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# UPLIFTING SERVICE

The Proven Path

*to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues,  
and Everyone Else You Meet*

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KAUFMAN

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# UPLIFTING SERVICE

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*to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues,  
and Everyone Else You Meet*

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KAUFMAN

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## C H A P T E R 1

# Journey into a New Culture

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It was the opportunity he had waited a lifetime for—traveling across the ocean to discover a new world, and a new way of conducting business. So, there he sat, staring into the darkness while his family slept in a nearby room, his bag packed with the only suit he owned resting at his feet. He flipped through the empty pages of his passport while he waited. Finally, headlights appeared in the driveway, creeping slowly toward the house.

Of course, this opportunity made the young man's family proud, especially his wife—even though she was staying home with their young children and would wait anxiously for his return. It made his father proud, who had worked so hard to give his son a better life than his own. And this opportunity made the young man's mother proud, as she believed from the day he was born that her son was destined for better things.

In the car on the way to the airport, the young man recalled his simple childhood—frigid mornings warming his hands by a woodburning stove. He remembered the family gatherings when

generations would mingle, sharing stories and family legends, and sitting in his small schoolroom daydreaming about new worlds.

As the car entered the big city, the young man noticed people glaring, with poverty in their eyes. He passed storefronts spray-painted with graffiti and with windows clad with thin steel bars, the only barrier between shopkeepers and thieves. In one tattered storefront window, a sign screamed out, “SELLING EVERYTHING! GOING OUT OF BUSINESS AFTER 40 YEARS.”

“Sad,” the young man thought. “Where did the prosperity go?”

The airport was congested and cluttered. Car horns honked. People scurried. Buses barged their way into the pandemonium. It was a madhouse. The taxi driver stopped far before the entrance and said, “You’ll have to walk. I’m not wasting my time in that mess.”

Inside the airport, passengers crowded into lines that stretched through narrow, seemingly endless hallways. The young man hadn’t even left his native country yet, but he felt consumed by anarchy—the polite civilian nature of his youth squashed by the harsh reality of tough economic times. Travelers rudely fought for a spot in line at the gate. Everyone was anxious.

Agents and employees at the airport were also sharp. It seemed their primary concern was to simply herd people through as quickly as possible, repeating their mantra, “Keep it moving.” The young man let the agents direct him and kept his mind focused on the task at hand—leaving this chaos behind for the learning experience of his lifetime.

“You!” screamed the gate agent, pointing at the young man and waving him over abruptly. “Give me your papers.” And so,

the young man did, realizing that he would let nothing get in the way of his boarding the airplane. He didn't care how rudely he was treated, how long he had to stand in line, how hard he needed to work to keep his composure, or how assertive he needed to be to claim his turn. This was the kind of turmoil and disarray the young man hoped would not exist in the new world. And although he had heard stories, he could not help but wonder, "Does such a new world and a more considerate culture really exist?"

"Whatever happened to the ideology of respect?" the young man wondered quietly. "What happened to human generosity and compassion?" He remembered the kind, helpful man who owned a small grocery store in the town where he grew up. He remembered his mother's unwavering loyalty and how she would not shop for groceries anywhere else. He smiled as he remembered the years he worked in that store after school, helping customers, carrying bags, and smiling with his colleagues as they brought groceries and smiles to everyone else.

"Your flight is boarding," said the gate agent loudly, snapping the young man out of his reverie. The young man stood in line until it was his turn at the counter. He watched as the agent checked his name, Todd Nordstrom, on his passport and boarding pass. Todd walked onto the plane in silence.

Unlike so many stories through the ages, in which young people from less-developed parts of the world travel westward to Europe and North America in search of a better life, this story follows a new tide that's turning in the other direction. Twenty-one hours after leaving North America behind, the airplane touched down and the doors opened. A waft of fresh air filled the cabin, and this young man stepped into the new world.



He had heard the stories, but the reality overwhelmed him. This airport didn't resemble anything he had ever seen before. The ceilings were as high as the sky. And although it was the middle of the night, the building was lit to appear as if it were the middle of the day. The walkways were wide enough to be roadways, and they were clean—not a trace of litter. Lush plants and flowers enveloped ponds where exotic fish swam. Families gathered and posed for photographs. As his eyes and ears filled with wonder, Todd found smiles greeting him at every turn.

“Welcome, sir,” said an airport employee. “May I help you find something?”

“I just got off the airplane,” Todd replied.

The airport employee chuckled. “You must be tired,” he said. “Where did you come from?”

“America,” he said. “I flew in from Los Angeles.”

The airport employee grinned and noticed a luggage tag hanging from his bag. “Welcome to Singapore, Mr. Nordstrom. We are glad you are here.”

## **In Search of Uplifting Service**

This Mr. Nordstrom isn't related to the iconic retailer that shares his name—a profitable retail brand often used to illustrate the power of excellent customer service. In fact, he is not an expert in customer service at all. He's a friend of mine, a typical young businessman, curious about achieving success. He's curious to know how others have made it happen. His views of the world are limited only by what he already knows.

I invited Todd to visit me in Singapore to experience firsthand what I have learned in this country and in other locations all over the world. I wanted to show him what was possible—and to change his perceptions forever.

This is not a book of heartwarming stories of fantastic customer service at The Ritz-Carlton, Disney, or Singapore Airlines. These iconic service providers have earned and deserve their prestige and commercial success. But service is not merely the act of treating customers well. There is a greater definition and a greater role for service to play in your life, and in our world. This book will show you how to create that world.

What is the real definition of service? What does it mean to create a service culture? What are the benefits—for customers, colleagues, and communities—of building an uplifting service culture? And, most importantly, what actions can you take right now to bring these benefits to your life?

All of these questions will be answered throughout this book. And, although you may think you already know the answers, you'll be surprised by what you learn and delighted with what you discover. You'll see how service has become diluted to the dull cliché we call "customer service." And, you'll realize that global businesses, communities, governments, and humankind in general are just now witnessing the birth of our true service potential.

Service is not just a reaction to a request. It's not a department that responds to complaints. Service is not a company policy. It's not a standard procedure.

Service is greater than that—it's a gateway to fulfillment, satisfaction, and delight. It's a curiosity to listen intently and appreciate

others, a commitment to taking action and creating value. Service is a contribution affecting every business, industry, culture, and person—including you. To see the true impact of uplifting service, we need to look farther than over the counter, over the web, or over the phone. We need to look for examples and insights all over the world.

### Why Service? Why Singapore?

Singapore is a unique and extraordinary island south of China. It's small—about 280 square miles of landmass, with fewer than 6 million residents, and less than an hour-long drive from coast to coast. Yet the country is one of the leading financial centers in the world. It hosts one of the busiest shipping ports in the world. Year after year it's rated one of the best places to live and conduct business. It has held the rank of fastest-growing economy in the world, and has yet to celebrate its 50th birthday.

The principal gateway to Singapore is the airport. It's no ordinary airport. In fact, it is the most awarded airport in the world, and it has an extraordinary impact on the entire country.

How can an airport have so much impact—especially on a nation with such high credentials? Backtrack to Singapore in the early 1990s and you'll notice a very different picture of the country. Singapore has few natural resources other than its people and its strategic location. In the 1980s and 1990s, the manufacturing base of the country was moving to China where land was vast and labor inexpensive. Administrative tasks were being outsourced to India and other low-cost locations. Singapore's educational system was focused on supporting the manufacturing base with quality-assurance training and business models.

Singapore could see the opportunity in service-based industries like medical, financial, legal, education, hospitality, entertainment, and retail, but the nation's human resources hadn't developed to support these service industries. The people of Singapore had been educated to know the answer, pass the test, do the right thing (the first time), avoid making mistakes, and follow proven procedures. But to serve? What does that mean in a culture in which everyone is meticulously trained to reliably follow the rules?

This challenge went even deeper. Singapore has a global reputation for vigorous law enforcement. It is, quite possibly, one of the safest places in the world—unless you're a criminal. Singapore had developed a stable culture of law-abiding citizens. So how can people educated to explicitly follow rules and regulations adapt to roles that require adaptation, creativity, and problem solving every day?

Singapore had to transform an entire nation that knew how to follow instructions well, but was hesitant to follow a customer wherever their interests may have led. Government officials recognized this conundrum. Yet, they also realized the opportunity—and the necessity—to transform. In fact, driven by the vision of the country's founding prime minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, government leaders have been guiding this country through successful transformations from the beginning. Today, as many parts of the world struggle with deep challenges and difficult change, this small country is a unique example to study. Singapore offers a wide range of successful organizations, uplifting service experiences, and practical insights for enduring success.

When Singapore claimed independence in 1965, it was a time of racial tension and economic hardship. In a land populated by immigrants with a potentially volatile mix of ethnicities,

religions, and economic backgrounds, the population and the law had to respect social differences and allow (if not demand) economic progress. That was an all-embracing and law-abiding transformation.

The country's geographic location made it a port of constant commerce, bringing travelers and companies from all parts of the globe to engage in business, enjoy leisure, or simply connect in transit to another part of the world. But Singapore wanted to become a premier global hub for creating and exchanging value, not just an exotic local bazaar, a transit point, or an interesting regional destination. To find its place in the wider world, Singapore had to undergo another enormous change of thinking and global understanding throughout the nation.

Then, during the 1990s and into the next century, as Singapore's low-cost economy disappeared and value-adding services took root, the time for another transformation had come, a transformation of thinking and action to create even greater value for people throughout the world—and for the people of Singapore—a transformation of attitudes from command to creativity and of behaviors from compliance and control to concern and compassion. In short, an *uplifting service* transformation.

If you want to transform a mindset, convert an industrial base, inspire a diverse amalgamation of people, and uplift an entire nation, where do you start? You start at the gateway. You start at the airport.

### Changi Airport's "Why?"

Singapore realized something that much of the rest of the world is still trying to figure out—there is a service crisis in the world,

and only focused attention and persistently positive action are going to fix it. Businesses have turned a very simple human concept into a catastrophic cliché. Bosses demand “customer service” from frontline employees as if it were a performance metric. They remain blind to the fact that true service comes not from demands and dashboards, but from a basic human desire to take care of other people. So many organizations, rooted in task and efficiency metrics of the industrial revolution, have stuffed the concept of service into disconnected departments and filled it with meaningless mantras and reactionary rhetoric, without stopping to realize its true potential.

“Oh, you want service?” an employee asks. “Well, you’ll have to talk to our service department.” Or, “You want something else or something different? That’s not our policy.” “It’s not my job to make you happy,” says a manager. “Talk to human resources if you’ve got something to say.” An executive might even say, “It’s not personal. It’s just business.”

What happens to customers’ loyalty when they realize that some employees are not concerned with achieving or delivering their satisfaction? What happens to team members when their manager is unwilling to help support or serve their needs? And what happens to an organization that isn’t concerned about the welfare of its employees, its community, its industry, or its social contribution? Morale declines, performance suffers, and service spirals further downward.

Where does service really start? And where does it end? In Singapore, it starts when and where you land—at the gateway.

Since the airport’s humble beginnings in 1981, Changi Airport has evolved to become a global standard of functionality, aesthetics, and service. It is currently the world’s seventh-busiest airport,

serving, surprising, and delighting more than 42 million travelers a year—that's more than seven times larger than Singapore's entire population.

The airport property is nothing short of exceptional. It's jammed with amenities unseen at any other airport in the world, like a butterfly garden, outdoor swimming pool, playground equipment, a four-story slide, napping rooms, spa treatments, and entertainment venues that include movie theaters, multimedia and online experiences, and even video-gaming stations.

Sounds like a great time, right? It is. However, it's much more than some fun between flights. The stress-free atmosphere of Changi Airport is a soothing oasis where you can relax, regroup, and reclaim your senses. It's a chance to reconnect with loved ones, call home, or meet someone new. It's a place where you can find yourself, and be yourself.

In the same way, Singapore is a place in which the world can see itself, too. It's an entire country in just one city. It's a wide range of races, religions, and cultures all serving each other and succeeding together. It's a small country in a big region serving customers from all over the world. It's a mix of people and languages using a commitment to uplifting service to build a better future. Singapore is a microcosm of the world. What works in this country can work in your company, your organization, your career, and your life. Uplifting service can work in your world, too.

## **The Adventure That Lies Ahead**

With each chapter of this book, you will take another step on the proven path into a world where service has the power to uplift, delight, and inspire.

We'll start inside Changi Airport and discover *why* Singapore embraced uplifting service at this important gateway.

Then we will travel inside the infrastructure of two other Singapore-based organizations, NTUC Income and Marina Bay Sands. The former is the nation's largest insurance company whose mission and vision of service are unique. The latter is a new, integrated resort on a journey to global magnificence, accelerating its business performance and enabling human potential with an uplifting service culture.

We'll leave Singapore's borders to visit uplifting service organizations and destinations around the globe—Nokia Siemens Networks with telecommunications customers in more than 100 countries; Royal Vopak based in Holland with a global span of oil storage and chemical handling facilities; Xerox in the United Arab Emirates; and Wipro, an IT and consulting powerhouse based in India and serving clients worldwide with a customer-centric competitive edge.

Uplifting service transforms individuals, teams, and entire organizations. I've witnessed its power and its impact firsthand. And along the way, I've gathered insights, interviews, best practices, and strategies from the world's most successful service cultures, innovators, and leaders. You will meet these leaders and discover the challenges they have overcome and the rewards they have achieved. And, for the first time, the essential architecture they use to engineer an uplifting service culture will be revealed so that you can use it, too.

Uplifting service is not just a business mantra; it's a transformational mindset. It's a powerful driver of engagement, loyalty, and trust. It's an accelerant, a connector, and a movement. And it's the only aspect of business that fuels and feeds the spirit of



every person to create a sustainable advantage, a continuous improvement, and a constant uplifting of people's performance, passion, and potential.

Like Todd Nordstrom's view of the world and service after he visited me in Singapore, your understanding and perception are about to change forever.



# Tools *for* Your Journey

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Every great expedition begins with a great idea. However, embarking on your journey into a new world also requires planning, commitment, and the right set of tools. Great explorers prepare themselves with proper gear and resources. To help you succeed along the path, we have provided all the tools you will need to uplift your service performance and build an uplifting service culture—free articles, videos, and easy to follow guides—revealing new ways you can begin transforming your culture today.

Get these **FREE** resources  
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## Article Library

Hundreds of tips, techniques, and real best practice examples with action steps you can apply right away. Learn what you can do right now to improve your service performance and build a stronger service culture.



## Video Library

Innovative ideas and useful insights. Watch these short videos to understand the benefits, issues, and challenges in building an uplifting service culture. You will learn a lot in just a few short minutes.



## Assessments

Are you an Uplifting Service Provider? Take the quiz to find out. Are you an Uplifting Service Leader? Take the test to discover your rating. Do you have an Uplifting Service Culture? Find out now.



## Webinars

Ron Kaufman explains how the Uplifting Service architecture works, and how you can put it to work right away. Each webinar is packed with case study examples, insights, and results. You can learn more online, anytime, at your convenience.



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## Quotations on Service

Thousands of quotations on service from the author, Ron Kaufman, and other famous people. Enjoy and share these meaningful words of wisdom.



# Meet Ron Kaufman

Ron Kaufman is the world's premiere thought-leader, educator, and motivator for uplifting customer service and building service cultures. Ron is the author of 14 other books on service, business, and inspiration.

Ron provides powerful insights from working with clients all over the world in every major industry for more than twenty years. Ron is an inspiration to leaders and managers with his content rich and entertaining speeches, and his impactful, interactive workshops. He is rated one of the world's "Top 25 Who's Hot" speakers by *Speaker Magazine*.

Ron has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*. He is passionately committed to uplifting the spirit and practice of service worldwide.

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A breakthrough book  
that will surprise, delight, and uplift you,  
your organization, and your team.

In *Uplifting Service*, Ron Kaufman takes you on a journey into the new world of service. Through dynamic case studies and best-practice examples, you will learn how the world's leading companies have changed the game, and how you can successfully follow this path to an uplifting service transformation.

“Read this book, apply the steps. Watch your culture transform and your perspective on service change forever. Ron Kaufman has unlocked the mystery of service. Get ready for a magnificent journey into a new world.”

**Marshall Goldsmith**

Bestselling Author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“Ron Kaufman has pinpointed a massive wound in society, and offers a strategy to uplift the world around us. For mankind, it's transformational. For business, it's a clean and clear path to a sustainable competitive advantage. This book is long overdue, and will create a legendary shift.”

**Thomas Moran**

Director, Customer and Partner Experience  
Microsoft Operations



**Ron Kaufman**, the founder of Uplifting Service, is the world's premiere thought-leader, educator, and motivator for uplifting customer service and building service cultures.

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