

## **It's All About the Experience**

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In the current economic environment, simply filling a customer's need leaves a business vulnerable to being viewed as a commodity. Worse yet, a track record of strong customer service may not be enough to differentiate one brand from another.

Over the years I have been fortunate enough to work with and write about companies that have transcended service and established a well-differentiated **brand experience**. During my presentation on December 10<sup>th</sup>, I'll share insights from a number of my business books such as ***The Starbucks Experience: 5 principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary***. Together we can use these identified principles to more fully define and refine your experiential offering. Using my Starbucks book as an example, I'll address how to more fully build the following principles into your daily operations:

- **MAKE IT YOUR OWN** Starbucks partners (employees) are encouraged to 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." It should also be noted that customers have to be engaged into an ownership position with the business, not treated as passive receivers of transactions.
- **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 leadership principles, along others from experiential brands, will be the launching point for our time together on December 10th in Cheyenne. See you there.....