



It's all about the experience

This is the place where everything should all come together—the reason why we have created the Culture and why our people bring it to life. Because beyond everything we have talked about, it's the experience that matters most.

Whatever happens in our daily lives, the end result is our experience. So what are we doing or what do we need to do to create the best experience for our employees, customers, vendors, and investors on a consistent basis?

If all the key aspects of our company have been aligned to produce a phenomenal experience, we have done the best job possible. We have secured the future of our company and of our jobs. We will have created a reorder business where our customers don't want to leave us. And the employees won't want to leave either.

HERE'S THE DEAL

A regular experience that merely satisfies—a so-so experience—doesn't elicit any kind of emotion. On the other hand, great or horrible experiences, those that get us excited or upset, do spark an emotion and will create an emotional connection (though, obviously, one emotion will be much more positive than the other).

There's a limit to how much we can control. Basically, we can direct the customers' experience up to their emotional reaction. After that, thanks to word of mouth and today's speed of communication, our repeat business is up to the customers. So we better make their experience great!

Start with our everyday actions to see if they are creating a so-so experience or a great one. Do we say "Hello" in the morning or do we grunt?

Do we say “Thank you” as often as we should or do we just take things for granted? Do we ask others how they are doing or do we just talk about ourselves? Do we convey the feeling that “I am too busy” or “I am never too busy”?

When we look around at the bounty or lack of it in our lives, there is a direct correlation between the experiences we create—good or not—and the fulfillment in our lives.



Why is it all about the experience?

We are attracted to things or repelled by them, depending on our past experiences.

Experiences that elicit emotions actually help us form memories. Why? It's how our brains work; it's how we are wired. The area that is responsible for the formation and storing of memories from emotional events is located in the limbic system, in a place called the amygdala.

But it's the really great or really bad experiences that create emotional reactions. There's no spark for so-so, merely good, or satisfactory experiences or expected events. And memories are not necessarily formed by a single emotional event; they can be, but they are usually patterned or conditioned in the brain over time. We may be conditioned to be fearful (fear conditioning) because of experiences that brought us harm, for instance. Positive (appetitive) conditioning results from experiences that were positive, that made us feel good, or that were good for us.

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There is also a direct link through the amygdala to our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. After conditioning from repeated emotional stimuli, we usually react to certain experiences reflexively or subconsciously.

The linking of our experiences with emotion and memory has helped us to evolve as a species to where we are today. We migrate toward experiences that have been good for us and stay away from those that have been bad.

We've all heard the expression, "Every generation needs to learn that the oven is hot." We burn ourselves once, and ouch! We have an emotional

reaction and form an emotional connection to stay away from hot stoves, thanks to the memory that is created in the process. So for the rest of our lives, we avoid touching a hot stove. If we even get too near a hot burner, our reflexes take over, pulling us away from harm. We don't have to think about it.

Flip the coin over: When we experience something great, our autonomic nervous system takes over, and we reflexively want more of the same, so we keep going back to the experiences that were great. That keeps us safe and moving toward what has been good for us in the past.

A great experience creates an emotional reaction that forms an emotional connection and finally a memory that keeps attracting us to that great experience.

No matter whether it's a great or bad experience, an emotional reaction will turn into an emotional connection, especially if is repeated. After that, what happens, happens automatically. Our brains are programmed to remember and to make our reactions reflexive. From then on we are attracted or repelled without consciously thinking about it.

When it comes to our customers, every time we deliver a great experience and create an emotional reaction, *that* turns into an emotional connection. And customers program, pattern, or condition themselves to return. It may sound a bit contrived, like we are programming or manipulating people by the experiences we deliver, but we're not. We're just delivering experiences that, hopefully, they like a lot, and if that helps them come back to get more of what they like, all the better. It's a win-win situation.

We've seen it with Zappos. By first delivering WOW and now delivering happiness—a wonderful experience—the company has created long-term relationships with its customers and sees 75 percent return customers on any given day.

BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are broken for the following reasons:

1 percent die

5 percent move away

10 percent find someone new

17 percent communicate less and less

but

67 percent of relationships are broken because of one word: *indifference*.

Treat employees and customers like they don't matter, treat them like they are a number, treat them like you don't care about them—in essence, put indifference into the experience you deliver—and you will be alone in short order.

What should be the biggest thing your company is doing? The answer is obvious: Deliver the best experience in everything you do for employees and your customers alike. The results will be high percentages of repeat customers and low employee turnover.

You can achieve this if you follow the steps in this book.

Sometimes we don't remember why we dislike or avoid someone or something. We've simply forgotten what started our negative emotional connection, but we're still programmed to follow it. It's like the old feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. It's been going on for ages, though no one can remember how it started.

Emotional connections seem to last forever, and some continue for a lifetime, so keep that in mind the next time you think about increasing your profit margin by decreasing quality or customer service. People remember . . . and their attitude is this: "If you screw us (or even think about it), this time *you* are the party that is going down."

When Netflix raised prices with no conceivable added value, the customers fled in droves, and the stock price dropped more than 75 percent.

When Bank of America tried to charge a \$5 fee for using the ATM, it created such an uproar that within days, the bank reversed the policy.

When Verizon tried to charge its customers a \$2 fee for online bill payments, the reaction was swift, and the decision was rescinded within 24 hours.

COMPANIES: You can't add a fee without adding value, because your customers will react strongly and negatively, and they'll remember long after you forget.

WHAT IS THE LAST EXPERIENCE?

Usually the last thing the customer experiences is what heavily “colors” a customer’s memory. What happens at the end is so important that you should not only focus on the overall experience but also pay close attention to the last part of the experience.

Imagine you’re at a baseball game and enjoying every play, when, at the bottom of the ninth inning, your team’s player hits the winning

*You have won
the game if your
customers say, “I
love giving them my
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treat me so well.”*

home run. As the ball sails out, the fan in front of you jumps up and spills a soda on you; it ruins the whole experience. Yet if the same person had spilled a soda over you in the first inning, but your team still hit the game-winning run, you’d come away feeling great about the win and probably wouldn’t be thinking about the sticky soda on

your clothes. We color our memory of an event with what we experienced last. So we must take great care with what happens at the end of any transaction.

If you are doing anything to compromise the customer’s experience—especially in the final part of the buying cycle or after—you will color that

person's memory of the whole process adversely, and that's one of the worst things you can do as a business.

So what is the last thing your customers receive from you . . . a bill? Do they end up dealing with customer service because they have a question or concern? Do they have to fill out a survey? Or do they get a thank-you note? It's up to you and the experience you want to create, especially at the end.

*What "color"
are your
customer's
experiences?*