



Book Review

Kaufman, R., Uplifting Service: The Proven Path to Delight Your Customers, Colleagues and Everyone Else You Meet.

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Introduction

Ron Kaufman's *Uplifting service culture* has become one of the most famous books in the domain of customer service. Among the plethora of books published in customer service this book was found to have gained much attention, particularly from industry practitioners. *Uplifting service culture* is a unique book in its format, content, writing style and even the nature the information provided on the selected cases. The book is predominantly case based with only a few theoretical models, which makes acquiring knowledge and actual implementations more straightforward. Even though this might not be a concern for many academics, this book provides a wealth of information to make sense out of the theories that have been established.

Ron brings a number of carefully selected cases to support the strategies in the journey of uplifting service culture. Among the mostly discussed cases are Changi Airport, Singapore and several similar larger global organisations that have gained a reputation over the years, with the obvious idea of setting a benchmark for practitioners. While the essential requirement of service education for successful service culture is highlighted, concerns have also been raised about the low emphasis given by practitioners for providing overall service education. This point also provides a number of implications for research opportunities that scholars may carry out by collaborating with the industry. In his book Ron emphasises the urgent requirement to uplift the service culture and provides a step by step guide for implementation, and advice for continuous improvement and retaining its sustainability. Strategies to understand customers better, create a positive experience, generate greater value, deepen loyalty and maintain long term relationships are among the key benefits that a reader may acquire by reading this book.

Content

The content of the book is summarized into unique themes based on five key sections—why, lead, build, learn and drive. There are 27 chapters in total aligned under the key themes. The first section *WHY?* is elaborated through three chapters. The second section is *LEAD* containing three chapters. The third section of this book *BUILD* contains 12 chapters, and they represent the key model Ron provides for building the service culture. The fourth section *LEARN* contains six chapters, and the final section *DRIVE* contains three chapters. This review is structured around the sections due to the large number of chapters; further, the titles of the chapters will not make sense until they are fully read. The review will refer to individual chapters only when it is seen as important to highlight key points.

Section One: Why

This section is based on the key chapters titled *Journey into a new culture*, *The gateway to possibility* and *The proven path*. The first chapter begins with two cases on poor and excellent service from the airline sector. Along with that Ron provides a solid foundation for the rest of the discussion and for justification of the urgent requirement for uplifting service culture which is lacking despite its extreme importance. The first chapter contains a simple definition on service as “*taking action to create value for someone else*” (p.20) and it also clarifies the meaning of service culture, as well as the requirements and actions required to inculcate it and its benefits. The key highlights of this section are his focus on the investment in

exceptional infrastructure and the experience created beyond the core service. Adopting a relationship marketing mindset (Gummesson, 2008), Ron also emphasises the importance of several stake holders, especially the employees, community and the environment. Providing a differentiated service, and creating value and sustaining it have also been given much emphasis. This section mainly addresses the benefits of uplift the service culture, the urgent requirement to do so, and the consequences of implementing, thereby setting the foundation for the entire discussion of the rest of the book.

Section Two: Lead

This section of the book, comprising three chapters, discusses the importance of true service leadership, or the commitment of the top management, and the involvement of all the parties, with emphasis on the significant role of boundary spanners and their engagement, in delighting a customer. The need for comprehensive service education is elaborated in chapter five titled *Leading from all levels*. The essential commitment of the top management is elaborated through seven rules, namely, declare service as top priority, be a great role model, promote a common service language, measure what really matters, enable and empower your team, remove road blocks for better service and sustain focus and enthusiasm. The sixth chapter *The journey to magnificence* is made more interesting by introducing a number of attractions such as Eiffel tower, the Sydney Opera House, and a few cases about organisations such as Disneyland and Marina Mall Resort and their efforts towards building an iconic service culture.

Section Three: Build

In this section, comprising 12 chapters, the 12 building blocks of service culture are comprehensively explained based on the foundation provided in the previous sections. The 12 chapters are: *Common service language*, *Engaging service vision*, *Service recruitment*, *Service orientation*, *Service communications*, *Service recognition and rewards*, *Voice of the customer*, *Service measures and metrics*, *Service improvement process*, *Service recovery and guarantees*, *Service benchmarking*, and *Service role modeling*. Compiling the key points in a sequence, a notable case among all is the 'no worry strategy' (pp. 90-91) of Singapore government implemented for all government organisations to ensure that callers who contact any government department would never be given the answer 'sorry you have called the wrong place'. The case highlights that any officer in any government department who answers the call will connect the customer to the relevant department, making a beautiful learning point about uplifting the service.

Ron refers to such strategies as ‘*effective common service language*’, and linking such service language to systems and procedures is emphasized as one key strategy towards building an ‘*engaging service vision*’.

The importance of having correct people who have a genuine interest in providing an extraordinary service and ideal recruitment strategies to absorb such people are elaborated through five key advices. The case used to support this point is ‘Google’ and how they ensue that *googlee people* are selected with no mismatches with the organization culture. Although an orientation is a key ritual after recruiting people, Ron points the failure of such efforts due to its too basic content which is not sufficient to get started and get connected with the service culture, and advocates for a more welcoming, uplifting, realistic orientation. Communicating the tag lines expressing your service commitment towards the customers is also among the key points emphasised. Even though communication is explained in the literature in a very generic manner in many service-related text books Ron explains the important unique aspects of communication with a number of cases. Importance of recognition for committed people through numerous unique practices are also among the key learning points.

While emphasising the critical importance of customer feedback, Ron has made a number of important observations. For example, even though customer feedback is often advocated and emphasized in the service domain, he has made a number of deep observations on the manner in which it is handled, such as the importance of obtaining qualitative feedback rather than throwing a questionnaire or having a suggestion box which may not capture the true voice of the customers. His concerns and advice clearly indicate that surveys may create unpleasantness and destroy value rather than creating or improving value. He has also been keen to provide remedies if things do not go as planned such as attending to disappointed customers and highlights the importance of recovery strategies and guarantees. The importance of benchmarking, not just within the industry but outside, in improving the service is emphasized, citing a number of examples from Amazon, Apple, BMW and Nordstrom. In the final chapter, *Service role modeling*, the leader’s attitude skills and behaviour to achieve the goal of uplifting service culture is communicated with several cases.

Section Four: Learn

This section comprises six chapters with the titles *Learning takes practice*, *The six levels of service*, *Your perception points*, *The big picture*, *Building service*

partnerships, and Taking personal responsibility. Ron's main emphasis at the beginning of this section is the importance of service education and he highlights the important difference between training and service education. In this section a number of tools are provided to measure different service levels. Although service evaluation is mostly done using the popular five- or seven-point Likert scale, he provides new, much more engaging and interesting measures such as 'criminal level, basic, expected, desired and surprising unbelievable' levels. Emphasising managing customer touch points in the services domain, he provides detailed guidelines, referring to it as managing perception points and provides a number of advice and tools on managing perception points.

Section Five: Drive

This section, the final in the book, is elaborated through three chapters: *Your implementation road map, Learning form experience* and *More than a business philosophy.* In this section the five most important areas for service uplifting, namely, leadership alignment, service culture steering committee, 12 building blocks, actionable service education system and process integration, are described in detail. At the end of this book Ron gives a strong message of uplifting service culture with passion and commitment, beyond commercial concerns.

Evaluation

The book provides significant messages to the reader such as the poor state of services, importance of providing service with a genuine concern, urgent need to identify engaging strategies, contribution of employees – particularly their excitement to create value, continuous improvement, and treating service culture as a strategy than a tactic. The author also provides a comprehensive analysis of numerous slogans in marketing (e.g. *Customer is always right*), examining the common use of such slogans such as paying mere lip service to them in marketing campaigns, and also the misinterpretation of such slogans. Despite these new ideas, it is also possible to witness that many of the models provided are related to the existing body of knowledge although presented in a different manner that may be easy to understand and implement. For example, even though people, process, and physical evidence (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016) are well known as the key pillars of a service domain, the emphasis of this book is mostly on the people and process. Moreover, while technology is a key pillar in managing relationships, this book has not taken it into consideration. The book would have been enriched by a discussion on the role of technology and the importance of customer data in uplifting service culture. Although the book has been written mostly from the *customer is the king*

perspective, which is the standpoint usually adopted by marketers, a discussion on dysfunctional customer behaviour that has implications for service provision would have provided readers with some food for thought. Finally, though the author provides a differentiation between training and service education, he does not adequately elaborate on this difference. In spite of these drawbacks, the content is adequate for practitioners to obtain a quick understanding, and a reader with knowledge on services marketing in general, and customer relationship management in particular, will be able to connect well with the content.

Conclusion

Uplifting service culture justifies the importance of service culture with evidence. A number of important concepts in the services domain have been explained with a new look to suit practitioners which may be interesting for even a lay person's reference. The book takes the reader through a very exciting journey of organizations that have exceptional service cultures and justifies that service culture is no more an option but a requirement. A reader with a passion for customer service would, no doubt, read this book more than once!

About the Author

Ron Kaufman has more than 30 years of experience working in diverse sectors and countries. He is a leading educator and motivator in the world for uplifting customer service and building service cultures. His 'Uplifting service culture' has been named as the World's top customer service development program in 2020. He has 14 other books on service, business and inspiration to his credit.

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