



A Guide for Leaders:

The 9 1/2 Principles of Innovative Service, **by Chip R. Bell**

Includes printable worksheet for meeting participants

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The Welcome Appetizer

“It is the service we are not obliged to give that people value most.”

—J.C. Penney

Karl Wallenda is the most famous aerialist in history. As the senior member of the Flying Wallendas, his antics on the high wire were as inventive as they were death defying. For years the family team was a main attraction of the Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus. In 1974, at the age of sixty-nine, Karl broke a world skywalk distance record of 1,800 feet, a record that stood until 2008, when his great grandson, Nik Wallenda, completed a 2,000-foot skywalk at the same location. His favorite line: “Being on the wire is living; everything else is just waiting.” When asked why he so loved life on the high wire, he cleverly responded, “The streets are rough.”

Wallenda's line is a metaphor for the state of customer service today. The streets are competitively rough—crowded with too many ho-hum, pretty good, average service providers. It makes differentiation as rough as the cobblestone streets in Wallenda's hometown of Magdeburg, Germany. The alternative is innovative service—experiences that take customer's breath away much like the Flying Wallendas seven-person pyramid circus act on the wire.

But, while there is far less traffic on the high wire of innovative service than the streets of okay service, its performance makes front line employees empowered and willing to take risks. It requires a spirit of experimentation born of a clear and present desire to be distinctive. It takes encouraging the frontline to pay attention to the scenography of service delivery—all the sights, sounds, smells, touches, and tastes of the experience that communicate congruence and sensory pleasure. It requires a think outside the box mentality that results in inventive actions and creative practices. And, it involves random acts of generosity from a sincere greeting to a warm farewell.

1. What did you like most about Francie Johnsen's approach to innovative service?

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2. Write down five specific things you or your company current do/does to generate new business or retain current business.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____

5.) _____

3. Which one or two have worked best in the past?

4. Brainstorm how those might be tweaked in some ways that your prospective customers/clients would categorize as “value-unique”?

Principle 1: Put a Surprise Inside: The Cracker Jack Principle

“It’s the little things that make the big things possible. Only close attention to the fine details of any operation makes the operation first class.” —J. Willard Marriott, Sr.

I walked into the restaurant at the Park Inn west of Harrisburg, PA. From the back of the restaurant I heard, “Good morning, how would you like your coffee?” When I said black, the voice warmly responded, “Take any table you like and I’ll have your coffee there before you can sit down!” My day was off like a colorful merry-go-round!

“I’m Sandy. Do I get the pleasure of serving you today?” she asked as she served my coffee and handed me the menu. The breakfast was perfect and served quickly. Periodically Sandy checked to make sure all was well. There was no chitchat, just attentiveness...and, lots of smiles aimed point blank at my table. I finished, folded up my newspaper and I requested my check. And then, it happened!

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Sandy brought my check along with a go cup of coffee fixed just the way I like it! “This is great!” I exclaimed. “You have no idea how much I needed a coffee to go today.” Sandy winked and responded, “It’s our gift to you!” Want to take a guess at how many people I have told about Sandy?

1. What is an example of a service surprise moment that made you want to share it with others?

2. What are simple, inexpensive and unexpected ways you can surprise those you serve?

3. What support do you need from your associates to deliver more surprises to customers and colleagues?

4. If you got a group of second graders to help you come up with ways to surprise customers, would might they recommend?

Principle 2: Connect with Respect: The “Big Boy” Event Principle

“It starts with respect. If you respect the customer as a human being, and truly honor their right to be treated fairly and honestly, everything else is much easier.” —Doug Smith

When I was a kid, I use to accompany my grandfather to town in his pickup truck to buy a few bags of feed for his cows. We talked about “stuff” like two old friends, not like an elder speaking to a kid. And, he always introduced me to the people he encountered as Mr. Chip. If the sales person at the feed store asked him how many bags he wanted loaded, he would point toward me and declare, “Mr. Chip can tell you.” As a 10 year old, I felt very grown up. It is that same type of declaration and affirmation that customers enjoy. The “big boy” event principle is all about delivering unexpected respect to customers.

1. What did the salesperson at Joseph Neel’s Men’s Wear do in this chapter that made Chip feel so respected as a seven-year old?

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2. How do you feel when you are treated with great respect?

3. What are special circumstances or situations where we can turn up the “show respect” dial on our customers' experiences?

4. What are ways you can demonstrate obvious and “over the top” respect to those you serve—customers and colleagues?

Principle 3: Elevate The Class: The Purpling Principle

“Boldly summon customers on a journey to collective joy much like a child welcoming a close friend to a tree house filled with secrets.” —Chip R. Bell

Pink is a girl color, but purple is a princess (or prince) color—a hue of nobility. The word is typically used as a noun or adjective; for granddaughters with an undying desire to be a princess, it is also a verb: “I will ‘purple’ you with my wand.” Think of it as the six-year-old version of knighting someone. After you have been “purpled,” you are to be always treated as a prince or princess.

Paul had decided to pop “THE” question to Adrienne at lunch in the romantic, ten-table loft section of Tucson’s Smuggler’s Restaurant. Paul had requested the restaurant put “Adrienne, will you marry me?” on their marquee. But the restaurant decided to purple Paul and Adrienne. When Paul and Adrienne arrived, only Paul’s table remained in the roped off loft along with complimentary champagne. For the occasion, the staff had purchased linen, china, silver, and candelabras. His tab was under \$40; his tip was over \$100! And, Smuggler’s made no sales pitch to let them do his wedding reception. Their return was the sheer joy of getting to purple a frequent guest!

1. What are two experiences you or someone you know has had in which you or they were “purpled”?

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2. What are ways to “roll out the red carpet” for a current or prospective client or customer, or a potential referral source’ with you as the “purpler:”

3. What are times when purpling might not be the best strategy to build loyalty?

4. What are times when purpling could truly be viewed a value-unique to your customers or colleagues?

Principle 4: Put Total Sense into Service: The Speed Limit 23 MPH Principle

“Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.”

—Walt Disney

The 23 MPH principle is all about ramping up the five senses of the customer's experience. You might miss noticing the 25 MPH speed limit sign, but who would miss a sign with an out-of-the-ordinary number? What do the required forms of your enterprise look like? What do customers hear in the background when they contact your call center? What messages are being sent by the color, font, tone, images, or language used on your website? What does your parking lot, lobby or waiting area telegraph about your attentiveness to your customer's experience? Take control of the five senses and surprise your customers in new ways.

1. What does the Hotel Monaco do to awaken your senses for an enchanting hotel experience?

2. What senses are currently “embedded” into your customers’ experiences?

3. Choose another sense (sight, smell, touch, taste, feel) and brainstorm ways customers’ experiences might change if that sense was amplified?

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4. Where in your organization is a good target to start thinking about “service through the senses” (parking, phone, online, etc.)? How might that positively target change?
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Principle 5: Before and Beyond Service: The Circus Principle

“Be everywhere, do everything, and never fail to astonish the customer.”

—Macy’s Motto

Ask ten global road warriors to name the best airline in the world and most will likely have Virgin in their top five. Founder Richard Branson created the wildly successful Virgin Atlantic by following two of his five core values, innovation and fun! Most airlines view the customer’s travel experience as the space between check-in and arrival and/or baggage claim. Branson realized the travel experience for customers started when they left home and was not done until they arrived at their ultimate destination. Like the Ringling Bros.-Barnum & Bailey circus, coming-to-town started with the colorful posters on telephone poles and the parade down Main Street and ended with the souvenir you took home, Branson elected to own the travel experience before and after the flight.

For a couple of hundred dollars more, a limo picks you up at your home and transports you to the terminal in style. Upon arrival you are given your boarding pass and the Virgin Skycap takes care of checking your luggage while you proceed to the Virgin Clubhouse where you can get a massage or manicure, play virtual golf, or just relax. Once you land, a limo meets your flight, helps with your luggage, and transports you to your ultimate destination. Innovative service can begin before the main attraction and continue long afterward to create long-lasting customer memories of delight.

1. How does the Circus Principle apply to the service you provide?
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2. Brainstorm three things you could do before the customers’ encounter to enhance their experience with you?
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3. Now, identify three things you could do after the customers’ encounter to improve their memory of their encounter?
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4. What is your favorite example of an organization that practices the Circus Principle? How can apply this example to your service?

Principle 6: Hardwire Wisdom Into Service: The Campfire Story Principle

“Customers love to learn if the journey is more like a story than like a chore.”

—Chip R. Bell

Customer mentors look for ways to imbed learning into every touch point of the customer's experience. After Howard Schultz reassumed leadership of Starbucks in 2008, he closed all 7,100 locations for three hours of training. He was concerned employees were focusing too much about speed and not enough about creating a great customer experience. Peterson Caterpillar in Eugene, OR learned the top-ten most frustrating experiences of their customers. One of the top customer concerns was remembering the steps in the complex shut-down procedure of a large power generator--the size that powers a shopping center or hospital. Peterson created a 30-second YouTube training video that customers could access from their smartphone. It was a huge hit with their customers.

Customer mentoring is more than one-to-one customer tutelage. It is every small way a customer-focused organization ramps up the learning of their customers. Research done by TARP Institute found that proactively providing customers new and useful learning increases their likelihood of repurchasing by 32%. And, the best customer mentor happens with the non-judgmental, upbeat style of a great story told around a campfire. Organizations that mentor customers earn as they help others learn.

1. What wisdom—either of yours, or that of others, are you currently passing on to those you serve?

2. What a specific ways can you become a better mentor to your customers?

3. What skills or expertise that your customers might find useful is currently not being shared with them?

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4. How can you turn “customer education” into an experience more like stories around a campfire?
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Principle 7: Monogram The Moment: The Fly-Fishing Principle

“We wildly underestimate the power of the tiniest personal touch.” —Tom Peters

When my granddaughter, Cassie, was barely three she could write her name! My granddaughter has always been a champion scribbler! Plus, she has two older sisters who could write their names! Not ever wanting to be last in any activity that even remotely could have competitive overtones, she announced to her mother, “I am going to write my name.” Without parental coaching or a model to copy, she proudly displayed her penmanship! And, her mother widely propelled this proof into cyberspace!

Customers are a lot like my daughter-in-law! Monogrammed service can make them swell with pleasure and willingly tell the whole world! They can turn a ho-hum reputation into the stuff fan clubs are made of. And, why is this principle called fly-fishing? Anglers with a hankering for fly-fishing know just any old worm will not appeal to a rainbow trout—only the fly uniquely crafted for the precise setting and presented with authenticity and skill. Now, please don't push this fishing analogy too far. There are a lot of fishing metaphors that do not work in the same sentence with customers—like bait, hook, and catch.

1. What did you enjoy most about Chip's example of getting monogrammed service at the Four Seasons Hotel? Are there ways you or your unit could take a similar approach?
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2. Identify a couple of situations where you or someone you know was given “personalized” service or had something “personalized” for you? How did this experience make you feel?
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3. What are places in your encounters with customers and colleagues where “monogrammed service” might be doable and valued?
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4. Choose one of those places and brainstorm ways to turn a routine experience into a monogrammed one.
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Principle 8: Effort Removal Squared: The Easy Button Principle

“It is always the simple that produces the marvelous.” —Amelia Barr

Customers today are intolerant of having to invest time and effort in getting the service they expect. And, one of their biggest peeves is waiting! It makes me recall how my dad managed our “are-we-there-yet” impatience on a long car trip with a game of “counting cows.” The rules were simple: each person took one side of the car when the journey began. One point was given for every cow you saw on your side; five points for every horse, and if a graveyard appeared on your side, you lost all your points and had to start again. Active participation in a simple game made the trip seem shorter.

A customer staying at a Homewood Suites in San Antonio arrived at the breakfast buffet before it was completely set-up. Because the guest demonstrated a noticeably friendly attitude, the Homewood employee in charge of set-up asked, “You want some early morning fun?” “You bet,” the guest replied. “Okay,” the employee said, “Grab those cereal boxes over there and set ‘em out like this was gonna be a breakfast party.” Within minutes the buffet was ready. The guest’s face revealed his pride in a job well done as the first guests arrived for breakfast. While some guests might only want to be served, the Homewood employee accurately gauged this one would get a charge out of being an involved participant rather than an impatient bystander.

1. What did Stitch America do to take the effort out of purchasing an order online?

2. How can you apply the Easy Button Principle to how you deliver service to customers or colleagues?

3. Where in the entire trail of experience (from the moment a customer has a need to the point where that need is met or not) might there be challenge, delay, or any type of customer effort?

4. What are ways you can become easy to do business with along that trail?

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Principle 9: Turn an 'Oops' Into an Opportunity: The Panning for Gold Principle

“We say ‘the customer is always right.’ Are they always right? Of course not. But, it is our job to make the customer feel right when things go wrong.” —Stew Leonard, Jr.

An employee of Harris Teeter grocery stores was on the receiving end of both barrels from an intensely irate customer. She was berating him over the spoiled chicken she claimed she bought at his store. “Why would you sell spoiled meat?” she screamed, in a voice that could be heard a block away. She would not let the employee get in a word edgewise. The employee patiently let her finish venting and then sincerely apologized, letting her know his company cared about her concerns. He then gently pointed out her chicken was purchased from a competitor; but that he would be happy to replace it with one of his own. “She was mortified and felt bad about giving me such a hard time,” he told me. “I insisted she let me replace the chicken, but she refused. She then left the store.”

But about an hour later, the employee noticed her shopping in his produce department, and when she saw him she ran up and gave another heartfelt apology. She went on to explain the reason she was there: “If you can back up a product from another chain as well as you did, then I can only imagine how you would back up one of your own products.”

1. How is great service recovery like panning for gold?

2. When you have been disappointed with the service you have received; what could the service provider have done to turn your disdain into delight?

3. What did the service person in the opening story of this chapter do to turn a black, angry situation into gold for both the customer and the organization?

4. Recall a situation in which a customer was angry about the service he or she received. What did you do to deliver great service recovery? If you had the situation to do over again, what might you do differently?

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Principle 9½: Synergize Your Service Delivery: The Fruit Salad Principle

I buy my night crawlers (worms) for fishing at Jerry's Bait and Tackle...an antique, all purpose country store on Lake Oconee, Georgia. You help yourself to the package of worms in the refrigerator. Right next to the refrigerator are the fishing lures and hooks so customers there to buy hooks remember to get worms and vice versa. Some establishments would separate these and keep them under the close control of management. There is large note on the refrigerator door reminding customers to check for wiggling by using the large funnel shaped bucket. It is written in the language of "respect." And, when the cash register is involved, there is a checklist on the customer's side—need a fishing license, cold drinks, cigarettes, etc. The goal is clearly to help customers avoid getting out in the middle of the lake only to discover a critical fishing item is missing.

Here is the best part I like the best! Jerry's is not just all-purpose—it is all-pleasure. You can get the *Wall Street Journal*, not just the local gossip rag! You can buy lottery tickets. You can buy the typical beer and wine...but, Jerry has a few bottles of the pricey wine—for that special occasion when you forgot to pick up the really good stuff. He has unexpected items like a flash drive, odd battery sizes, windshield wiper blades, or a wrench to remove a water filter. If you need it on Sunday afternoon when every other store is closed, Jerry just might have it! And, if you just want to hang out, have a hot dog and listen to the Atlanta Braves or Hank Williams on the radio, there is no rushing you away to make way for paying customers. Jerry practices the Fruit Salad Principle—combining many principles to synergize service delivery.

1. Which three of the nine principles did you like the most?

2. How would your service experience change for your customers and colleagues if you applied all three of your favorite principles?

3. What would it take for you to apply the principle you liked the least?

4. Who can best help you apply what you have learned from the book? How can they help? Will you let that person know that you would welcome their support?
