

Enriching Lives

We are at our best when we deliver enriching experiences.

—Apple credo

Gary Allen traveled 3,200 miles, crossed ten states, and used 100 gallons of gas to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Apple Store in May 2011. Why would he do such a thing?

When the iPad was introduced, thousands of people camped out overnight at Apple Stores around the world to be among the first customers to buy it. Even Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak stood in line at a store in San Jose, California, more than *twelve hours* before the device went on sale! Couldn't he have simply called his boyhood pal, Steve Jobs, and ask for an iPad to be delivered to his home?

Comedian Mark Malkoff brought a goat into an Apple Store—yes, a real goat—posted the video on YouTube and received nearly one million views.¹ He also decided to test the patience of Apple employees by ordering pizza and having it delivered to him at an Apple location, visiting stores dressed as Darth Vader, and hiring a trumpet player to serenade him and his wife *in an actual store*. Why didn't Apple Store managers kick him out? The answers to these questions will help you create a one-of-a-kind experience for your customers that

will move your brand forward and help you crush your competitors. But to really understand the answers, we have to turn to a higher source.

Gimme That Ol' Time Apple Religion

One of the most intense religious experiences of my life happened when I was a graduate student of journalism at Northwestern University. One Sunday a group of us decided to attend a Baptist church in downtown Chicago. Keep in mind that as a Catholic boy from California this was my first “immersive” experience outside of a Catholic mass. You could imagine how puzzled I must have been to see nurses standing alongside the walls. Once women started fanning themselves and fainting during the service, I knew why the nurses had been stationed there! When I saw the twenty-member gospel choir starting to rock out to the song “I’m Going with Jesus” and the preacher running full speed around the perimeter of the church with his arms in the air, I realized this would be unlike anything I ever experienced at my church. Those churchgoers were truly “inspired”—infused with the spirit.

Many Apple customers are also infused with the spirit—the Apple spirit. In 2011 researchers in the United Kingdom discovered that Apple actually triggers the same areas of the brain that light up during intensely religious experiences. The neuroscientists used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology to discover that, for Apple fans, seeing images of Apple products actually lit up the same parts of the brain as images of a deity do for religious people. If you’ve seen photos or videos of customers whipped up in a sort of “evangelical frenzy” at Apple Store openings, now you understand why.

Oakland, California, resident Gary Allen is one of the faithful. In May 2011, Allen marked the tenth anniversary of the Apple Store by traveling thousands of miles to visit the first store in Tysons Corner, Virginia. He didn’t even fly. He rented a Toyota Yaris and drove for five days. Allen began his trip on Saturday, May 14, headed along I-80 to Denver and through Kansas, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and into Virginia. Now get this. Allen didn’t even know how

Apple would celebrate the anniversary. He just knew how *he* would celebrate—by making a pilgrimage to the place where it all began.

After Allen's final long night of driving and getting just four hours of sleep, Allen arrived on the sixth day of his journey at 9:40 a.m. No special event had been scheduled. No reporters were present, and no banners unfurled. But since Allen had been blogging about his journey, the Apple employees knew about his arrival, gave him a tour of the store, and even treated him to cake. Allen was filled with the Apple spirit. For Allen, visiting an Apple Store is a religious experience. Religion gives meaning to people's lives, and for millions of Apple customers and thousands of employees, the brand gives them a sense of meaning, providing deeply emotional experiences that improve their lives.

A Puddle of Water Turns to a Pile of Panic

One early morning I awoke to find a puddle of water at the base of our refrigerator. It had stopped working overnight, and the freezer's ice had completely melted, not to mention the ice cream and other products. In my attempt to be a good husband, I decided to troubleshoot before my wife and kids woke up. I called the Sears customer service number placed on the inside of the unit, peaceful in the knowledge that all would be well soon.

The Sears phone tree took me through a menu of options, but I was still relatively calm until an automated voice informed me that the next available day for repair would be "Thursday," a full week from the time I was calling. A small panic began to set in. Finally I reached a live human being, and my panic began to subside until he put me on hold . . . and that's when my peace was shattered for good. My wife walked in as I was on hold and asked who I was on the phone with.

"I'm on hold with Sears customer service. Our refrigerator is broken." I said. My wife glared at me and through gritted teeth said, "I vowed never to do business with Sears again."

She reminded me that she had a troubling in-store customer experience at a local Sears store the previous year followed by endless red tape and frustration. I recalled the incident but thought it

was a fluke, and besides, customer service on the phone must be a completely different experience.

Since I was in the middle of researching this book, I decided to turn a potential negative into a positive and conduct some research. While I was on hold for a considerable amount of time, I conducted a Twitter search for the term “Sears customer service.” I wish I hadn’t. Here is just a sample of the remarks left by Sears customers within a twenty-four-hour period:

- “Sears is the worst. There’s a dozen customer service counters, and no one at them.”
- “I haven’t bought from @sears in over 30 years. Their service ALWAYS sucks.”
- “Sears home service and customer solutions should be ashamed and shut down.”
- “Sears customer solutions is rude and has no solutions.”
- “Parents about to lose it with Sears customer service count 5... 4...3...2...”
- “Sears, I’m done with you. Your customer service is deplorable & I will never EVER buy another product from your stores again.”

Just then a customer service rep returned to the phone. I was hesitant to proceed but didn’t know what else to do. The milk was getting warm, the ice was melting, and my kids would be up any minute. So I forged ahead.

“We can send a repair technician to your house today if you purchase the \$250 extended care agreement,” the phone rep said curtly. He also explained that it would take care of all parts and labor. I knew I was being manipulated into purchasing something I didn’t need, but if it would guarantee a repairman to my house “today” instead of next week, I would do it. After giving my credit card information to the rep, he informed me that it would include all parts and labor only “up to \$500.” Again, I felt manipulated. The peace, which had turned to panic, had now turned to aggravation. To cap it off, the phone rep repeatedly stated in question for-

mat, “OK? OK?” to get me off the phone. I got off the phone feeling angry, frustrated, and manipulated, and just a few minutes earlier I had awoken as a very happy man, looking forward to another great day.

On a whim, I decided to see what Apple customers were feeling that day. Here’s a sample of Twitter remarks from the same twenty-four-hour per period as my Sears search:

- “Though I’m generally a skeptical customer, I truly couldn’t be more pleased w/the service I received at our local mall’s Apple store. #happy.”
- “Apple has always amazed me with their awesome customer service. #1 IMO!”
- “It’s really hard to knock the Apple Store employees because the customer service is awesome. But c’mon, too hipster.”
- “Thanks to Apple for replacing my dead iPhone with very little fuss. Great customer service.”
- “I must say Apple Store has supreme customer service.”
- “Apple has the best customer service in the history of service.”
- “Apple has just made me the happiest person in the world. Great customer service!”

Three months after my experience with Sears, the company dropped a bombshell, announcing that it would close 120 stores and lay off thousands of people after a significant drop in same-store sales. Sears blamed the economy, but retail experts pointed to a severe decline in customer service as the primary culprit behind Sears’s trouble.

What was the difference? How does Apple succeed when so many others fail? What is Apple doing right? Most important, what principles can any business learn from Apple about creating an extraordinary customer experience? It starts by asking the right questions. While Sears leaders were asking themselves, “Where are the best places to cut expenses?” Apple senior executives including

Steve Jobs were asking, “Who provides the world’s best customer service?”

Stuff You Don’t Learn in School

I hold a unique position within the Apple community. My book *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* is an international bestseller and has changed the way entrepreneurs and business leaders around the world tell their brand stories. In some countries such as Japan, it has become one of the most successful nonfiction books in recent history. Everyone, it seems, wants to communicate better, and who better to learn from than the late Steve Jobs, the master of communication? The principles outlined in the book are catching on. When Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg introduced a redesign to the site, many observers on Twitter suggested that he must have read the book since he was dissecting a Steve Jobs presentation scene for scene. It’s all very flattering, but nothing replaces the joy I get when I receive e-mails from people who have used the principles to successfully attract investors, win multimillion-dollar contracts, pitch movie scripts, or simply to get an A on their school presentations.

I followed the presentation book with another bestseller, *The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs*. This book, too, changed the way businesses around the world think about their products, customers, and communication. I’ve presented the content to audiences around the world as well as MBA classes at Stanford, Berkeley, and UCLA among others. On every campus I get the same reaction. Students will approach me and say, “We never learn this stuff in school.”

My books have won many fans within Apple itself. Some Apple Store managers have told me that they require new employees to read my books before their first training session. I’ve even met Apple Store employees who say they were asked to read *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* so they could apply some of the communications techniques to the experience on the sales floor. It soon became obvious that another book was required to round out the trilogy and help readers understand what it means to deliver an Apple-like experience in any industry.

Whenever I visit an Apple Store and I meet people who have read my book, I ask them questions—lots and lots of questions. Why did you greet me at the door? Why do you wear a blue shirt? Why do you use two fingers to point somewhere? Why do you use my first name several times in the conversation? Why did you spend twenty minutes talking football instead of selling me a product? Why do you want me to be the first to touch a product? Some people must think I'm a nut, but there's a method behind the madness. I'm a journalist, I love to solve communication challenges, and I really enjoy breaking them down into a simple approach that anyone can follow. I'm constantly asking myself, *Why does Apple do what it does, what other brands do something similar, and how can I teach these principles to others?*

I don't bill myself as a "customer service expert." I'm a communications coach, speaker, and journalist. But what does it mean to provide extraordinary customer service? Well, if you study the brands that do it well such as Disney, Four Seasons, Zappos, FedEx, Nordstrom, Apple, and others, you will discover that it all comes down to communication: how you talk to your employees and how they, in turn, talk to your customers. In fact, Apple did not invent many of its customer service principles. Steve Jobs has acknowledged that the Apple Store was inspired by the Four Seasons (which is why the hotel chain and other brands are discussed in this book). But Apple has refined and improved upon the principles it learned from others. Apple has, in turn, inspired many brands that touch your life. AT&T made changes in its retail store experience with input from Steve Jobs himself. Disney, Nike, T-Mobile, Tesla, J.C. Penney, and other brands have done the same. You can, too.

The principles in this book work for Apple, and they'll work for you, too. I'll show you the parallels, but it's up to you to adopt the techniques. Each chapter reviews one principle. At the end of each chapter, "check out" the activities that will force you to think differently about the experience you provide and how to apply the techniques in the chapter. You will also see real customer reaction quotes throughout the chapters. If you are not hearing the same enthusiastic feedback from your customers, then you need to dedicate yourself to implementing the tactics discussed in the chapter.

The Apple Experience Made Simple

The Apple Experience is divided into three parts. Part I, “Inspiring Your Internal Customer,” focuses on employees, training, and internal communications. Part II, “Serving Your External Customer,” reveals specific techniques to wow your customers in every conversation. Part III, “Setting the Stage,” discusses the environment in which you present yourself, your brand, and your product. Although each of the parts is equally important to providing an Apple experience, most observers stick to what they can see—Apple products and the design of the stores. The Apple experience is so much more. “If Apple products were the key to the Stores’ success, how do you explain the fact that people flock to the stores to buy Apple products at full price when Walmart, Best-Buy, and Target carry most of them, often discounted in various ways, and Amazon carries them all—and doesn’t charge sales tax!”² according to Apple’s former head of retail, Ron Johnson. “People come to the Apple Store for the experience—and they’re willing to pay a premium for that.”

Enriching Lives

All Apple employees are encouraged to carry a credo card, a wallet-sized card that outlines the vision behind the Apple Retail Store. The first two words on the front of the card are “Enriching Lives.” Those are the two most important words in this book. According to Ron Johnson, retailers should be asking themselves, “How do we reinvent the store to enrich our customers’ lives?”³ When you enrich the lives of your employees, they are more engaged in your business, are less likely to leave, and offer better customer service. When you enrich the lives of your customers or clients, they will reward you with their business and, more important, become your most ardent fans and actively promote your business to others. When you enter the business of “enriching lives,” magical things start to happen. Let’s make magic together.