noise a pleasure or distraction? Is your voice mail message engaging and up-to-date? Give yourself an auditory audit and you will hear many opportunities to improve. And put a smile on your face when you are speaking—we can't see it over the phone, but we can hear it in your voice.

**What do people feel?** People feel everything that comes in contact with their clothing or their skin. This includes the weight and texture of everything they touch and handle: the comfort of your chairs, the softness of your carpets, the temperature in your office, the texture of your products, and the smooth or sticky surface of your counters. Touch includes the handshake to connect, the high five to celebrate, and the warm hug to welcome someone back.

**What do people taste?** Even if you're not in the food and beverage business, people form sweet or sour perceptions about the service you provide. Is there a pantry or a restaurant on-site? Are there snacks or breath mints in the conference room or on the counter? Lick your lips and ponder this: How sweet is the flavor of your service?

**What do people smell?** Your customers notice fragrances and flowers, breath mints and body odor, mealtimes and machines, production gases and car fumes, and much more. Real estate agents put freshly baked cookies in the kitchen to help sell houses. Smart service providers brush their teeth after every

snack and meal. Close your eyes and take a deep breath first thing in the morning, after lunch, and once again at the end of the day. Is the smell of your service environment consistently attractive and appealing?

## A Surprising Taste of Service

At Changi Airport, the Service Transaction called “passenger arrival” begins when an aircraft door opens and ends when the taxi door closes. Mapping this Service Transaction identifies many Perception Points: the aerobridge (Is it clean, dry, air-conditioned, and well lit?); the transit area (Are luggage carts available? Is the signage clear?); the immigration counter (Is the line moving quickly?); the baggage belt (How long before the bags arrive?); the duty-free shop (Is it open, well stocked, and well staffed?); the customs officers (Are they helpful and respectful of your belongings?); the arrivals area (Is it crowded and noisy, or clean and clear? Is there a long line to get a taxi?). That’s a lot of Perception Points, and Changi Airport studies every one.

One of the airport’s ambitions is to be rated the friendliest in the world. But one Perception Point persistently scored low in the “friendly” category on passenger surveys: the immigration counter. Of course, it’s not Immigration’s primary function to be friendly as much as it is to monitor and manage who enters and leaves the country. But because Changi Airport wants to step up their passengers’ experience at every Perception Point, they studied this point carefully and found a new solution. Instead of asking Immigration officers to make friendly small talk with arriving and departing passengers which could distract them from their essential responsibility, slow down the process, and lead to longer waiting times, Changi Airport placed an

attractive box of breath mints on each and every counter. Every day, as thousands of passengers hand across their passports for review, Singapore's Immigration officers smile, gesture toward the box, and kindly say one word, "Sweet?" And what was the result of this inexpensive innovation? Immigration's "friendly" scores went up.

### Clear, Kept Promises

In a world where the escalator is always slipping down and competition is stepping up, there will be times your Perception Points may fall below some customers' expectations. But this doesn't mean that you—or they—need to suffer. You can be proactive to anticipate their experience and to manage their service expectations.

The long-term approach to managing expectations is a strategy, not a tactic. It takes time to work effectively; you must start it long before you need it. The strategy is "Clear, Kept Promises," and it works exactly as it sounds. You make a clear service promise, and you keep it. You make another clear promise, and you keep it again. Do this over and over again when you serve your customers and your colleagues. In time, you will build a reputation for reliability and a reservoir of goodwill. Once that reservoir is in place, you can call upon it if and when you need it. Should you find yourself temporarily unable to provide your normally uplifting service, all you need to do is apologize and explain the situation. Those you serve will be remarkably understanding—they have an investment in that reservoir of goodwill with you, too.

This strategy only works when you keep the promises you make and when you make your promises crystal clear. There's a big

difference between “Don’t worry, it’s guaranteed,” and “This three-year guarantee covers all parts and labor at our service center. On-site service is available for a small extra charge.” Dissatisfaction is lurking if you say, “We can process your request within a day,” but what you really mean is, “We can process your request within one day once we have your completed application with all supporting documents.” And your professionalism is at stake when you say to a colleague, “I’ll get this done as soon as I can” instead of “I can complete this for you by four o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Will that be soon enough?”

Clear, Kept Promises also means communicating clearly and quickly when you cannot keep a promise, not waiting for a last-minute leap of effort or a stroke of very good luck to save the day. Sometimes things happen and you cannot deliver what you promised. Should you wait until other people notice (if they notice) and then explain what happened? Should you wait until the very last minute to see what happens? After all, why worry someone else if there may be nothing to worry about?

Let’s take a closer look. Suppose you promise to deliver 100 important items to your customer next Thursday. But on Monday morning you discover only 50 left in stock. Your factory says they may get you another 50 just in time, but due to scheduling and weather, it’s not a sure thing.

Should you tell your customer as soon as you know that you might not deliver 100? Should you risk creating anxiety and concern when you still have four days to solve the problem? The answer to this question is “Yes.” With four days advance notice, your customer will have time to develop a plan. If you wait until Thursday to tell them, it will be impossible for them to prepare. And then if the factory does deliver all the items in time, you will appear as a trustworthy service provider who successfully solved the problem.

When something goes wrong, let other people know as soon as you do. Clear, Kept Promises means communicating early, doing what's needed to take care of those affected, and then making a new service promise. This may seem uncomfortable, but it's your best step forward to build credibility as a trustworthy service partner.

Everyone gets confused at times in the busy turmoil of life. But the people you serve should never be confused about their expectations of service from you. It's a long-term strategy to build goodwill with every promise you keep. Make clear promises and keep them. Communicate early when you can't.

### **Winning from the Beginning**

The second approach to managing expectations is not a strategy; it's a tactic. It is short-term and cannot be applied in every situation. This tactic is called "Under Promise, Over Deliver" and, when used correctly, it will create new opportunities for surprising and uplifting pleasure.

Suppose you are in a store and the salesperson needs to go somewhere else to retrieve the item you ordered. She says, "It will take about five minutes," but she comes back in eight minutes. Are you happy? No. In fact, for the last few minutes you would be looking at your watch and wondering, "Where did she go?"

If a salesperson knows that it's going to take about eight minutes, what should she tell you? "I'll be back in about ten minutes." If she says that, and then she comes back in eight minutes, will you be happy? Yes. And you might even be impressed and say to her, "Wow! You sure are fast!"



So what is the difference between these two situations? Changing just one word from “eight” to “ten.” One word and a salesperson’s thoughtful use of a proven tactic for managing expectations: Under Promise, Over Deliver.

Time and speed are not the only Perception Points of service during which you can manage expectations. You can do the same with product features, availability, performance, and price. Imagine you work in an electronics store. Someone comes in to buy a camera, looks at and holds different brands, and then chooses a model he likes. Suppose the camera he chooses comes with a carrying case at no extra charge. If you are certain your customer is going to buy this camera, consider telling him about the carrying case *after* he completes the purchase. Then you can smile and say, “Congratulations! Your new camera also comes with this attractive carrying case. And it’s free!”

Your customer will feel terrific! He’s been given a nice surprise, something extra, something *more* than he expected.

This Under Promise, Over Deliver tactic is not intended to hurt or undermine those you serve. You are managing expectations to influence what others expect, so the service you provide at key Perception Points will satisfy and please them. You win, your colleagues win, and your customers win, too.

Warning: Under Promise, Over Deliver is a short-term tactic, not a long-term strategy. Don’t use this with the same person again and again, or the surprising part won’t work. And sometimes, it’s simply not appropriate. For example, if your competition is promising high and delivering high, then don’t promise low. The tactic won’t work. If you are pushing for a promotion and your boss has sky-high standards, then promise high performance and deliver even higher.

### Questions for Service Providers

- Pretend you are someone who is being served by you. Follow the person's experience from the very start to the finish. How many Perception Points can you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste throughout the process?
- Which of your Perception Points are lowest on the Six Levels of Service in your Service Transactions? What can you do now to step them up?

### Questions for Service Leaders

- What are the Service Transactions your team is responsible to deliver? How many Perception Points can you identify and improve?
- Which Perception Points are frequently cited in your customers' complaints? What can you do to improve your customers' experience?
- How can you start winning from the beginning? When is it appropriate for you to manage your customers' and colleagues' expectations?

# 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.”

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**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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