

*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 24

# Taking Personal Responsibility

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Imagine you are at work and something unexpected goes wrong. Your customer is frustrated and your colleagues are upset. The boss is disturbed and you are feeling anxious. You are already late on another project and the policy in this case is unclear. This is an uncomfortable situation.

Can you sense the pressure, feel the stress, and hear the voices rising? Now, fill in the blanks with whatever first comes to mind.

It's not my \_\_\_\_\_.  
I don't have \_\_\_\_\_.  
Our policy isn't \_\_\_\_\_.  
I'm sorry, but \_\_\_\_\_.

If you are like many people, you may have found yourself mentally filling in words like these:

It's not my *fault*.  
I don't have *time to fix this*.

Our policy isn't *clear*.  
I'm sorry, but *I can't do anything right now*.

When things go wrong, it's always possible to point a finger, make excuses, or feel badly about the problem. These reactions are common. And, they are highlighted in the media every day through accusations, allegations, guilty verdicts, and stories of shame, blame, and victimization.

But in the world of uplifting service, blaming other people doesn't help. Feeling badly about what went wrong doesn't make it any better. Finding excuses and justifications doesn't improve a thing.

## Uplifting Service Champions

Uplifting Service Champions choose a different approach, taking responsibility for difficult situations—and taking action to improve them. They solve problems that arise every day, and then look for more problems to solve. When a customer is dissatisfied, they say, “I will fix this for you.” If a project is running late, they take ownership to make it right. Instead of blaming or shaming inactive colleagues, they empower and inspire them to action. Service Champions don't blame circumstances; they look for steps forward. They are unwilling to be stranded in the viewpoint of a victim. They create empowering perspectives and positive experiences each day.

**TAKE  
PERSONAL  
RESPONSIBILITY**

---

~~EXCUSES~~

~~SHAME~~

~~BLAME~~

Service Champions fill in the blanks with deliberately different answers:

*It's not my style to blame other people.*

*I don't have time to argue about the past. I am creating the future.*

*Our policy isn't going to stop me from making this right.*

*I'm sorry, but we will solve this problem for you.*

Uplifting Service Champions build teamwork, increase pride, improve communication, and make our world a better place by serving others. They are people, just like you, who take responsibility and make real improvements. When you see something that should be done, you do it. When you notice something that could be better, you recommend it. When you see an opportunity to step up and serve, you don't hesitate—you take it.

## The Five Styles of Service

Service Champions take personal responsibility for other people's *experience* of the service they provide. This point of view recognizes that service is not only what you say or do, it is what someone else values from your actions. Service champions modify their style to suit the other person and the situation, using the Five Styles of Service to make this happen. These Five Styles of Service are not higher or lower levels, or better or worse; they are simply different. And, during the course of a Service Transaction with many Perception Points, each of these five styles may be the appropriate to use at different moments in time.

**Direction:** Direction is telling other people exactly what to do, giving them clear instructions and expecting them to follow. A police officer directing traffic is delivering a service. A physical



therapist gives instructions so patients are not injured in a workout. An IT consultant says to you on the phone, “I want you to type in the following commands, and then tell me what you see on the screen.” That style is direction and, in the right situation, it is excellent service.

**Production:** This style of service focuses on getting the job done efficiently and quickly. It’s common between colleagues who are both familiar with the work. It’s also the right style to use when someone is in a hurry. Scan the barcode, pack the item, close the ticket, and say good-bye. This is the pizza chain promising delivery within 45 minutes. It’s the tailor or dry cleaner offering same day service. It’s the grocer offering a freshness guarantee. This style of service can be attractive for service providers because it gets a lot done quickly. But to some customers this can appear robotic and bureaucratic—more focused on your procedures than on the experience you are creating.

**Education:** This style of service teaches and informs. It helps people learn more about what is happening and appreciate why you are serving them the way you do. “Let me show you how that works. Allow me to explain. Here’s what you can do to get the best results.” The education style of service makes other people information-rich. It empowers them to become better customers for you. You may not be a teacher, but consider how many opportunities you have to serve others well by helping them understand a range of products, prepare for steps in a process, or get more value from the choices they have made. Doctors who teach their patients see higher compliance rates because people take their medication as prescribed, and enjoy lower malpractice rates because patients sue these doctors far less often. Governments that explain their policies enjoy higher levels of citizen support. And in any arena where products are commoditized and prices are easily matched, the service provider who teaches and informs can earn a competitive edge.

**Motivation:** This style of service is an acknowledging pat on the back. A personal trainer who pushes you to keep going in the gym then praises your sweaty effort. The technician who says, “Don’t worry, you called the right place. I can help you.” This simple phrase lifts your spirits up as he calms you down. Or you complimenting your own customer with a few simple and encouraging words: “You made a good choice.”

Motivation is also the style to use to make an upset customer feel right, even when they are wrong. Sometimes customers mix up the facts, don’t understand the policy, or have exaggerated beyond belief. But the last thing upset customers want to hear is anyone saying, “You’re wrong.” What they want to hear is that you understand, appreciate, and agree with them on what they value. And you can do this with a motivating style of service.

An upset customer says, “Your employees are rude and unprofessional.” And you reply, “You are right to expect courteous and professional staff.” No argument. Your customer says, “Your policies are rigid. Your company is bureaucratic.” And you reply, “I agree that we should be as flexible and user-friendly as possible. Your suggestions can help.” Suddenly you are on the same side. Your customer says, “This product isn’t what I was promised. And your price is way too high!” You reply, “You have a right to be satisfied by whatever you purchase from us. And you deserve good value for your money. Let’s review what you have purchased and see if there’s a better option.”

These responses make your customer *feel* right without making you wrong. By actively agreeing on the importance of what someone else values, you give them an emotional pat on the back. This makes him or her feel better, and makes it easier for you to work together, too. The next time you want to avoid an argument, try this approach with your partner or your spouse.

**Inspiration:** Inspiration is a style of service that makes a genuine person-to-person connection. It lets people know you are interested in their well-being, not just in their wallet. This style sets the tone for caring about others, welcoming others into your world, and appreciating the opportunity to enter theirs. This style is starting with “Good morning! Nice to see you” and ending with “Thank you for this opportunity to serve you.” This is the heartfelt human spirit that uplifts other people, and in the process uplifts you.

The style you use will depend on the situation. Who are you serving, what do they want, and what style will they value? People in a hurry want production. The curious customer appreciates education. Someone who is confused may value clear direction. Those who are just learning will enjoy a shot of motivation. And everyone from time to time simply wants to be seen and heard as a unique or special person, a service you can provide with a moment of inspiration.

## The Other Side of Customer Service

Much of the domain of customer service focuses on being a better service provider. But there is another side of customer service, and that is being a better customer. An Uplifting Service Champion takes personal responsibility for this side as well. When you give great service, customers appreciate you more. When you give bad service, customers can be a pain in the neck. Similarly, when you are an appreciative and considerate customer, service providers will often go the extra mile to serve you better. But if you rant and pound the table, people may serve you grudgingly, if at all. Here are proven steps you can take to be a better customer and enjoy *receiving* better service:

1. **Be appreciative and polite.** Remember, there is a fellow human being on the other end of your phone call, the receiving side of your email, or just across the counter. Begin each interaction with a quick “Hi. Thank you for helping me. I really appreciate it.” This takes about two seconds and can dramatically improve the mood of a service provider.
2. **Get your service provider’s name and use it.** You can make this short and friendly by first offering your name and then asking, “Who am I speaking with please?” or if you are face-to-face, simply, “May I know your name?” Once you know it, repeat it with a smile in your voice. This creates a personal connection and makes it much harder for a service provider to treat you like an anonymous account holder or policy number.
3. **Be upbeat.** Many service providers face customer after customer all day long. The routine can become tiresome. When an energetic and smiling customer appears, that person often enjoys special care and treatment in return. What you send out does come back. Attitudes—positive and negative—really are contagious.
4. **Provide information just the way they want it.** Many service providers need your data in a sequence that fits their forms, screens, and procedures. Have all your information ready to go, but give it in the order they prefer. Saying, “I have all my information ready. Which would you like first?” lets the provider know you are prepared and will be easy to work with. The time you take getting everything in order will save time in the service conversation, too.
5. **Confirm next actions.** Repeat what your service provider promises to do. Confirm dates, times, amounts, promises,

responsibilities, and commitments. This helps you move together through the service process, catching any misunderstanding and correcting it along the way. Be sure you both understand what will happen next: what they will do, what you will do, and what both parties have agreed to going forward.

6. **When appropriate, commiserate.** Sometimes service providers let their frustration show. A slow computer, a previous customer, high call volume, pressure from a manager, or some unwelcome personal event may have upset them. When you hear an upset tone, be the one to soothe it. “It sounds like things are tough right now. I really appreciate your help.” This brief moment of empathy can be an oasis in their world.
7. **Show your appreciation.** A sincere “thank you” is always appropriate. If your service provider deserves more, give more. A nicely written compliment can make a huge difference in someone else’s day, or career. And who knows? The person you praise today may serve you again tomorrow.

Service is a two-way street. The traffic of goodwill flows equally between customers and service providers. If you want to enjoy uplifting service, don’t wait for someone else to make your day. Take the first step by extending your own goodwill.

## What’s in It for You?

Stepping up to improve your service can mean a lot of work. Upgrading your actions and uplifting your attitude is a real commitment. Should you bother? Before completing this section of the book, let’s be candid and ask the question: “What’s in it for you?”

If you do step up, customers will appreciate your uplifting service. And you'll enjoy more compliments. Happy customers come back and they tell other people. That's good for your organization and builds job security. That is good for you. If you upgrade your service to colleagues, your efforts may well be noticed. What goes around does come around. When you step up for colleagues, they are more likely to step up for you. That makes your work easier and the place you work more satisfying for everyone. And what about everyone else in your business network: suppliers, distributors, and other organizations? Serve them better and they will serve you better, too.

This two-way street even applies to those in your personal life: your family, friends, neighbors, and everyone else you meet. We all live and work in a whole world of relationships based on service. As you uplift and upgrade the service you provide, the world will uplift you.

### Questions for Service Providers

- Where can you take more personal responsibility at work, at home, and in your life?
- Which styles of service are you most comfortable providing?
- How can you choose the best style to use with different customers and in different service situations?

### Questions for Service Leaders

- Where do you hear the sound of blame, shame, and excuses in your organization?
- How can you be a role model of taking personal responsibility?
- Which styles of service do your employees provide most often? Which styles do your customers prefer?
- Which styles do you use most frequently when engaging with your team members? Which styles do they appreciate most? Which are most effective?

# 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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EMAIL / WEB:

[Enquiry@RonKaufman.com](mailto:Enquiry@RonKaufman.com)

[RonKaufman.com](http://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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