

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
KAUFMAN

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

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CHAPTER 23

Building Service Partnerships

What is the difference between completing a project, having a job, and developing your career inside one successful organization? What is the difference between changing money from one currency to another, getting a 30-year mortgage for your home, and consolidating your investment, savings, and credit accounts at a single financial institution? What is the difference between going on a date, going out with the same person for several years, and creating a family together for a lifetime?

These three examples have more in common than you might imagine. In each, the first situation is a transaction with a beginning, a middle, and an ending: completing a project, changing money, and going on a date. You may, or may not, go back again.

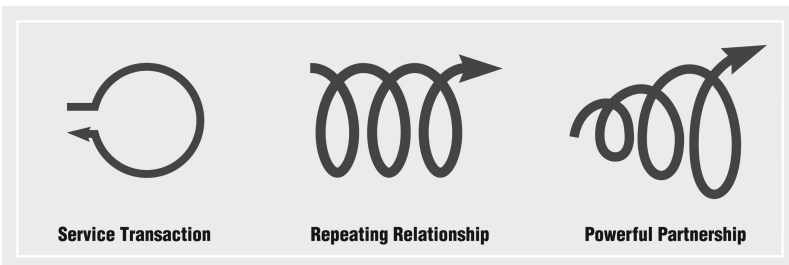
The second set of situations are longer term. These relationships are consistent over time: a job, a mortgage, a steady boyfriend or girlfriend. Transactions and relationships are different. Buying a car is a transaction. Bringing the car in for regularly scheduled tune-ups to the same location is a relationship. Installing

equipment is a service transaction. A contract for maintenance or regular supplies is a repeating relationship.

The third set of situations are powerful service partnerships, and they grow more important and beneficial over time. In a Powerful Partnership, both parties create and receive greater value. Consolidating your financial life in one place is more convenient for you. Having a larger share of your wallet is more valuable for a financial institution. Developing your career with one great company can be a highway to tremendous achievement. Keeping great employees is essential for every tremendous organization. And what about creating a family, or living together for life? That's partnership on a very personal level, and both parties must invest themselves to keep the partnership growing.

First You Sow, Then You Reap

The key to every successful partnership is both sides giving and receiving greater value. This is true with customers, colleagues, couples, and careers. But there is a catch. The value you want must come from someone else, and the value they want must come from you. So, who goes first?



Some companies say, “If you become a better customer, then we’ll give you better service.” Other companies give you better service first, and you reward them with a greater volume of your business.

Some colleagues say, “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.” But colleagues who help you succeed without first “making a deal” are ones you will be glad to help the next time they need you. Some employees say, “Give me a raise, and then I will take more responsibility.” But big promotions at work rarely happen that way. The person who steps up and takes responsibility earns the raise and recognition.

In a successful partnership, each party is counting on the other to succeed. Each side *wants* the other side to win. Your achievement contributes to the other party’s success. A powerful service partnership is win–win at its finest.

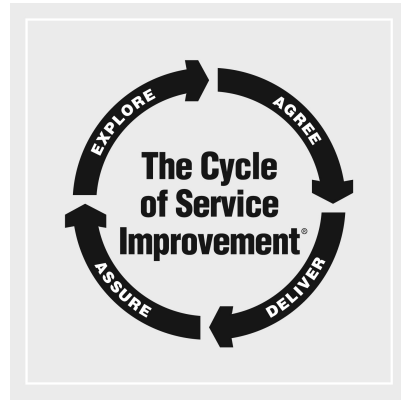
How do you continue giving more of whatever someone else appreciates or values? This can be difficult because expectations rise and people’s interests change. What worked in the past may not be needed or even wanted in the future.

The Cycle of Service Improvement

The Cycle of Service Improvement is a proven method to discover and deliver higher levels of service. This is the powerful technique behind every well-known service brand. The Cycle of Service Improvement works in all industries, cultures, and countries around the world. It works to improve businesses, governments, and communities. It works when applied to internal and external service situations. The Cycle of Service Improvement works in personal relationships, too. You can use this essential tool to build stronger partnerships in every area of your life.

The Cycle of Service Improvement is a series of four connected conversations. Each requires a different kind of dialogue and another level of commitment. Each stage offers unique

opportunities for you to deepen your partnership with other people. You can differentiate from the competition in any of these four quadrants, or you can perform well in all four to distinguish yourself as an extraordinary service provider. Let's examine each stage of this cycle by studying Amazon more closely.



Explore for More

Visit Amazon.com and type in any topic of your choice in the search box. Amazon immediately opens a window into that world for your exploration by listing books, movies, music, and other products related to the topic.

Choose any book and Amazon takes you exploring again. Have a look inside the book. How many people rate the book? How much does it cost? How long will it take for you to get a copy? Scroll down and the exploring continues further. People who bought this book often bought other books at the same time, or changed their mind and bought a different book. Want to know more about those choices? Just click. Still interested in the original book? Then keep scrolling to explore even more useful information. Who wrote it? Who published it? How big is it? What do other readers have to say about it? You can even explore the background of those who wrote the comments.

All this exploration offers tremendous value for you as a customer. And the time you spend exploring gives Amazon value, too. Your

time spent on each screen, and your clicks on any image, help the company discover what people like you are interested in, attracted to, and willing to spend your precious time exploring. If you are a repeat visitor, or a customer with an account, then the value to Amazon is even greater. Now it learns exactly what you are interested in at this moment, and it can compare that with whatever you have explored on its website in the past.

This precious information helps Amazon provide even greater value in your next moment of exploration. Suppose you bought a book about hiking from Amazon, and now you are looking for books and movies about traveling in Italy. Before you know it, books about hiking in the Italian Alps will be among the choices on your screen.

Explore means asking open-minded questions and listening carefully to the answers. This is where you build awareness and appreciation for another person's concerns. This is the domain of discovery where new possibilities are invented and revealed.



One example is a financial advisor who listens carefully and works with a terrific list of questions to better understand your dreams, fears, preferences, past experiences, and your current situation. This same advisor does an equally terrific job of helping you understand what he or she does, whom he or she serves, and what he or she stands for and recommends. Another example is a supplier who wants to understand your business better and learn how he or she can

help you bring more value to your customers. This same supplier shares with you an outside perspective, industry information, and best-practice case studies you might have never seen. A personal example is the true friend who wants to know what's been going on in your life—where you have been and where you are going—and shares the same about himself or herself with you.

Explore means learning what other people want and need, what they hope for, and would be delighted to experience. What are their goals? What would be a great success? What would be an incredible achievement?

Explore also means uncovering what other people are concerned about, afraid of, and seek to prevent, protect, or avoid. The more you understand what makes people anxious, the better you can serve them. These are the downside possibilities in life. An uplifting service partner explores these, too.

In a powerful partnership, you also want other people to understand you. This means sharing about your history, capabilities, team, resources, and yourself. What do you want to accomplish? How can the customers, colleagues, and companies in your life make a valued contribution to your future?

Unfortunately, many people explore rather poorly. They only listen when someone else bangs the table or argues for attention. They raise their voices in an effort to be heard, instead of listening to understand and waiting patiently for the right moments to speak. They only want to hear the minimum they need for the next step in their process. These people are the order takers in life who care more about how much you buy, and less about what you seek to achieve.

How well do you explore? Are you not really listening, not truly caring, and quickly forgetting what other people tell you? Are you asking the same old questions and following the industry standard? Or are you creating value in the way you engage, and in the quality of discovery you create with other people? Exploration at higher levels requires greater curiosity in both directions, and more concern for the success of others.

How Well Do You Know Your Customers?

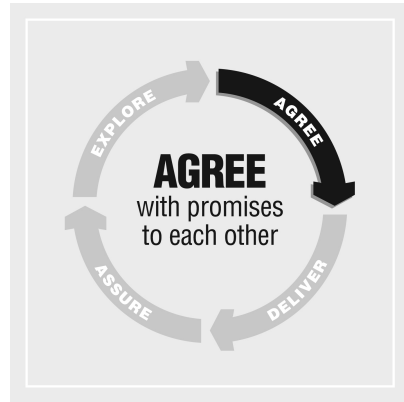
Many people think they know who their customers are, but only have a shallow understanding at best. Do you understand your customers' business, what they do, and how they work? Do you know how they measure their success? Do you know the trends, changes, and major issues of their industry? Do you understand your customers' customer, and appreciate how their expectations are changing? Do you know your customers' history, their challenges and achievements, and their next big goal? Do you understand their competition and which companies have a better reputation, larger share, or higher profit margins? Do you know who's who inside their company, who are the people in positions of power, and how to help the people you know succeed? Do you know what your customers think about your organization, your people, and you? Finally, do you understand your customers well enough to stand apart from and above your competition? If that is your goal, then start with better exploration now, before the competition beats you to it.

Coming to Agreement

Explore is the beginning, but understanding each other is not enough. You must confirm the next actions to be taken. The

Agree quadrant is where partners make clear promises to each other about the terms of their relationship: exactly what they will give to and do for each other. Agree does not mean “say yes” to whatever someone else asks for or desires. Agree means “create yes” by working together and reaching an agreement that works for both sides.

Suppose you have chosen the book title you want at Amazon. Do you want the hard copy, paperback, or digital Kindle version? If you chose hard copy, where do you want the book delivered? If you ordered more than one item, do you want them delivered together, or shipped as soon as each one is available? How



would you like to pay for your purchase? With PayPal? With a gift certificate, a coupon, or an existing credit? With a credit card already on file, with a new card you want to enter now, or with an Amazon card you can apply for on the spot?

When you move to checkout, Amazon keeps the value coming by clearly confirming all your choices: the items, prices, delivery addresses, payment method, choice and cost of shipping, gift wrap selection, and your message. Suddenly thought of another item or a different message you want included on the card? Simply go back within a short time after your purchase and you can easily change anything about your order.

Unfortunately, many companies and individuals handle this Agree stage rather badly, viewing it as the mere technicalities of a service

agreement. They are rigid and inflexible, earning them a reputation of being bureaucratic and unwilling to provide alternatives. Or they promise the moon but don't document clearly what they promise, and then deliver well below expectations. This is unfortunate, because confusion in this Agree stage of the Cycle leads to disappointment in the stage that follows. Whenever you hear, "But I thought you said . . .," this means someone did a poor job of coming to a clear agreement.

Other service providers earn a positive service reputation in this quadrant for being easy to do business with, offering alternatives, convenience, and speed. They confirm your commitments with written notice and thorough and accurate documentation.

The Agree quadrant is rich with opportunities for you to step up your service. Can you offer greater flexibility or a wider range of choices? Can you simplify your contracts, or explain your terms in a more engaging manner? Can you make your promises accurate, comprehensive, or clear?

A Playful Policy Review

Most frontline staff members are taught to follow policies and procedures. They may be hesitant to break the rules to improve their service, yet some rules should be broken, changed, or at least seriously bent from time to time. If your customers complain about rigid policies and robotic staff, you can make a change and make a difference with a playful policy review.

Bring your team together and set the mood for fun. Send a cartoon invitation, put a funny sign in the room, wear party hats, or enjoy a short video of a comedian's great performance. Then, keeping

the mood light and easy, share a list of your current policies and procedures while asking these three key questions:

- What do you like least about this policy or procedure?
- What do our customers find most difficult or problematic?
- How would you change this policy if you could?

After the meeting, change what you can to improve the experience for your customers and your team. If a policy cannot be changed (and there may be good reasons not to), then make an extra effort to explain the reasons more clearly.

The Special Case of “What If?”

The Explore and Agree stages offer a unique opportunity to step up your service by anticipating what could go wrong and putting contingency plans in place. But many service providers, especially those in sales, routinely ignore this opportunity. The last thing many salespeople want to do is discuss potential problems when they are about to close a deal. But by raising the awkward question, “What if?” a service provider can actually uplift a client’s confidence and increase their ultimate satisfaction.

You may have heard the expression “firefighting” used at work. This means something unexpected has happened, and now people are running around with great haste and waste, putting out the fires. Whether you are a customer or a service provider, putting out fires is rarely a happy situation. By asking, “What if?” and by exploring and agreeing in advance, you can prevent these fires even before they start.

Imagine you are in charge of organizing an annual company event where you will honor your finest service providers and many of

your most important customers will be attending. You meet with two five-star hotels to discuss your needs. Both offer a similar menu, a poolside gathering before the dinner, comparable decorations, and an almost identical price. The first hotel's representative gives you a tour, answers your questions, and hands you a proposal. The representative says, "We're sure your program is going to be a great success, and we hope you will choose us for this event." The representative at the second hotel says and does the exact same thing. But as you are about to leave she asks, "May I talk to you about one more thing before you go?" You are surprised by this last-minute question and wonder what is on her mind. She continues, saying, "The poolside gathering before dinner is a great idea, and I am sure your guests will love it. Rain is rather unlikely at this time of year, but just in case, may I take a moment to tell you about our plans?" Now you nod with interest.

"We always watch the weather carefully before an important event like yours," she says. "If it does rain, we will move your poolside gathering inside to the ballroom lobby. Rain also means your guests will be a bit delayed, so we'll move the schedule back an extra fifteen minutes. We'll take care of this with the kitchen and the banquet servers so you don't need to be concerned about it. And we will provide valet parking for your guests as a small way of making them feel good, even if the weather is not so good." She smiles and concludes with, "I don't think it's going to rain, but I did think you would feel more comfortable knowing about our plans, just in case. Are these plans OK with you?"

Is there any question which hotel you will choose? The other hotel may have exactly the same plans in case of rain, but if its representative doesn't take the time to tell you about it, he or she didn't create the extra value. And here's an unexpected bonus: even if it does not rain, your confidence in the service provider who asked

will still go up. Why? Because they explored the downside possibilities and then agreed with you on an uplifting service solution.

Do you explore what might go wrong with your customers and colleagues? Do you take the time to discuss alternatives, make contingency and backup plans just in case they are needed? Or are you hoping that everything will work out fine and you will not have to put out any fires?

Delivering Uplifting Service

The Deliver stage is where you keep the promises you make and fulfill conditions as agreed. Or you can go the extra mile, providing a surprising level of service. Promised a speedy one-week delivery to someone in a hurry? Call after three days to let the client know his or her delivery is ready. Guaranteed a certain level of power or performance? Make your guarantee, plus 10 percent, the minimum you deliver. Offered to provide hands-on support? Be there to hold the client's hand much more frequently than he or she expected.



In this quadrant there is an unexpected opportunity lurking in the phenomenon of people chasing other people. Do you ever chase your colleagues or service providers for updates or information? Do other people ever have to chase you for a detail or report? Chasing each other with calls and messages is very common, but it's not very welcome to either party. To the person being chased,

it can be a hassle or a nuisance. To the person who is chasing, the information he or she is seeking is already later than expected, which is why it is called “chasing.” You can deliver uplifting service by informing others in advance instead of others chasing you.

Ship a package with any of the big courier companies, and the first thing they will do is scan the barcode. From that moment until the moment your package is delivered, you can easily track progress on its website, or receive updates on your phone or by email. You can always know where your package is, where it was, when it left, and where it’s going. Many customers value this information for the peace of mind it provides, even though it does not affect the delivery time or date.

When things go wrong, providing proactive information is of even greater service value. When Singapore Airlines flights are delayed at the last minute by air traffic control or because of technical issues, passengers may already be at the gate or on-board the plane. Throughout these unexpected situations, the airline keeps its passengers well informed. At regular intervals a representative provides the latest update and makes a promise when the next update will be provided. Even if nothing has changed by that time and no new information is available, an airline representative communicates on schedule. This reliable communication means that passengers are never left wondering or uninformed. In fact, this simple tactic during flight delays has become a steady source of compliments.

Proactive communication is appreciated, even if it does not improve or change a situation. But proactive communication does not mean calling someone over and over again or sending him or her messages nonstop. That could be annoying. Some people will appreciate a daily report; others, a weekly summary.

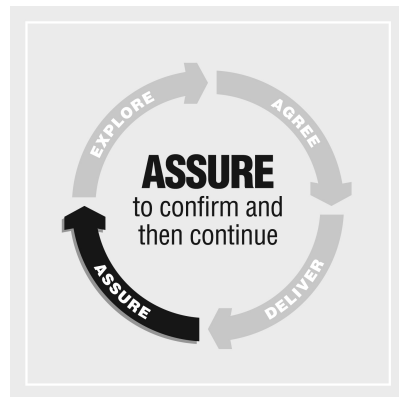
Some want notice as each milestone is met; others, only if a milestone is missed. Some prefer updates by email; others, by phone or by text. Some want to hear from you personally; others want you to contact their assistants, unless the situation is unexpected or unique.

With so many variables, how can you figure out the right amount of proactive information to deliver at what time and through what medium of communication? Apply the lessons in this chapter. First, explore the situations that may arise, the schedules, the people, and options for being in touch. Second, agree when communication should be proactive, which details will be included, and what timing and technologies you will employ. Third, deliver the information that you promised. Get in touch before someone else comes chasing you. Be an uplifting service provider by keeping your customers and colleagues up-to-date.

Assure Closes the Loop

The fourth stage in the Cycle of Service Improvement is Assure—follow up and check for satisfaction, making sure what you agreed to and delivered was fully appreciated and effective.

Everything can be improved, even your proactive communication. What was appropriate at one moment may no longer be what another person appreciates or desires. For example, your customer may have asked for an update every Tuesday and she valued your weekly communication. But after a



while, your weekly message has become a nuisance. She would prefer a monthly summary, with a weekly report to her assistant. But how will you know unless she tells you? And when will she tell you unless you ask? You will learn about this change in expectations, and a great deal more, when you step up and assure. Imagine what you might learn by asking. “Do the actions that we take still address your concerns? Does the service we provide give you the value that you need? Is the agreement we made before still the best for your current situation?”

Some people handle the Assure quadrant badly. They say, “If you have a problem, give me a call.” And then they hope you do not call, thinking, “No news is good news.” But no news is bad news in the service business, because a happy customer who never tells you about it can be stolen away by someone else and an unhappy customer often will not tell you, but will tell many other people.

Asking the Ultimate Question

The ultimate question in the Assure quadrant closes the loop and starts another successful cycle. This powerful sentence connects the end of one service experience to the beginning of another: “Is there anything we could do differently the next time that would make our service better or more valuable for you?”

This question tells customers you are looking to the future, seeking to improve, and are grateful for their feedback. It shows that you are committed to taking measures to improve or increase their satisfaction. This is refreshing for customers and can be vital for your business. A question like this will open the dialogue for greater productivity between departments, better collaboration on teams, and even a closer connection with family members.

The next time you complete a job, finish a project, or think your delivery is complete, don't wait for the next opportunity. Initiate the conversation to serve better and make your business stronger. Some say it's the other person's job to tell you if his or her needs have changed. But that's the difference between a transaction, a relationship, and a partnership that is growing. In a Powerful Partnership, you aren't satisfied that your partner is content. You want to know what more you can do together and how you can improve.

Every Completed Cycle Builds Trust

Each time you complete a cycle of Explore, Agree, Deliver, and Assure, more trust develops between you and other people in your business, your community, and your personal life. Discover what others care about, are concerned about, or want to make happen in their lives. Explore. Make promises to take action on their behalf. Be responsible for some aspect of their well-being. Agree. Then do what you promised to do and keep in contact during the process. Deliver. Finally, follow up and follow through to make sure they are fully satisfied with your actions. Assure.

Building trust often starts with small promises, less exposure, and lower risk. A customer orders just a few before she orders more, and buys a few more times before she considers you her sole supplier. An employer gives out smaller projects first, discovering who delivers, then increases the importance of projects and budgets over time.

This makes sense in business, but also applies in your personal, social, and community life. Building trust with others is the outcome of uplifting service. It is the glue we need for our partnerships today, and those we create for the future.

Keep the Fire Burning

It was late. Todd Nordstrom was sitting in the boardroom of my office looking out the window. He was eating an apple. I could tell he was winding down for his early flight out of Singapore and back to America the next morning.

“What happens when it’s not new anymore?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” I responded.

He took another bite and held up his pointer finger as if to signal he needed a second to swallow.

“How do companies like Marina Bay Sands, NTUC Income, and Changi Airport maintain the enthusiasm after the education?” he asked. “It’s got to diminish, right?”

I pushed my chair back from the table. “The enthusiasm can be lost over time,” I said. “But, that typically doesn’t happen if people truly grasp the reasons for uplifting service.”

“What do you mean by that?” Todd asked.

I chuckled and reminded him of his visits. “Did you see how happy it makes those people to provide uplifting service?”

Todd took another bite of his apple as he smiled. Then he spun around in his chair—almost childlike. His smile grew as he crunched on his bite of apple.

“When was the last time you did something special for your wife or one of your kids?” I asked. “You know, one of those times when

they are surprised and you were just as excited to see the expression on their face?”

“I am hoping the gifts I bring back from this trip will make them smile,” he said. “I bought my daughter a sarong kebaya so she can dress up like a member of the Singapore Airlines crew. And I got my son a sepak takraw ball. He’ll be surprised to see a rattan version of the beanbag he and his buddies kick around.

“I wasn’t quite sure what to get my wife . . .” His voice drifted off, and he was clearly thinking about his family at home. “I’ve been sending back pictures, and I bought her one of those nice gold-dipped orchids, but those seem like such small things compared to the whole experience of visiting this place.”

“The reward for you is in the service,” I said. “But you’ve got to keep taking the next step up. You’ve got to keep that fire of service burning brightly.”

He nodded.

“Why don’t you bring your wife with you to Singapore on your next visit, Todd?” I asked.

His eyes opened widely as the idea took him by surprise, and then he nodded as it became realistic. “We have been exploring a trip together, and we are thinking about visiting Asia. We just hadn’t really agreed yet on when or where to go.” Then he leaned back in his chair and smiled. He was thinking about the future with his wife, already creating the next conversation.

Questions for Service Providers

- You will get what you want by helping other people get what they want. What can you do to provide better service for your customers? What can you do to be a better partner for your colleagues? How can you create more value for your organization?

Questions for Service Leaders

- Apply the Six Levels of Service to the Cycle of Service Improvement. How well does your organization currently Explore, Agree, Deliver, and Assure?
- How can you build more powerful and valuable partnerships with your customers, suppliers, employees, and community?

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.

EMAIL / WEB:

Enquiry@RonKaufman.com

RonKaufman.com



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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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