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Change in service mindset needed

Training is not enough, staff need to think creatively to apply what they have learnt

Reports by **Brandon Chew**
brandonc@sph.com.sg

“YOU get more when you’re served in Singapore.” This is the mindset that the country should work towards, according to service excellence guru Ron Kaufman.

“The phrase ‘by right, you’re entitled to . . .’ comes out of a history where Singapore didn’t have enough and had to equitably distribute resources,” said Mr Kaufman, founder of Singapore-based UP! Your Service College.

Now, with “more than enough resources and opportunity”, the country has to change its mindset. Indeed, a superior service culture could change the bargain-hunting, price-competitive mentality of Singaporean consumers. It would also positively, constantly, impact a company and its stakeholders.

In an interview with BT, Mr Kaufman defined service as “the act of creating value for a person or organisation”. Many organisations

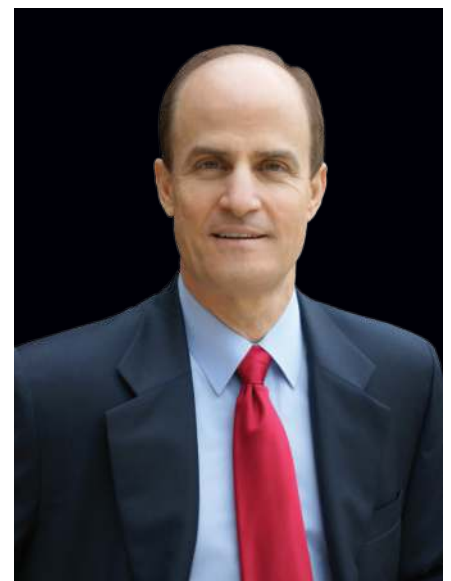
are not adopting this definition, and instead are simply imparting staff with certain skill sets, he continued.

“What many companies do is spend money on different forms of service training for various departments and roles, without ensuring these trainings are aligned to each other or to the desired culture of the organisation,” he said.

The common approach of measuring success by hours of training rather than by alignment of messages and meaning, is at the root of this behaviour. “Participants and students in traditional courses are tested and receive a statement of attainment, meaning they have reached a certain level of demonstrable skill. But now, what we need is people who can think creatively to apply what they have learnt in unexpected situations.”

As such, education, creativity, and evolution, not training, adherence,

and attainment, are the hallmarks of a superior service culture. “New issues are always going to arise in a service situation. If an employee has been educated, he will apply the principles he has learnt and will know how to respond.”

**MR RON KAUFMAN**

Education, creativity, and evolution are the hallmarks of a superior service culture

In contrast, educating employees on the fundamental principles of service allows them to react effectively and creatively to different people and scenarios. This spontaneous exuberance will spill over from employees into the company itself and create a “continuously evolving competitive edge”.

A service culture will naturally add value to customers; but more importantly, said Mr Kaufman, the innovative environment that it germinates will spur organisations to constantly find new ways to add value.

But satisfying customers is not enough. Staff need to create value for their colleagues as well – and this is where a company-wide service education comes in.

Said Mr Kaufman: “When all members of the organisation learn the same fundamental service principles, they start to see that the internal service culture is what enables the people facing the customer to be able to innovate.”

This convinces staff from all departments of the necessity and relevance of superior service, and makes it easier for the organisation to create value for its customers.

It also reduces the need for over-competitive pricing as a product differentiator, and may convince Singaporean consumers that the cheapest product is not necessarily the best one. “If, as a service provider, I’m creating lots of additional value for my customers, then they will probably value me more, and will be willing to pay more or come back to me again instead of going to my competitors.

This logic applies to the issue of staff retention as well, Mr Kaufman said. A company with a superior service culture will be more likely to attract and keep employees –

and these employees will want to stay and be part of the culture, even if the wage opportunities are greater elsewhere.

The service culture phenomenon does not end there. “Value is a two-way street. If I, as a service provider, am creating lots of additional value, then customers are going to value me more,” said Mr Kaufman.

Naturally, then, these customers will become more personally invested in the company, and will want to see it succeed. In this sense, Mr Kaufman noted, the service culture has leaked out of the organisation, becoming “contagious in the best possible way”.

Creating this win-win situation for organisations and stakeholders, he continued, is how Singapore can stand out in the global market. “We want people to have a mutual, long-term, value-added relationship with Singapore. We want them to say: ‘Singapore is my headquarters, my place for financial services, my holiday destination.’

To make this a reality, though, a paradigm shift will have to occur, said Mr Kaufman.

“Companies here need to stop focusing on getting it right, and start focusing on what else they can do, how they can do a little more for their stakeholders.”

Only then, he said, would Singapore turn into a “platform for shaping the world in a constructive, positive, value-adding way”.



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UP! Your Service was founded by Ron Kaufman, the world’s leading educator and motivator for uplifting customer service and superior service culture. Ron is the author of the bestselling “UP! Your Service” and “Lift Me UP!” book series.

Enquiry@UpYourService.com
Tel (65) 6309 9668 Fax (65) 6242 7951
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Serving the world from Singapore

Reports by **Brandon Chew**
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RON Kaufman's vision is for Singapore to become a centre for service excellence. And by establishing the successful UP! Your Service College here, he is taking steps to make it happen.

Founded in 2006, the college helps organisations "build a superior service culture for sustainable competitive advantage," said Mr Kaufman. Besides international names such as Microsoft, Merrill Lynch, Emirates Airlines and Shell, clients include local organisations such as NTUC Income, Temasek Polytechnic and heartlands restaurant chain Botak Jones.

A regular speaker at international seminars, Mr Kaufman is no stranger to service excellence. Since relocating to Singapore in 1990, he has helped establish the Service Quality Centre and has served on the Workforce Development Agency's Go the Extra Mile for Service (GEMS) Committee. His other company, Ron Kaufman Pte Ltd, was established in 1993 to manage his speaking and publishing engagements.

The college was created to solve a problem, says Mr Kaufman. "How do you serve organisations at a much wider level than giving speeches or consulting?"

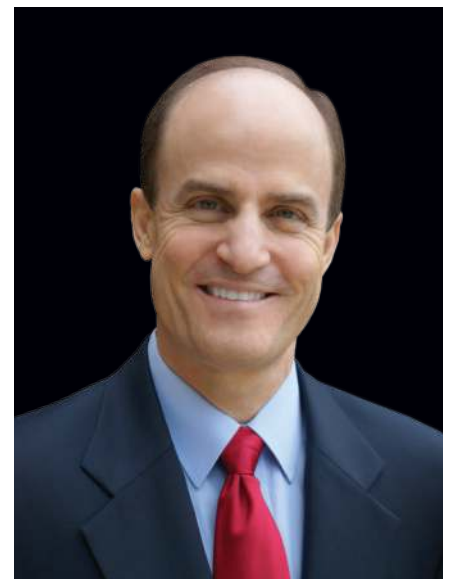
As such, the college's curriculum breaks Mr Kaufman's service vision down into "fundamental principles" that can be taught to organisations from all industries and countries. This has helped create what he calls the "Six Sigma or Seven Habits of service culture," referring to Motorola's vaunted business management strategy and Stephen Covey's self-help principles respectively.

Mr Kaufman is more than happy to advertise the college's "made in Singapore" status. "Our curriculum was created here, and is now being served all over the world," he says. "The rest of the world is responding very powerfully to this."

Singapore's small size and multi-ethnic composition gives it an edge in today's globalised, diversified world, he reckons.

"If we can make this country a case study in continuously creating and adding value, we can attract people here for education, post-graduate studies and more."

Barely into its second year, the college is looking to expand. Mr Kaufman plans to take his curriculum to schools in three or so years, after the brand has garnered more credibility.



RON KAUFMAN
Author and Founder
UP! Your Service