

# Uplifting your service

**Ron Kaufman**, founder of UP! Your Service, has worked over 20 years to help organisations build strong service cultures. He says changing the negative perception of service has to come from within each organisation

By Priya de Langen

“**T**he fundamental definition of service is taking action to create a value for someone else,” says Ron Kaufman, founder of UP! Your Service, a service education and management consultancy firm.

With over 20 years of experience educating organisations on building great service cultures under his belt, one cannot help but listen when Kaufman speaks about service as an issue. In his upcoming book, *Uplifting Service: The Proven Path to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues and Everyone Else You Meet*, Kaufman explores the fundamentals of service and how companies can go about building the foundations of making service part of their organisational culture.

Providing great service is not just something that organisations can do for external stakeholders; they can also build service internally. Ultimately, providing the right types of service will contribute to a company’s long-term success.

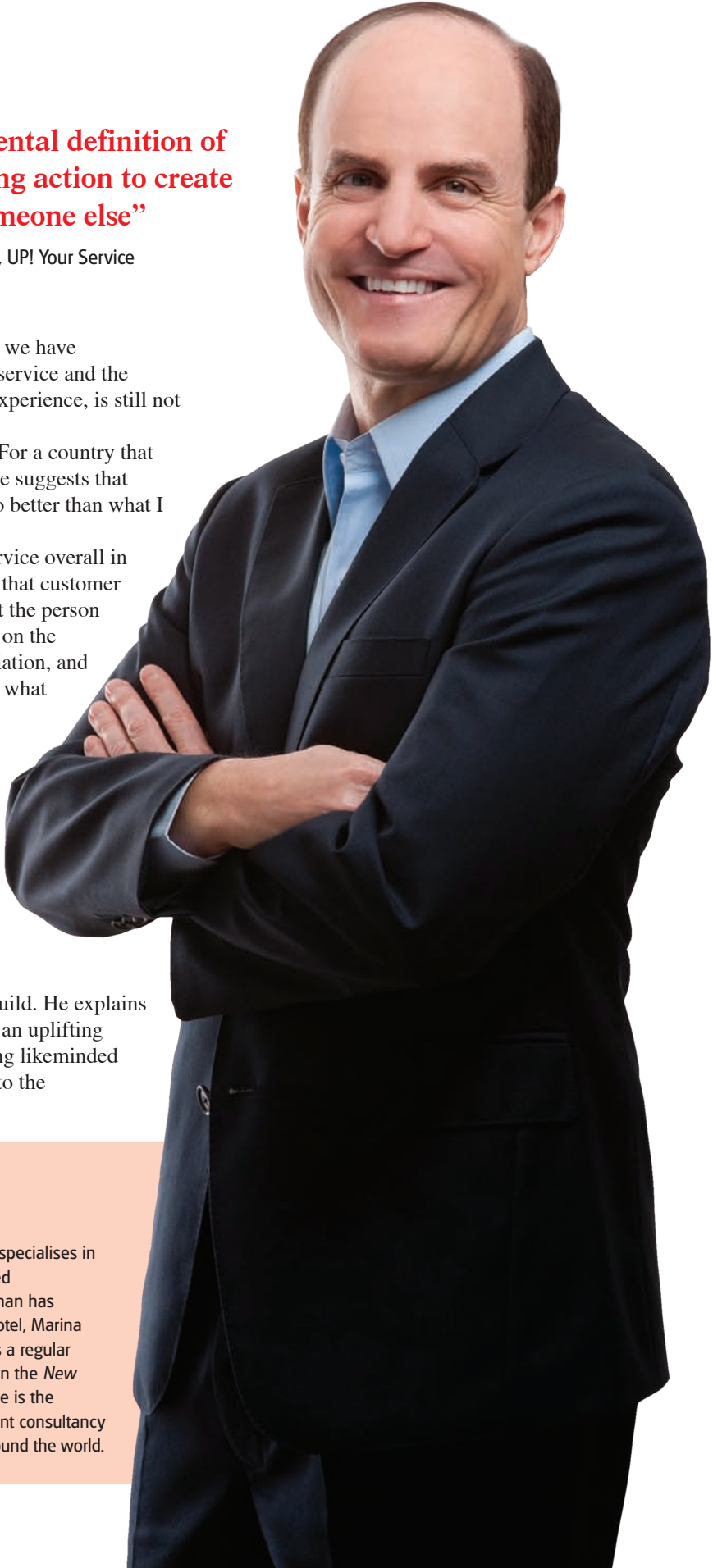
## **Mind your mindset**

Despite this importance, the perception of service and the service industry in its entirety is often negative. Kaufman explains that there are still challenges that need to be addressed. “We treat service as a ‘fuzzy side’ and there has been poor thinking regarding customer service – that ‘the customer is always right’, or worse, ‘the customer is king’,” he says. “So, what does that make the service provider, the slave?”

Another challenge is that the people who provide the service (whichever type of work) also feel “servile”. “When they are in service to someone else they do not necessarily feel dignified,” he says.

Kaufman argues that service – both to give and receive – is a natural need for human beings. As such, he wants to “uplift” the idea of service to people. “We are the species that needs service and we only create value and success in our lives or careers when we provide a service (to others).”

Kaufman agrees that there is a negative perception of service in Singapore, but he says that the market has improved tremendously over the

A full-length portrait of Ron Kaufman, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue shirt and a matching tie. His arms are crossed over his chest. The background is plain white.

## “The fundamental definition of service is taking action to create a value for someone else”

Ron Kaufman, Founder, UP! Your Service

past 22 years that he has been here. “In Singapore, while we have dramatically improved in service standards, the spirit of service and the attitude and desire to give someone else a good service experience, is still not native to the population,” he says.

However, he notes that this mindset can be changed. For a country that benchmarks itself with the rest of the world constantly, he suggests that people in Singapore should ask themselves, “how do I do better than what I did yesterday?”

Another step that Singaporeans can do to improve service overall in the country is to be a better customer. Kaufman explains that customer service is not just about the person serving but also about the person on the receiving end. “A customer can have a big impact on the service; find out the person’s name, express your appreciation, and have the right information so that you can tell the person what you want,” he advises.

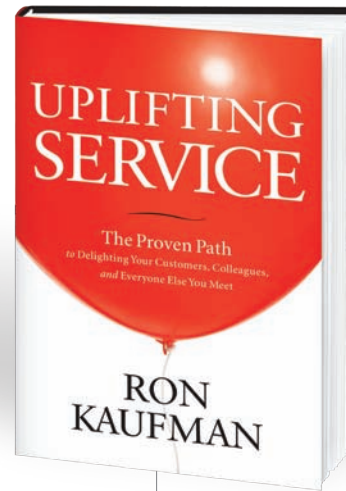
### Creating a service culture

There are many organisations around the globe that are renowned for their great service cultures, including Singapore Airlines (SIA), and The Ritz-Carlton. Kaufman says that there is a difference in just improving an organisation’s service performance and “uplifting” its service culture. He says that organisations need to observe and ask themselves what these companies are doing differently in their fundamental activities.

He expounds on this in his book under the chapter, Build. He explains 12 building blocks that can help an organisation develop an uplifting service culture, including Service Recruitment – attracting likeminded persons who are technically qualified as well as aligned to the organisation’s vision, spirit, and values.

## Biography

Ron Kaufman is a global consultant, speaker and educator who specialises in building service cultures in the world’s largest and most respected organisations. Based in Singapore for more than 20 years, Kaufman has worked closely with Singapore Airlines, Changi Airport, Raffles Hotel, Marina Bay Sands, NTUC Income, and many government agencies. He is a regular contributor to *Bloomberg Businessweek* and has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *LIFE magazine*. He is the founder of UP! Your Service, a service education and management consultancy firm with headquarters in Singapore and representative offices around the world.



There are several organisations in Singapore that have stepped up their game when it comes to building a great service culture. NTUC Income is one company that has gone the extra mile to cater to its clients through its innovative Orange Force – orange three-wheelers with the branding of the company that are on the highways in Singapore. The professionally trained team’s job is to respond to people who need help in the case of accidents, usually within 20 minutes. Not all the people they help are policy holders, and yet they help them anyway.

“They have created a service innovation that has a great impact on their market reputation and is great marketing for them,” says Kaufman. He adds that this innovation came about from an effort to reduce fraudulent claims – a risk reduction strategy.

Another company that has improved its service externally to its customers as well as internally for its employees is Marina Bay Sands (MBS). When MBS was launched, their internal tagline was “We are magnificent” but Kaufman says that there was a dissonance between the standards of service and their vision at that initial stage. Ultimately, the organisation changed its vision to “A journey to magnificence”.

Kaufman says the integrated resort is currently building a strong HR-related culture where there are learning and development opportunities and cross-functional training opportunities for their employees. “The shift in the vision is a nice alignment between what they want to create for their guests and what they want to do internally,” he says.

### HR provides service

When it comes to service, it is not just external stakeholders that matter but also internal ones where an organisation’s HR has a big part to play. “HR has the opportunity and responsibility to create value for their employees,” says Kaufman.

This should start at the initial recruitment stages – HR should ensure the new hires are not only a good fit for the organisation but also the recruitment process should be an honest reflection of where these employees are going to work.

Also, HR can create value for employees through the orientation process. Kaufman says though HR is often responsible for this, other departments should also be involved in the process. “How many employees come out of an orientation and say ‘that that was so valuable’?” he asks. “The challenge for HR is to create an experience for the employee to think that ‘I am so glad that I joined the company’. That would create a lot of the value.”

This very much applies for other parts of talent management, including career development and benefits for employees. Kaufman says that when it comes to benefits, different people value different things. “Some people would prefer working on flexible time and they will work their tails off for you if you give it to them.” Kaufman says that organisations should have a dialogue internally to align their goals to cater to their employees.

Ultimately, everyone within an organisation should ask themselves what they can do to make it better for someone else, as it is about being a service partner. “How can HR make other people understand this? What does it take to be service partners and how can we show it?” he concludes. [hrm](#)

## CASE STUDY

### Changi Airport

A well-known airport around the globe, Changi Airport, Singapore has 28,000 employees working in it every day, from those in the retail outlets to the customs. Employees at the airport understand and share the same vision, which is to serve their customers well.

“When you are in an unfamiliar airport and you have a question, whom will you ask? Will you pause to locate the official Information Counter or will you ask about anyone who is wearing any kind of uniform?” asks Ron Kaufman in his book, *Uplifting Service: The Proven Path to Delighting Customers, Colleagues, and Everyone else you meet*.

He says that from people who work in the coffee shops to the airline employees at the gates would be able to tell a passenger where the departure gate locations are and where they can buy a last minute gift from a souvenir shop. Kaufman says that all employees are passionately dedicated to service and this comes from Changi Airport’s engaging service vision – “Many Partners, Many Visions, One Changi” – and everyone works together to create positive experiences every day.

Furthermore, Kaufman says the airport constantly communicates an uplifting service culture internally to its employees and externally to millions of passengers every day. Huge posters are frequently refreshed with new expression of the airport’s vision, photographs of top-ranked service personalities, winners of service contests, and quotations from customer compliments. Passengers also see banners promoting the airport’s success but most of all, they get to see a message appreciating them: “Your smile is our inspiration. Thank you for making us the world’s most-awarded airport.”