The Starbucks Experience
5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary
by Joseph A. Michelli

In 1971 Starbucks started with one small store in Seattle, Washington and today they have over 11,000 stores worldwide with 5 new stores opening every day and annual sales topping $600 million.

While they did have a great vision and a top notch plan, the true success of this business is based on what Starbucks insiders call the "Starbucks Experience." In his latest book, The Starbucks Experience, author Joseph Michelli takes you through their journey to help you pinpoint key ways that you can use the Starbucks example to take your business from ordinary to extraordinary.

Michelli focuses on the 5 principles that set Starbucks apart and led them to greatness. Through these principles — Make It Your Own, Everything Matters, Surprise and Delight, Embrace Criticism, and Leave Your Mark — you will learn how to make your company customer friendly, employee empowering, creativity rewarding, and relationship focused so that you too can enjoy the type of success enjoyed by one of America's most admired companies.

With principle one you will learn how to give your employees the freedom to make your company their company, so they will work hard to make the business a success. With principle two you will learn how having steadfast processes in place will help your company stay on top of the details that lead to success. With principle three you will explore ways to please your customers with expected stability while also dazzling them with unexpected benefits in order to boost customer loyalty. Principle four will show you how to benefit from opposition whether it comes from one customer or a whole community so that your company can continue to grow. And, lastly, with principle five you will explore the benefits of helping individuals and the community at large and what these contributions can mean for your business’s success.

If you are ready to unleash the power of these five principles and watch your business change from good to great, read on and get ready to learn.

Principle 1: Make It Your Own

This principle asserts the need to have each and every employee from stock person to CEO abide by and deliver a uniform experience from your business — yet act in a way that fully engages each employee and lets their individual talents shine. By achieving the optimal combination of the two, your business can deliver an extraordinary experience that keeps employees happy and customers loyal.

The basis of this principle for Starbucks is what they call the "Five Ways of Being." These five ways include being welcoming, genuine, considerate, knowledgeable
and being involved. Although these "ways of being" may not directly translate for your particular company (for example a retirement center may stress being compassionate more than any of the five ways listed above) you should always strive to define what is important to you and what you want to stress in your company. By creating a company-wide example of "how to be" you can help your employees create an environment that fosters loyalty and success. This example will provide a framework for how they can respond to situations at work that ensures continuity for customers without stifling the creativity of your employees.

Being welcoming is all about making each customer feel as though he or she is your most important customer. No matter what you sell, your customer is buying more than just your product. To be a truly satisfied customer they need to buy an experience. At Starbucks this is achieved by encouraging the employees to know the names of regular customers, their drink preferences, and even details about their jobs and lives. At your company it may just mean acting as though each client is your most important client and always giving them your undivided attention.

At Starbucks being genuine means to connect, discover, and respond. For their employees this means that they try to make each customer feel like more than a sale waiting to be made. For example, this can mean that they take the time to notice whether a customer is unsure about the menu (because, for example, he orders a plain coffee) and needs some help choosing or whether he really just wants what he ordered. For your company this can mean talking to your customer to see what problem they are really trying to solve. They obviously need and want your product, but why? Finding the answer to that can help you serve them better and enable you to sell them a true experience.

At Starbucks being considerate means thinking of the needs of others, but not just locally. Starbucks wants each employee from server to manager to think at a store, community, regional, and global level. This consideration ranges from meeting the needs of the customers in store with pleasing music, to meeting the needs of coffee farmers globally. For your company this can mean looking at ways to make your store or service inviting and then making sure that the materials you use are globally responsible. Can you save on electricity with different lightening that also adds a more welcoming touch to your office?

In order for an employee to truly get behind a product the folks at Starbucks believe that the employee needs to be knowledgeable about the product. If an employee really understands your service or product then two things happen. First, they start to believe in the product so they see what they do as more than just a job. And second, they can share that understanding and excitement with the customer so they can also connect with the product. At Starbucks they send coffee home with every employee so they can experience the different aspects of it first hand. For your company you could also give out samples of your product or you might try scheduling plant visits so your employees understand more about how your product comes to be. Or, if your company provides a service you can offer "Employee Growth Days" through HR where employees are invited to join other departments for a day in order to get a feel for how that department
contributes to the department that they regularly work in and to the company as a whole.

Involvement means really caring about how your business and your actions affect those around you. At Starbucks this means taking an active role in what happens at the company, but it also means taking an active role in the community. This takes the attitude of your employees from: "I will just do what is expected and that will be enough," to "What can I do to make this place, my life, and the lives of others better today?" In your company this could mean encouraging others to look for ways to be involved and letting them choose how to get involved and the extent of that involvement. Maybe your employees would like to organize a book fair for the local elementary school or organize a community appreciation day where free samples are passed out or advice is provided on the street as a thank you to people for making the community a great place to live and work in even though they may not be your customers.

The key benefits of embracing the "Make It Your Own" principle are added value to your service or product by improving the customer experience, increased customer loyalty and boosted sales due to customer satisfaction, and better employee retention because of happier, more satisfied employees.

**Principle 2: Everything Matters**

This principle focuses on the fact that every single detail of your business from how you clean your floors to how you word your mission statement can and does have an affect on your customers. While it is important that you let your employee's utilize their individual talents, to have a successful company long term you also need to set up solid processes and procedures that ensure consistent and reliable product delivery and service. Your customers need to know that what they buy will be of the same high quality every time they make a purchase and that their experience with your company will always be satisfying.

At Starbucks this "everything matters" attitude helps transcend buying a cup of coffee to buying into an experience. When customers enter their local Starbucks they expect clean, comfortable surroundings, a great tasting beverage, and a feeling of well-being and acceptance. This experience is made possible by the processes at Starbucks. Everything from the type of music that is played overhead to the choice of farms that Starbucks purchases its coffee from is carefully thought out to deliver the best experience.

And, this principle extends to people too. At Starbucks everyone matters. That is why customers are given free samples if they are unsure of their choice, why they are given free replacements if they spill their coffee, and why each pot is thrown out after one hour so a new, fresher one can be brewed. By taking care of the details Starbucks reduces the chances of customer dissatisfaction and builds stronger connections with each customer.

At your company this "everything matters" attitude can work just as well. To see the biggest change, start with what matters to your customers the most. Ask your
customers what details they first notice about your company. Ask them what they would like to see more of and what they could do without. Begin making your changes there and build on those processes to expand this movement throughout your company. For example, after collecting the suggestions from your clients build on them by asking for input from your employees. Incorporate the items that they feel are important into your final plans. Then, turn those ideas into concrete steps and processes that are to be followed consistently and company-wide.

By paying attention to the details with the "everything matters" principle you will be able to produce and deliver higher quality products or services consistently, deliver a superior client experience regularly, keep your employees happier and make a name for your business that is synonymous with quality.

**Principle 3: Surprise and Delight**

This principle helps you tackle two seemingly different objectives. One, how to provide a consistent product or experience that always meets the expectations of your customer so they are secure with their purchase. And two, how to add a little something extra to surprise your customers, keep them happy, and set yourself apart from the competition. At Starbucks this principle can best be seen in their efforts at customer service. Employees are encouraged to look for simple ways to surprise customers on a daily basis. Whether the surprise is in the form of a question about a remembered personal occasion or it's a storewide planned event that focuses on a fun event, like offering free ice cream samples as they enjoy their coffee.

And don't forget, the surprise and delight element doesn't just extend to customers. Starbucks is always looking for ways to delight their employees so that they will be happier and more content. This satisfaction motivates employees to work harder to please their customers and each other.

When it comes to implementing this principle into your business practices there are numerous ways that you can make a start. First, ask yourself what you could do right now to positively surprise or delight a co-worker and then act on that idea. This act will get the ball rolling. Next, concentrate on ways to take these initiatives company-wide.

Which areas of your customer service interactions are best suited to this principle? Maybe your customers are often faced with waiting in long lines. If so, what can you offer them—upbeat music, products to try, comfortable seating—that will make this wait surprisingly more enjoyable? Or maybe your customers are accustomed to receiving your monthly service summary, newsletter, or financial forecast towards the end of each month. As a way to add delight you could send the information out early to help them get a jumpstart on their action plan or, even better, add some new exciting benefit to "wow" them.

Finally, focus on things your company can do spontaneously to implement this principle. For example, maybe you can surprise your employees with a summer bonus in addition to the expected holiday bonus, and then use the opportunity to
talk about this principle. By pointing out how getting an unexpected bonus made
them feel, you can open the doors for them to search for ways to surprise and
delight your clients in new and unexpected ways.

Through the effort to "surprise and delight" you can cultivate increased customer
loyalty, build the groundwork that makes it easier to make things right after they
go wrong, enjoy the commitment of truly engaged employees, and build a rock
solid relationship with your customers.

**Principle 4: Embrace Criticism**

This principle spotlights the effect that working with, instead of against, criticism
can have on your business's overall success. Every business will be criticized at
some point. Whether that criticism comes from an unsatisfied customer that is
sharing his views with others or an organized group in the community that doesn't
appreciate or understand your business — you need to be ready to face that
criticism and embrace it.

At Starbucks this "embracing" has been done in a number of ways. When they
receive bad press they go to the source of that press and earnestly ask for their
suggestions on how they should change. The leaders at Starbucks use this
criticism as an opportunity to find out where they are failing customers and how
they can make things right.

Starbucks also understands that sometimes criticism can come from
misunderstanding or lack of information so they counter these attacks with
information. The more a complainant knows about your values, business
practices, and products the more likely they are to accept what you are trying to
achieve.

In order to embrace this principle at your company you need to begin by asking
yourself some tough questions about how things work inside your company. Are
there areas of discontent inside your business? Have employees tried to bring
problems to your attention but you avoided solving them? To unearth these
answers start with an employee satisfaction survey. Use those results to squelch
internal resistance by making the appropriate changes. Are long work hours the
main complaint? Maybe you can hire additional staff. This willingness to embrace
internal conflict and work towards solutions will provide a model for your
employees to do the same with unhappy customers.

Next, look towards external critics. What are others saying about your company?
Where is the nugget of truth in that criticism and what can you do to accept it, take
responsibility for it, and change it? For example, if a local blog contains a
complaint about the timeframe in which your services are delivered, it may be time
to overhaul that timeframe. First, see if you can meet with or speak to the writer of
the complaint. Next look at their complaint seriously. Can you offer a quicker
service option? Maybe you can deliver part of the service, like a written overview,
within a few days to give the customer something to consider. Or, can you
streamline your procedures, or hire additional temporary staff during business
seasons to reduce the delivery time by a few days?

By "embracing criticism" growth and change can happen with less resistance due to community and global support. Customer loyalty will increase as resistance decreases and new customers can be won once you are seen as a socially conscious company that takes criticism seriously and truly attempts to right the wrongs your company may have caused.

**Principle 5: Leave Your Mark**

To be truly successful at business you must have something more than an impressive bottom line. This something extra is social responsibility. Talented individuals want to work for a company with a global conscience and customers will pay more to be a part of that global awareness and improvement.

For Starbucks this principle means providing for their employees, protecting the environment, looking out for the farmers that grow their coffee beans in other countries, and supporting community events that foster education and well-being. The part-time employees are offered healthcare benefits, the Starbucks Ethos water project supports water preservation, the living conditions of coffee bean pickers is addressed on an ongoing basis with Starbucks C.A. F. E. (Coffee and Farmer Equity) Practices program, and the communities that house Starbucks stores benefit from programs such as free training for under or unemployed members of the community.

What can your company do to help the community and the environment? How can your company change to become more socially conscience? A publishing company that uses a large amount of paper products could plant trees to replace what they use. A computer company could donate software or computers for employment training or school education programs to empower the community. A financial consulting company could offer free advice to below average earners through a community outreach program. The key is to focus on the main item that your company does best and devise a way to share that with others in a way that enriches lives and makes a difference.

By "leaving your mark" you will enable your company to stand out from the competition while you affect real change in the world. Once your company moves from a business that sells a product, to a business that makes a difference, it will naturally attract more business, entice more talented candidates to join the team, foster higher employee morale, enjoy boosted productivity, and eventually realize higher profits.

**Conclusion**

Satisfied employees, loyal customers, community support, and higher profits - these are all key components for any business that wants to go from ordinary to extraordinary. And now, through the direction of the five principles of The Starbucks Experience, you possess the tools and direction you need to achieve
this high level of success. Begin now by focusing your efforts on creating an experience, and not just on selling a product or a service, and soon your company will be cultivating long-lasting customer relationships, creating happy, long-term employees, rallying community and industry support when it's needed for growth or change, and feeling good about the practices of the business. Best of all, embracing these principles does more than enhance your customer's experience with your company; it enhances your bottom line.