

Starbucks, Walt Disney, and YOU!

Worldwide, the Starbucks name is increasingly becoming synonymous with coffee. Forty million customers visit Starbucks each week and loyal customers frequent their store 18 times a month. From a single store to six new stores opening EVERY DAY (one every 4 hours) 365 days a year - Starbucks must be doing something right.

In an effort to understand Starbucks' meteoric success, I spent two years studying this revolutionary company. During those two years, I traveled through Central American coffee farms, visited coffee processing plants, spent time with Starbucks land scientists, met with senior leadership (from the Starbucks CEO down), talked with customers, store managers and front line workers.

This examination of Starbucks led to my book entitled, *The Starbucks Experience: 5 principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary*. The book, which has appeared on the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and *BusinessWeek* bestsellers lists, provides a detailed look at the strategies and principles that Starbucks leaders and employees bring to life in the spirit of producing the ultimate customer experience including:

- **MAKE IT YOUR OWN** Starbucks partners (employees) think about the customer experience ("the third place", "affordable luxury", and "the living room of the community") in a way that allows each of them to connect with their customers in a personal way. According to Starbucks Chairman, Howard Schultz, "We are not in the coffee business serving people; we are in the people business serving coffee."

- **EVERYTHING MATTERS** Paying attention to absolutely every detail gives Starbucks a competitive advantage because it builds intense loyalty among patrons. Managers have to constantly put themselves in the shoes of their customers, seeing everything from the other side of the counter.

- **SURPRISE AND DELIGHT** At Starbucks, it is critical to deliver consistent product and service to delight customers. But on top of consistent quality, Starbucks partners look for ways to surprise and engage consumers in a process of discovery. In an example of the importance of surprise, Starbucks gave out free cups of "Calm" tea on April 15 (the day federal income taxes are paid in the USA) in anticipation that their customers would be frazzled by the tax deadline. In essence, surprise emerges from the art and science of anticipating the wants, needs, and desires of customers.

- **EMBRACE RESISTANCE** Starbucks receives many forms of resistance from communities, international organizations, and at times, customers. Both at the leadership and front line levels, Starbucks has benefited from criticism and utilized it to become stronger and better able to meet the needs of those who share their input.

- **LEAVE YOUR MARK** People want to do business with and work for companies that are socially conscientious. In addition to their corporate philanthropy and grant-giving, Starbucks encourages its employees to be involved in their communities; matching cash contributions in support of their partners' efforts. Furthermore, Starbucks leadership makes business decisions in accord with their social values.

These principles, which are designed to elevate customer service beyond transactions, have universal application. In a conversation with a colleague at Disney, I validated this very important approach...

You can probably imagine the most asked question in the front courtyards of the Disneyland and Disneyworld theme parks. On Main Street USA, people most often asked "where is" questions (with "Where is the bathroom?" being one of the most universal). But you would probably never guess the second most asked question by harried and excited visitors. Believe it or not it is...

"What time is the 3 o'clock parade?"

Who said people were logical?

Imagine being a new cast member, standing out in 97 degree weather with 96 percent humidity in a polyester costume only to be asked for the 20th time in a day: "What time is the 3 o'clock parade?" How would you answer? How would your people answer?

Let's hope we would be able to remain courteous. But more importantly, the way we answer the question and train staff to create answers for that question adds into the overall mix of impressions that determine the customer's satisfaction with a business. Let's look at how Disney trains its people to deal with these types of situations. Note: I did not say, let's look at what Disney tells its people they should say in these situations. Scripting answers for people may create consistency, but you might as well have a computer or sign giving information about the parade time if you don't give your people the latitude to create experience for customers that meet the customer's unstated or confusingly stated needs.

In essence, Disney says above all be courteous; second, plus your response to add value in a way that exceeds expectations; and third, to the degree possible add value in a way that makes a personal connection and tailors a personal experience for the customer. So let me run you through a range of examples to a guest of the park asking "What time is the three o'clock parade?"

At the non-courteous end is the response we often wish we could utter in business - some adolescent crack like "3 o'clock might be a good guess."

Moving up the food chain of answers is the simple courteous, "Sir or Ma'am, it starts at 3 clock."

In the language of Disney, a "plussed up" answer might be, "It starts at three o'clock at the entrance to Main Street USA and makes it to where we are standing by approximately 3:15pm."

Finally the "plussed up" and personal response might be something like: "The three o'clock parade starts at the entrance to Main Street USA and makes it to where we are standing by approximately 3:15pm. But when my family visits the park, I encourage them to view the parade from in front of the Disneyland train platform because there is a turn in the parade route which slows the floats down for great picture taking."

I doubt that many people ask you about parade times in your business, but the concept applies. Are you demonstrating and training staff to not only be courteous but to offer "plussed up" and personable responses that meet the unstated needs of the customer? In so doing, you exceed the customer's expectations as you create personal experiences for them.

Walt Disney himself once said, "Don't build it for yourself. Find out what the people want and build it for them. Walt did. Starbucks does. How about you?"



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THE STARBUCKS EXPERIENCE...

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