LEAD WITH YOUR CUSTOMER

TRANSFORM CULTURE AND BRAND INTO WORLD-CLASS EXCELLENCE

J. Jeff Kober

Mark David Jones

2nd Edition
Praise for the First Edition

"As the former executive vice president of operations for Walt Disney World, I often get asked to share Disney's secret to success. This book is different. Lead With Your Customer shows both the strategic way the most successful companies expand their customer service to include their employees, as well as pragmatic tactics these companies use to achieve an industry-leading corporate culture and brand. The lessons from Lead With Your Customer apply to any professional in any kind of organization in any country who sincerely wants lasting results. I suggest you implement the tools in this book today—before your competition does!"

—Lee Cockerell
Former Executive Vice President, Walt Disney World

"World-class customer service is proven to be the cornerstone of great companies and brands. Lead With Your Customer has true application as a formula for success for any company that seeks to create a culture of high performance and consistent results, through a leadership model that can utilize the six Ps as its road map. To help build your world-class brand, I highly recommend this book for each member of your leadership team."

—Clint Westbrook
Vice President, Global Operational Excellence, Aramark
"Don't let terms like brand fool you. Lead With Your Customer may be filled with private-sector examples, but there is widespread application to the business of government. Focusing everyone on a vision, operationalizing your values, delivering on your promises, and understanding your employees and customers by walking in their shoes are powerful concepts. They apply to every federal, state, and local government; indeed, they are indispensable if you want to transform your bureaucracies."

—David Osborne
Co-Author, Reinventing Government and The Price of Government

"Whether you are an entrepreneur incubating thoughts of your next venture or you direct a global enterprise, Lead With Your Customer will help you combine time-tested truths with practical tools you can apply today. Let these world-class experts help you break away from mediocrity by challenging you and your organization's processes to attain world-class results!"

—Claudio Diaz
SPHR, Chief Human Capital Officer, Marcum LLP

"Too often corporate values are passed along as philosophies of business, but not linked to the reality of the corporate decision making. Yet, when organizations live their values as the foundation for all business decisions and systems, they create an organization of excellence. Lead With Your Customer is about more than creating customer service; it is about creating organizational excellence. This book provides a well-articulated road map for moving values from philosophy to reality, making the case that values are the essential business tool for sustained corporate success."

—David Cohen
Author of Bestselling The Talent Edge and Inside the Box
President, Strategic Action Group

"Lead With Your Customer erases the line between your external brand and your internal culture, and shows how they need to grow together as one organism. Happy customers, happy employees—you can't have one without the other."

—Ben Yazici
Retired City Manager, Sammamish, WA
"Imagine! A book that helps you apply the Golden Rule to the most important people in your organization—your customers and the people who serve them. If you hold a fundamental belief in the dignity and capacity of people to contribute to a common purpose, Lead With Your Customer is for you. Incorporate these practical insights and easy-to-use techniques and watch the untapped energy in your organization produce world-class success!"

—Laurie Ohmann
Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer,
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis

"I was thrilled to see the message of culture, brand, and business results come together in one book. This is the first book that has done an effective job communicating the importance of creating an organizational culture that is consistent with the brand promise you want to deliver for your customer. Lead With Your Customer confirms that to sustainably maintain a WOW external customer experience, you have to invest and nurture a WOW internal customer experience—and the World Class Excellence Model provides a clear road map to get there."

—Tom Gavic
President, Founding Partner, and Owner, Credo

"The bookshelves are full of expensive leadership tomes written by academics and professional speech-givers. But Mark David Jones and Jeff Kober are the real deal! Their leadership lessons are vibrantly illustrated with real-world stories from successful real-life experiences as Disney executives and then world-class consultants to dozens of companies and government agencies. Whether you’re just starting your career or making the move to the C-suite, and no matter what line of work you’re in, Lead With Your Customer will inspire and excite you to excel!"

—Rick Luce
Space Systems Program Manager and Former Disney Imagineer
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J. JEFF KOBER

MARK DAVID JONES

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Contents

Foreword ........................................................................................................... v
Introduction ........................................................................................................ vii
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................. xiii

Part I: Establishing the Foundation for Excellence ........................................... 1
  1. Your Customer Really Is the Key ................................................................. 3
  2. Achieving Proven Leadership Excellence ..................................................... 7
  3. Understanding Your Customer’s Compass .................................................. 13
  4. Defining Your Vision and Values ................................................................. 35

Part II: Leading the Culture .............................................................................. 53
  5. Why Should Employees Work for You? ....................................................... 55
  6. The Keystones of Organizational Excellence: Employee Engagement ....... 65
  7. Optimizing Your Workplace Physically and Virtually ............................... 81
  8. Making It Easier for Employees to Do Business With You ....................... 89
  9. Providing Compensation and Benefits That Matter to Employees............... 101
 10. The Tangible and Intangible Costs Employees Pay .................................... 111
Contents

Part III: Leading the Brand ................................................................. 119
  11. The Customer Experience ......................................................... 121
  12. The Front Line as the Bottom Line ........................................... 127
  13. Creating a Great Place to Do Business ..................................... 139
  14. Making It Easier for Customers to Do Business With You .......... 149
  15. Delivering Products and Services Customers Really Want ........... 167
  16. The Tangible and Intangible Costs to Customers ....................... 175

Part IV: Ensuring Alignment and Integrity ........................................... 183
  17. How Anticipatory Service “Netting” Gets Results ..................... 185
  18. Service Recovery That Really Works ......................................... 197
  19. Leading World Class Excellence .............................................. 207
  20. Leading Forward to World Class Excellence ............................. 223

References ......................................................................................... 227
About the Authors ............................................................................. 225
About World Class Benchmarking ..................................................... 237
Index .................................................................................................. 239
In my career I’ve been blessed to work for two highly regarded organizations: I spent 16 years on the for-profit side with Walt Disney World, and I’ve spent more than 20 years in the nonprofit sector with Give Kids The World.

For those who wonder what the two sectors have in common, I’m quick to point out that nonprofit is a tax status, not a leadership style.

Give Kids The World and Walt Disney World both strive to create the perfect guest experience—albeit for different reasons. While Disney wants its guests to return time and again, visiting families cannot return to the Give Kids The World Village. The critically ill children who come to the Village with their families are granted just a single wish trip, so it’s critical that we get it right the first time. At Give Kids The World, there are no do-overs. This has led us to embrace a culture of celebrated discontent—of never accepting that we cannot do better. In the words of the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, “Perfection is not attainable. But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.”

So much of what I learned at Disney prepared me for my role at Give Kids The World. Ever since the release of Tom Peters and Bob Waterman’s book *In Search of Excellence*, companies have clamored to find out just “how Disney does it.” Is it really “magic”? Are cast members sprinkled with pixie dust? In one of my roles at Disney I taught other organizations our approach to managing people, sharing Disney’s long-
held belief that if you take care of your cast members, they will take care of your guests, and the bottom line will follow. That is at the heart of Mark and Jeff’s chain reaction of excellence.

The cornerstone of Disney’s success is leadership excellence, creating an authentic environment for cast members that is built on trust and respect. That doesn’t just happen. You can’t just repeat the mantra during the onboarding process and expect it to last a lifetime.

The lessons I learned at Disney shaped my perspectives on leadership, and Mark David Jones and Jeff Kober shared many of those same experiences. The insights they gained, coupled with their exhaustive research into other successful companies, are the basis for this transformational book.

Excellence in leadership is a choice, a conscious decision. Leaders must accept personal responsibility, demonstrating a passionate commitment to the organization’s mission and their role in fulfilling it. Leadership excellence inspires employee engagement, recognizing that individuals work not only with their hands, but also with their hearts and their minds. Excellence is also a process, not a program.

Through the concept of “Everything Speaks,” *Lead With Your Customer* focuses on the interdependence of the people, the place, the processes, and the product. Nowhere is that interdependence more on display than at our Give Kids The World Village. Fundamentally, we offer a resort stay (product). But the whimsical design of our storybook village provides a perfect setting (place) for our carefully orchestrated efforts (processes) to accommodate every wish child. The unconditional love showered on the families by staff and volunteers (people) create the perfect guest experience. We leave nothing to chance.

*Lead With Your Customer* shares a blueprint for success beginning with the chain reaction of excellence. This model describes a proven process that begins with leadership excellence and the positive ripple effect that it has throughout an organization. It creates a culture that leads to guest satisfaction, brand loyalty, and long-term success.

The strategies and tools presented in this book can help make you a great leader. They have led to success in countless world-class organizations, and they can do the same for yours.

Pamela Landwirth
President and CEO, Give Kids The World
Introduction

Do you know that disturbing déjà vu moment? It’s the one that comes when:

- Employees are really busy, even task focused, but results aren’t improving.
- You feel as if 20 percent of your staff are doing 80 percent of the work.
- Momentum appears to be on the horizon, then someone introduces a re-org.
- You go through another crazy cycle of having your budget mindlessly slashed, with little strategic thought.
- New initiatives get introduced, but it seems as if it’s still the same “flavor of the month” as the dozen before them.

That’s what compelled us to write the first edition of *Lead With Your Customer*—to address these very issues that our clients shared when we’d meet them. They’d describe a kind of Groundhog Day of organizational mediocrity. It didn’t matter if they were in the public, private, or nonprofit sector. It could be a big organization, or a fairly small one. Retail, government, healthcare, finance—it was the same story. These struggling organizations kept doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. And, sadly, the results didn’t come.

We thought we could help—by sharing the behind-the-scenes solutions from successful organizations that consistently deliver excellence through sustainable business practices. These organizations use proven strategies and tactical tools, not
lame academic theories that deliver empty promises. That’s because they, like us, embrace a different approach, captured in the motto: “If it doesn’t work in the real world, you’re wasting my time.”

Now, with this second edition, we want to continue to share what we’ve learned in the intervening years, as the customer experience has been transformed through technology and other events. We’ve all witnessed new companies become dominant following these strategies and former greats lose their mojo when they’ve strayed. We wanted to show you what some of our clients have done to implement these ideas. And we wanted to give you a better map for moving your organization forward.

This method is about attaining those results—effectively working with others to exceed the needs of customers using whatever resources you have. No need for the tired (and expensive!) "reinvent the wheel" consulting firm methodology. This book provides a complete, fully integrated approach that identifies what really works, and guides you to create your customized implementation plan, bridging the gap between where you are and where you want to be. You get measurable results with the smartest investment of time, effort, and budget.

To make it possible to understand this customer-first approach, and thus enable you to transform your organization’s internal culture and brand, we have created the comprehensive World Class Excellence Model, which we’ve named after our company, World Class Benchmarking. The model is the result of our decades of success as leaders at the Walt Disney Company and our years of experience and research working with more than two dozen Fortune 500 companies, as well as the most successful large, midsized, and small organizations. It can serve as a compass for your operation, guiding your future success toward bottom-line results, long-term success, and a world-class reputation.

About This Book
Why read this updated business book? Originally, as business leaders, we were frustrated by how scattered the proven success tools were in various books and other resources. We wrote the original version to finally have a one-stop shop for understanding what the best organizations do differently and better, and how you can implement these key facets of continuous and sustainable improvement for your organization or team success. This second edition of Lead With Your Customer
includes all-new examples of World Class Excellence and how to apply them to your organization, still founded on our classic leadership model through the lens of your customers—both internally, as you engage your employees (building your organization’s culture), and externally, as you engage your customers (building your brand).

This book reveals the proven way to achieve excellent bottom-line results. Every day, some organizations attain the best outcomes in their particular industry—and not by accident. They work hard following and refining strategies and tactics that simply get better results than those of their competition.

There are thousands of business books about how to create an effective internal organizational culture. And there are nearly as many books about how to create a powerful external company brand. Experts have commented on the importance of these two issues and how they are somehow interconnected, forming in effect two halves of a business puzzle, but no one effectively joined them together—until our original edition, which integrated both in our business model. Thankfully, in the past eight years, there have been several well-documented books that have gone into greater detail about this connection. Our goal with this edition is to focus on examples of how to adapt these best practices to your organization.

Throughout our years of experience with successful organizations of all sizes, we have observed striking behind-the-scenes similarities in how they have achieved consistently excellent results and earned the respect of both professionals and customers around the world. Eventually, we began to see a cohesive pattern and developed our model, which reveals how these organizations transform their cultures and brands to become wildly successful and truly world class—and likewise can enable you to optimize your own operation.

What do these legendary companies do that is different and better? Let’s start with a quick analogy. Ask leaders if they are busy, and they will usually respond by saying that their “plate is full.” Consequently, in today’s fast-moving business environment, we’re so busy day to day that any new responsibilities tend to “fall off the plate” when accountability begins to wane six to 12 months later—creating the infamous program-of-the-month problem.

How do successful organizations avoid the program-of-the-month trap when they make a change to improve their operations? Instead of making the change a discrete project (just another thing on “the plate”), they do something radically different: They make it “the plate”—a sustainable, long-term process of improvement
that isn’t seen as an initiative with an end date. According to this approach, business issues—such as your values and vision, methods of delivering service, and interactions with people—should be consistent nonnegotiables, while everything else that is largely beyond your control, such as economic circumstances and political and social issues, shifts with the seasons. World-class companies establish a strategic foundation once and for all and then reinvest their resource savings (the time, money, and effort not wasted chasing business fads) on adapting to the ever-changing context of business.

Obviously, no organization is perfect. Just because an organization is legendary today doesn’t mean that it can’t fail tomorrow. In this respect, we need to note one critical point: In this book, we’re not providing hundreds of world-class business examples to have you focus on the particular organization being described; the future results of any organization will depend on whether it consistently executes the strategies we are sharing. Therefore, we ask that you instead focus on the strategy being exemplified and how it has been successfully implemented in the real world. These excellent results are only a natural outcome when an organization follows the proven principles of success—and this book shows how you too can learn to achieve these same outcomes by focusing first on your customer.

How to Lead Your Customers to World-Class Excellence in the Real World

If you’re looking for an academic book about business theories, this is not the one for you. Lead With Your Customer is the result of our years of operational experience with numerous large, midsized, and small organizations around the globe; our focus is resolutely on the real world. The primary purpose of this updated edition is to explain the benchmark practices these organizations follow in more detail, illustrate them with current examples, and provide more thorough implementation guidance.

Of course, everyone strives to be the best at what they do. What does world class mean in your industry? High-end corporate legends like Apple, Berkshire Hathaway, and Amazon may come to mind, but can smaller businesses also be considered world class? What about industrial plants and government agencies? And if so, how?

Many people mistakenly assume that world class can refer to only those brands that are the most expensive, the most luxurious, or even the most popular. Actually, you can refer to the best of any particular class of operation as world class, but it
seems that many want to claim that status without achieving the results that prove it.

After decades of working with dozens of the most renowned organizations, we noticed a pattern among the most consistently successful ones. The best in every class of operation profitably built the strongest brands by creating high-performing organizational cultures. This doesn’t mean they’re perfect—no organization is. Yet despite their imperfections, these diverse organizations excel in many ways—all worthy of benchmarking—and this book showcases their achievements.

The business tools presented here will enable you to achieve the same breakthrough results as so many other professionals have done—even in the most difficult situations. We encourage you to read this book, implement the solutions that work best for you, and begin realizing your fullest potential.

**How This Book Is Organized**

Composed in four parts, this book begins by exploring leadership and the foundations for excellence in part I, answering these kinds of questions:

- What are the core, nonnegotiable aspects of my business?
- What types of leadership are most effective?
- How can I really understand my customers?
- How can I understand how all the complex facets of business fit together?

In part II, we explain how leading with your internal customers—your employees—creates your organizational culture. In this respect, legendary organizations keep in mind the following six priority questions that enable them to create the internal effectiveness and efficiencies that develop engaged employees and result in superior customer satisfaction:

- How do you proclaim the promise of your culture?
- How do you focus your employees on service behaviors?
- How can you optimize the workplace?
- How can you harness the power of processes?
- How can you add value by investing in your employees?
- How can you understand the value of getting the price right?

We answer each of these crucial questions about your culture, using many examples from renowned organizations, to show how these priorities fit together logically to achieve organizational excellence in relation to your employees.

In part III, we explore how leading with your external customers creates your brand and how the best organizations focus on the following six priority questions
to engage, satisfy, and ultimately exceed the expectations of their customers:

- How do you establish the promise of your brand?
- How do you create an effective front line?
- How can you leverage the workplace to strengthen customer service?
- How can you create an impact through processes?
- How can you focus on products and services?
- How do you get the price right?

Again, as in part II, we devote a chapter to answering each of these crucial brand questions. And using more examples from world-class organizations, we show how these priorities unite to achieve organizational excellence.

Finally, in part IV, we explain how the most successful organizations put it all together to ensure alignment with their core values and vision, integrity, and results. In these final four chapters, you’ll find the answers to these kinds of questions:

- What is service netting, and how can it ensure that no aspect of the customer experience is missed?
- How can I best provide service recovery when my customers aren’t happy?
- How can I lead through the transformation process to achieve the best results?
- What can sustain outstanding results and strengthen my legacy as a leader?

As you read these chapters, you’ll learn how successful leaders have overcome the challenges you currently face. You’ll discover how leading with your customer—both external and internal ones (as you’ll come to see your employees)—can transform your organization’s results. And most important, you’ll learn how to finally halt the never-ending rotation of flawed improvement initiatives that invariably stop being effective. By implementing the proven approach of world-class organizations, you’ll begin to realize the potential you’ve always envisioned. What comes next isn’t just the first chapter of another new business book—it’s the first step toward building lasting success for you and your organization. Your exasperating déjà vu is about to end—if you want it to. Follow in the footsteps of the world’s most renowned organizations and start realizing your team’s potential today!

Mark David Jones
J. Jeff Kober
February 2019
First and foremost, we would like to thank our families, friends, and colleagues for the years of support. We are grateful for you all. You inspire us to continue building a legacy of integrity and excellence.

In addition, we would like to acknowledge the many respected thought leaders, scholars, and pioneers of organization development who have come before us. Our efforts in this book to provide a unifying model of sustainable excellence build upon and synthesize the best of your valuable contributions.

Finally, our thanks to the thousands of clients and readers who have provided encouragement to us about writing this updated edition. We trust that you, as well as new readers, will find the new information valuable. Our hope is that this becomes your team’s one-stop shop overview of how the best concepts and tools work together to achieve extraordinary results in the real world. We are excited for your future successes and are eager to hear your examples of world-class results.
PART 1

Establishing the Foundation for Excellence
What creates a consistently successful organization? In our extensive work with a wide range of organizations in the private sector (including hospitality, retail, healthcare, transportation, and food and beverage) and the public sector (at the federal, state, and local levels), along with companies based in dozens of countries, we have noticed some transformative yet timeless concepts that all world-class organizations share. What does this mean for your organization? There is much that you can learn from others, but you cannot cookie-cutter your way to long-term success. Like every other organization, you are likely facing very real everyday business challenges. How do we get customers to comply with what we’re asking them to do? While you may have unique differences with regard to organizational culture, your goals are the same as those of any other serious professional: Grow your business and become as successful as possible.

The Chain Reaction of Excellence Model
Many excellent business books describe the strategic process that drives all organizational success. Whether it’s collected Gallup surveys or the classic groundbreaking study featured in The Loyalty Effect by Frederick F. Reichheld (2001), the same pattern emerges. Simply said, this process is what makes a successful organization. We call this the Chain Reaction of Excellence Model (Figure 1-1). The model has four links, and each link is the catalyst for the next one—progressing from left to right in
the figure. Here, however, let’s consider these four links from right to left—to trace the path from the end result back to the beginning root cause.

**Figure 1-1. The Chain Reaction of Excellence Model**

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**Loyalty and Long-Term Success**

To explain the Chain Reaction of Excellence Model, let’s start with the link at the right side of Figure 1-1: loyalty and long-term success. All organizations—in both the private and public sectors—are responsible for successful results, whether or not they generate revenue. Successful organizations generate value or profit, which they derive from loyal customers, who return and even become advocates. With private businesses, there is the obvious cause-and-effect process of generating revenue from goods and services. This applies to the public sector as well. Loyal constituents vote you back in, and happy citizens support you with the tax revenue and votes you need to fulfill your mission.

**Customer Satisfaction**

The next link in the model, moving from right to left, is highly satisfied customers. The customers you serve externally are the reason you are in business—and stay in business. In public-sector and even some private-sector situations, we can also refer to these individuals as compliers. Unless you understand what your customers want, you will not succeed. And while highly satisfied customers are vitally important, mere satisfaction is not the goal. Truly engaged customers are the only customers who ultimately become loyal.
**Employee Engagement**

Continuing left, the next link in the model is highly engaged employees. To transform matters externally, you need to improve the key dynamics of this part of your operation, which drives these results. According to Jacob Schneid (2009) of the Canadian performance assessment firm the Momentum Group, "Engagement has been referred to as an organization’s ultimate competitive advantage—and possibly the only one it can fully control." When your employees are engaged, they are involved, committed, and passionate about accomplishing organizational goals. They typically function at more effective levels and provide excellent service and functional execution. World-class organizations view their employees as internal customers. Serving employees as customers, using the same tools used to engage external customers, can result in loyal employees—and all the benefits connected with this outcome.

**Leadership Excellence**

The final link in the model is leadership excellence. Effective leaders throughout an organization are the catalysts for action, improvement, and excellence. Leaders who communicate a compelling vision, involve employees, and effectively manage company resources create the fertile environment within which employee excellence—and the rest of the Chain Reaction of Excellence—can be optimized to achieve long-term, sustainable success.

**Understanding the Heart of the Chain**

If you look at any successful organization, you’ll find the four steps of the Chain Reaction of Excellence Model at work—and the results at any given step directly reflect the effectiveness of the previous step. Thus, if your organization is experiencing a problem in one area, the root of the problem can typically be found in the step that comes before it.

One important observation needs to be made here. At the heart of the Chain Reaction of Excellence Model—the middle two links—are your employees and your customers. Consider what many do not: These two links of the model, representing these two basic categories of people, are what stand between you and the results you desire. Therefore, if you want to influence your organization’s ultimate outcomes, you can do so only by influencing those people with whom you do business day by day. In this book, moreover, we explain how both categories of people are really your
"customers"—your employees are your internal customers, and those normally called your customers are your external customers.

Another insight is just as critical: You cannot achieve external customer loyalty sustainably without first achieving internal customer loyalty. When you model the attributes that create committed, passionate employees, you are laying the foundation for them to create relationships with their external customers that will result in repeat business, advocacy, and a bigger, better reputation. And you are also engaging employees who are more likely to become informal marketers to their family and friends—and even become loyal customers themselves. This is one reason we titled this book Lead With Your Customer—to provide solutions that exceed the expectations of all your customers, external and internal!

**Summing Up**

Now that we have overviewed the Chain Reaction of Excellence Model, we can begin to see the truth that world-class organizations have discovered: Creating your organization's culture and building your brand are inextricably linked. The key to success and excellence is to serve both types of customers with a seamless, strategic approach, which we will be modeling and exploring in the chapters to come.

While the title of this book is *Lead With Your Customer*, it is not your typical leadership treatise. This book deals largely with improving employee engagement and creating a great customer experience. Still, there are some key leadership principles you must follow to achieve these goals. Let’s explore those in the next chapter.

Next Steps for Developing Your Big Picture:

◊ What does loyalty and success look like for your organization?
◊ What does a great customer experience look like?
◊ What connections can you draw between employee engagement and the customer experience?
◊ What efforts are you making to measure and assess the customer experience?
◊ What examples can you offer that show you have a highly engaged workforce?
◊ What connections can you draw between leadership excellence and your employees’ engagement levels?
Mark David Jones is the chief operating officer of World Class Benchmarking. During the past two decades, he has been a consultant to dozens of Fortune 500 companies around the world. As an author and highly demanded speaker, he is known for his innovative, results-focused passion.

Mark’s career at the Walt Disney Company spanned 26 years, working in a wide variety of leadership roles throughout operations, guest relations, and human resources—spearheading executive development and organizational change efforts. While serving as the senior consultant for the Disney Institute, Mark was in charge of leadership, creativity and innovation, and quality service initiatives. In recognition of his contribution to the Disney organization, Mark was nominated for the prestigious Partners in Excellence award—Disney’s highest regarded corporate award.

Mark has also written numerous published articles and was a contributing author to The ASTD Leadership Handbook, billed as "a who’s who of leadership experts."
Jeff Kober is chief executive officer of World-Class Benchmarking. For more than 35 years, Jeff has provided training and development solutions for workplaces around the world. Beyond his many keynotes and seminars, he has worked as a consultant with scores of organizations in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to help organizations move to the next level. Whether it’s creating online tools or multi-day workshops, he is known for his thought leadership and innovative learning approaches that build teams, strengthen leaders, engage employees, and create strong customer brands.

A former leader of the Disney Institute, Jeff collaborated across the entire Walt Disney World organization in establishing customer service and creativity and innovation programming. Since then he has gone on to author The Wonderful World of Customer Service at Disney, Disney’s Hollywood Studios: From Show Biz to Your Biz, and Disney, Leadership and You: House of the Mouse Ideas, Stories & Hope for the Leader in You. He is considered the foremost thought leader on best-in-business practices found throughout the Walt Disney Company, and continues to offer insights and ideas through his online presence, Disney at Work.
World Class Benchmarking was created from a passion to help professionals like you bridge the gap between business strategy and successful implementation. After accomplished careers leading public and private sector organizations, Jeff Kober and Mark David Jones met at the renowned Disney Institute—where business leaders from all over the world come to learn how the Disney Company is so wildly successful. Jeff and Mark were responsible for designing and implementing the business content that reveals the operational tactics needed to create customer and employee “magic.” After years of working with dozens of Fortune 100 companies, Jeff and Mark noticed a striking pattern: the world’s most renowned organizations, regardless of industry, followed the same approach to sustained excellence. As their reputation for successful organizational transformation grew, leaders from other world-class organizations encouraged Jeff and Mark to share their behind the scenes insights from working with the best-of-the-best corporations around the world. In early 2005, they launched World Class Benchmarking to share the proven approach to success through on-site business management consulting and their best-practice programs in Orlando, Florida, and other major cities.

Today, Jeff and Mark are thrilled to continue helping organizations realize their potential each day. The next success could be yours! Contact World Class Benchmarking today online at www.WorldClassBenchmarking.com.
Index

A
accountability, 157
action, taking, 162–163, 225–226
Adobe Systems, 58–59, 95, 173
Adventist Health Celebration Hospital, 94, 145–146
    concierge department, 158
example of attention to details, 145–146
Airbnb, 59
Alexa example of catering to particular styles, 29
Alston & Bird, 93
Ahnvarsson, Niklas, 142
American Express, 160
Analytical Graphics Incorporated, 93
Ancestry.com, 86
anticipating service needs. See "service netting"
Apple, 146, 155, 169, 170
artificial intelligence and bots
    Alexa example, 29
    American Express Advance
    Personalization Services example, 160
    chat bots, 95–96, 159–160
    task bots, 160
    Turing Test, 160
    Xiaolce, 159
attitude of excellence
    Harley-Davidson, 60
    Ritz-Carlton, 60
    Southwest Airlines, 60–61
automotive industry example of delivering the brand promise, 126
Avis example of service improvisation, 135–136
A&W/Marriott example of managing by walking around, 30–31

B
Bain and Company, 104
Bangor Savings Bank (BSB), 216–221
Baradwaj, Deepak R., 96
Barber, Allison, 69
Basecamp, 113
beliefs and philosophies
    Adobe Systems, 58–59
    Airbnb, 59
    Facebook, 59
Index

Google, 58
IBM, 58
Red Frog Events, 59–60
TOMS Shoes, 59
benefits. See also compensation as an employee retention strategy, 101
to consider offering, 103
customized work options, 92–93
Disney Difference compensation package, 107–109
effects of reducing, 105
time-saving on-site services, 92
unique, 104–105
Best Buy, 146
Bird, Brad, 55
Black Friday, 176–177
brand promise
brand-culture fusion, 188–189
communicating the, 121–122, 124–125
defining the, 122–123
delivering the, 125–126
differentiating the, 123–124
logos and branding, 124–125
maintaining the, 125
BT (formerly British Telecom), 193

C
Carlypso, 140
CarMax example of expectations, 24
Carvana, 140, 143
case studies
Adventist Health Celebration Hospital, 145–146
Bangor Savings Bank (BSB), 215–221
BT (formerly British Telecom), 193
CarMax, 24
Disney Vacation Club, 24–25
Federal Student Aid (FSA), 43–44
IKEA, 178–180
JetBlue, 115–116
Kerusso, 74
Kohler, 84
L’Oréal, 93–94
Marriott/A&W, 30–31
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), 25–26, 160–161
Nike, 28
Nordstrom, 75
Primera Engineers, 38
Umpqua Bank, 123
USAA, 31–32, 70–71
Walt Disney Company, 42–43, 57–58
Walt Disney World, 68
Walt Disney World Resort MyMagic+ initiative, 21–23
Wells Fargo, 187–188
Catmull, Ed, 214
chain of command, 91
Chain Reaction of Excellence Model, 3–6, 72, 209
change
choosing to lead with your customer, 226
the courage to create meaningful, 225–226
no-name, 224
vs. improvement, 223–224
chat bots, 95–96, 159–160
choices, providing, 155, 171
choosing to lead with your customer, 226
choreographed care, 133–134
Churchill, Winston, 60
Clough, Megan, 216
Cockerell, Lee, 12, 155–156
coffee example of the customer experience, 50
Cohen, David, 37
communication
chat bots, 95–96
customer guidance, 157
with employees, 94–95, 214–215
compensation. See also benefits; rewards and recognition
Disney Difference compensation package, 107–109
and organizational performance, 114
packages, 102–103
salary considerations, 101
unique benefits, 104–105
Container Store, 73, 75
core values and vision
criteria for developing values, 40
within the Customer Compass, 35–36
defining an organization’s vision, 40–41
developing your, 44–46
failing to integrate, 187–188
implementing your, 46–47
importance of understanding your, 36–37
operational values, 37–39
philosophical values, 37–39
Wells Fargo example, 187–188
Cornell University, 104
Corporate Culture and Performance (Kotter and Heskett), 37
cost. See price
courage, 227–228
Covey, Stephen R., 16–17
Cracker Barrel, 170–171
culture
brand-culture fusion, 188–189
building and supporting an organization’s promise, 56–58
“culture clues,” 87
customs and traditions, 62
employee attitude, 60–61, 113, 132
employee perceptions regarding, 56
employee research before joining an organization, 55–56
hiring talent that fits the, 67–68
implementing beliefs and philosophies, 58–60
initiatives to support corporate values, 56
language choice, 61
learning, creating a, 211
morale, 55
onboarding, 71–72
orientation programming to introduce, 68–71
using matrices to build employee, 194–195
workplace, 86
Customer Compass
concept overview, 13–15, 35–36
expectations, 23–26, 32
needs, 15–23
six Ps, 47–50, 105, 111, 175, 178–180, 186–187, 192
styles, 26–30
walk, 30–32
customer-focused behaviors
data-driven decision making, 129
efficiency, 129
fairness, 128
guidelines, 127–128
transparency, 128–129
Walt Disney Company example, 129–131
customer(s)
choosing to lead with your, 228
the customer experience, 50, 49, 132–136
effort, 176–177
emotional responses to products, 177
expectations, exceeding, 32
intangible price, 177–180
internal vs. external, 5–6, 35, 48–49
keeping existing, 197
listening to, 162
referrals, 197
sacrifices made, 177
satisfaction, 4
tangible price, 176–177
walking in the shoes of your, 30–32
customer service
   attending to all the details, 189
   bell-ringing examples of personalized attention, 134
   choreographed care, 133–134
   Give Kids The World example, 132–133, 145
   integrity net, 188–195
   making people feel special, 133
   real service opportunities, 136–137
   service improvisation, 134–136
customs and traditions
   Google, 62
   Southwest Airlines, 62
   CVS, 134

d
decision making, 38, 45
DeSantiago, Michael F., 38
development and training
   Container Store example, 73
   as the key to corporate success, 72
   low-cost ideas, 73–74
differentiation, 170–171
disengagement, 50, 106
Disney, Walt, 57–58, 83–84, 227
Disney Difference example of employee engagement, 107–109
Disney Leader Basics example of employee engagement, 65–66
Disney Vacation Club example of expectations, 24–25
Durant, Will, 224

e
effort, 176–177
Eisner, Michael, 84, 211–212
employee(s)
   benefits, 92–93
   concierge, 158
   co-workers, attitudes about, 114
determining the value of employment, 111–116
empowering, 202–203, 213
engagement, 5, 8–9, 50, 65–66, 105–109
expectations, 26
frustrations, 89
improvement, continuous, 93–94
intangible price, 113–114
as internal customers, 5–6, 35, 48–49, 111–112
obligation to exercise leadership, 12, 66
perceptions regarding an organization's culture, 56, 113
research before joining an organization, 55–56
retention, 101, 111–116
support, 66–67, 84–85
taking ownership of a situation, 156–157
tangible price, 112–113
The Encore Effect: How to Achieve Remarkable Performance in Anything You Do (Sanborn), 133
engagement, 5, 8–9, 50, 65–67, 105–109
Ericsson, 92
Evernote, 94
expectations
   CarMax example, 24
   Disney Vacation Club example, 24–25
   exceeding customer, 32
   held by employees, 26
   National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) example, 25–26
   positive or negative, 23–24
   Ritz-Carlton example, 23–24
The Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore), 50
Eyring, Pam, 26, 186
Facebook, 59
fear, 225
Federal Student Aid (FSA) example of vision, 43–44
Florida Department of Transportation’s SunPass, 151
Ford, Henry, 32
Four Seasons, 70
France, Van, 43
Fried, Jason, 113
Frohwerk, Art, 95
frontline employees
ability to respond immediately, 202–203
customer-focused behaviors, 127–131
importance of, 137
individualizing customer service, 132–136
service recovery, 198–199
supporting people in building the brand, 132
Fuller, Buckminster, 88
Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World’s Greatest Companies (Yohn), 189

Gardner, Joseph, 162–163
Gates, Bill, 98
Genentech, 92, 104
Gilmore, James H., 50
Give Kids The World example of customer service, 132–133, 145
the Golden Rule vs. the Platinum Rule, 20
Google, 58, 62, 86

Hampton Inn, 203
Harley-Davidson, 60, 133, 175
Harvard Business Review, 188
HCSS (software company), 94
Hello Fresh, 155
Heskett, James, 37
hierarchy, 91
hiring talent
interview questions, 67
transparency of candidates, 67
Walt Disney World interviewing process, 68
Holler & Dash, 171
Holmes, Ryan, 95
Home Depot, 152
Hootsuite, 95
human resources (HR)
customized work options, 92–93
employee retention, 101
and technology, 77–78, 95–96
time-saving benefits for employees, 92
Hurricane Maria example of providing support for employees, 66–67

IBM, 58
IKEA, 178–180
improvement, continuous
of employees, 93–94
for external customers, 160–164
of products, 172–174
Step 1–measure, 162
Step 2–act, 162–163
Step 3–remeasure, 163
Step 4–evaluate, 164
Step 5–celebrate and share, 164
improvements
choosing to lead with your customer, 226
the courage to create meaningful change, 225–226
no-name change, 224
vs. change, 223–224
individual styles
  amiable, 29
  analytical, 27
  driving, 27–28
  expressive, 28
  observations regarding, 29–30
influence, 9–10, 12
In Search of Excellence (Peters and Waterman), 43
Inside the Box (Cohen), 37
integrity net
  considerations, 192–193
  matrix for a fitness club, 194
  matrix for a people management process, 195
  purpose of, 189
  sample blank, 190
  sample for a fitness club, 190
  sample for a government payment center, 191
  steps in building an, 193
Interaction Associates, 92–93
Ive, Jonathan, 169

J
JetBlue, 61, 66–67, 71, 86, 105, 115–116
Jobs, Steve, 23, 32, 170, 171
Jungle Boat ride example of supporting an organization’s promise, 57–58

K
Kaiser Permanente Roseville Medical Center, 152–153
Kalogridis, George, 90
Kamprad, Ingvar, 178
Kerusso example of service huddles, 74
Kohler example of employee support, 84
Kotter, John, 37
Kroc, Ray, 147

L
Landwirth, Henri, 132–133
language choice
  JetBlue, 61
  W. L. Gore & Associates, 61
  Walt Disney Company, 61
leaders
  personal, 11
  positional, 11
  role of, 162–163
  spontaneous, 11
  vs. managers, 8–9, 66
leadership development, 75
leadership excellence
  Bangor Savings Bank (BSB) case study, 215–221
  defined, 5, 9
  as the driver of employee engagement, 8–9, 65–66
  getting results, 209–212
  influence and, 9–10, 12
  qualities necessary for, 208
  working effectively with others, 212–215
Le Moyne, Irve, 133
Lincoln, Abraham, 63
Lofy, Chuck, 122
Lofy, Mary, 122
logos and branding, 124–125, 171
L’Oréal, 93–94
loyalty
  brand, 170–171
  and employee benefits, 105
  and long-term success, 4, 47
The Loyalty Effect (Reichheld), 3, 47
M
managers vs. leaders, 8–9
Mandela, Nelson, 10
mapping example of continuous improvement, 160–161
Marriott, J. Willard, 30–31
Marriott, Richard, 31
Marriott/A&W example of managing by walking around, 30–31
Marriott Hotels, 69, 168
matrices to reflect the customer experience, 194–195
matrix reporting style, 91–92
McDonald’s, 147
MD Anderson Cancer Center, 133
memories, creating tangible, 168–173
Merrill, David, 27
Merrill, Reid, 27
Methodist Hospital System, 104
Microsoft, 94, 104
Miliotes, George, 67
Millard, Nicola, 193
Milliken, 94
mistakes, learning from
documenting learning insights, 211
guidelines, 97–98
prison escape example, 96–97
understanding policies, 96–97
money, 177
Montgomery-Rice, Bob, 221
morale, 55, 212–213
Morton’s Steakhouse, 134
Musk, Elon, 32

N
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) example of expectations, 25–26, 160–161
needs
the need to be heard and understood, 16–17
the need to belong and contribute, 17–18
the need to feel significant and special, 19–20
the need to feel stable and in control, 18–19
the need to feel successful and reach your potential, 20–21
universal motivators, 15–16
Neeleman, David, 86
Netflix example of differentiating the brand promise, 123–124
New York City’s Department of Finance customer-focused behaviors, 128–129
example of rewards and recognition, 77
Nike
catering to particular styles example, 28
employee communication example, 95
Norberg, Elizabeth, 65
Nordstrom
example of service huddles, 75
product displays, 147
returning a tire story, 150
Nunis, Dick, 43, 57–58

O
Oberle, Valerie, 211
Ogburn, Charlton, 223
onboarding
ideas, 71–72
JetBlue example, 71
purpose of, 71
one-stop solutions, 155–158
operational values
as a decision-making tool, 38, 45
defined, 37–38
examples (by organization), 39
vs. philosophical values, 37–38
organizational performance, 114
organizational structure
chain of command, 91
flattened hierarchy, 91, 214
matrix reporting style, 91–92
orientation programming, 68–71
ownership, having employees take, 156–157

P
Patagonia, 104
personal leaders, 11
Peters, Tom, 43
Phillips 66, 152
philosophical values
defined, 37
vs. operational values, 37–38
Pick n Pay, 133
Piggly Wiggly, 173
Pine, Joseph, II, 50
Pixar, 86
place
Adventist Health Celebration Hospital
example of attention to details, 145–146
Carvana example of an optimized
virtual and physical experience, 140
cleanliness, 147
importance of every detail, 145–146
medical center example of the
importance of a work setting, 139–140
physical and virtual worlds, 140
product displays, 146–147
and sensory perception, 140–144
signage, 146
the Platinum Rule, 20
positional leaders, 11
potential, reaching your, 20–21
price
for an employee’s work experiences, 111–112
charitable aspects of, 178
cultural fit, 113–114
intangible, 113–114, 177–180
missed purchases, 177
organizational performance, 114
and status, 178
tangible, 112–113, 176–177
and value to the customer, 175
Primera Engineers example of
philosophical and operational values, 38
Principal Financial Group, 92
prioritization, 38, 45
processes
common problems with, 149–150
communication with employees, 94–96
continuous employee improvement, 93–94
decreasing waiting time, 151–154
employee experiences, 89–90
giving the gift of time, 154–155
inefficient, 90–91
learning from mistakes, 96–98
offering one-stop solutions, 155–158
as opportunities to deliver the brand to
the customer, 150
organizational structure, 90–92, 132
providing continuous improvement, 160–164
providing customers with choices, 155
requesting information once, 150–151
service recovery, 197–198
technology’s role in, 159–160
process improvement initiatives
Agile, 173
ISO 9001:2000, 172
Lean Manufacturing/TPS, 173
Six Sigma, 173
Statistical Process Control (SPC), 172
products and services
balancing choices and streamlining, 171
Butterball Turkey line example of
product support, 172
continually improving, 172–173
Cracker Barrel example of quality vs. quantity, 170–171
creating tangible memories, 168–173
differentiation, 170–171
hospital pharmacy example, 167
hotel experience example, 167–168
process improvement initiatives, 172–173
product support, 171–172
providing superior, 170–171
quality vs. quantity, 170–171
visual design, display, and packaging, 169–170
promise, brand
communicating the, 121–122, 124–125
defining the, 122–123
delivering the, 125–126
differentiating the, 123–124
logos and branding, 124–125
maintaining the, 125
promoting from within, 58, 62
public-sector vs. private-sector businesses, 106
PWC, 104

Q
Qualcomm, 92
quality vs. quantity, 170–171

R
Rackspace Managed Hosting, 94
Red Bull, 86
Red Frog Events, 59–60
Redmoon, Ambrose, 225
Reichheld, Frederick F., 3, 47
responsibility vs. severity in service recovery, 199–201
results, getting
being resourceful, 210
building an engaged workforce while creating a great customer experience, 209–210
creating a learning culture, 211
creating and staying focused on your plate, 209
developing and executing your plan, 209–210
working hard, 211–212
retention, employee, 101, 111–116
rewards and recognition. See also compensation
impact of non-monetary rewards, 76
New York City’s Department of Finance example, 77
team database of preferred rewards, 76–77
Ritz, Cesar, 60
Ritz-Carlton
attitude of excellence, 60
type of the example, 202–203
type of expectations, 23–24
Ruby Receptionists, 104–105
Russell Investments, 92

S
Sanborn, Mark, 133
satellite example of customer expectations, 25–26
Scarborough, Shelby, 17, 71
Schneid, Jacob, 5
Scripps Health, 104
sensory perception of the environment
memories and emotions, 140–141
sight, 141
smell, 142–143
sound, 142
taste, 144
touch, 143–144
service huddles
   Container Store example, 75
   Kerusso example, 74
   Nordstrom example, 75
   purpose of, 74
service improvisation
   Avis example, 135–136
   CVS Samaritan vans example, 134
   Morton’s Steakhouse example, 134
“service netting”
   integrity net, 188–195
   making sure a problem doesn’t recur, 204
   service mapping using matrices, 194–195
   vs. service recovery, 185–186
service recovery
   as an opportunity to develop a customer relationship, 199
   empowering frontline employees to respond immediately, 203–203
   Hampton Inn example, 203
   handling by frontline employees, 198–199
   internal, 204
   low-cost or no-cost service ideas, 203
   making sure a problem doesn’t recur, 204
   processes, 197–198
   as a reactive measure, 185
   Ritz-Carlton example, 202–203
   Service Recovery Matrix, 199–201
   severity vs. responsibility, 199–201
   vs. “service netting,” 185–186
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
(Covey), 16–17
shirt return example of one-stop solutions, 157
silos
   breaking down, 98
   operating in, 90–91
six Ps
cheapening the product, 105
Customer Formula, 48–49, 111, 175, 192
IKEA example, 178–180
for internal and external customers, 48–49
JetBlue Call Center example, 115–116
key points, 186–187
overview, 47
skills
   leadership traits, 8–10
   managerial, 8
   Smith, Brad, 67
   Smith, Guy, 199
   Snow, Dennis, 199
social intelligence, 26–30
social media
   Disney Twitter real-time responses to customer questions, 158
   L’Oréal example of improving employee engagement, 93–94
   Southwest Airlines, 60–61, 62, 87, 113
   spontaneous leaders, 11
   Stankey, John, 95
   Starbucks, 104
State of the Global Workplace (report), 50
streamlining, 171
styles
   amiable individuals, 29
   analytical individuals, 27
   driving individuals, 27–28
   expressive individuals, 28
   Nike example, 28
   observations regarding, 29–30
   Social Style assessment, 27
support for employees
   JetBlue during Hurricane Maria, 66–67
   Kohler, 84
   Walmart, 84–85
   Sussman, Adam, 28
T

task bots, 160
TD Industries, 104
team meetings, 74–75
technology
  chat bots, 95–96
design challenges in the virtual world, 170
Disney Twitter real-time responses to customer questions, 158
human resources (HR) opportunities, 77–78
L’Oréal example of improving employee engagement through social media, 93–94
mobile apps for saving time, 152
teleworking, 85, 93
Timbre example of drones in restaurants, 159
Telefónica Europe, 93
Tencent, 158
Teslasuit, 144
Tiffany & Co., 146
Timberland, 104
Timbre, 159
time
  absences from an employee's personal life, 113
decreasing waiting time, 151–154
giving employees the gift of, 92
paying for goods and services to save, 154–155, 176
work hours, 112–113
time-share example of defying expectations, 24–25
Time Warner, 95
TOMS Shoes, 59
Toyota, 173
training and development
  Container Store example, 73
  as the key to corporate success, 72
  low-cost ideas, 73–74
trust, 122
Tudor, Kim, 30

U

Umpqua Bank example of differentiating the brand promise, 123
USAA
  example of showcasing customers’ military experiences, 31–32, 70–71
  four-day workweek, 113

V

Valero Energy, 92
values
  and corporate success, 37
criteria for developing, 40
developing your core vision and, 44–46
failing to integrate, 187–188
implementing your core vision and, 46–47
operational, 37–39
philosophical, 37–38
Primera Engineers example, 38
vision
  defined, 40
developing your core values and, 44–46
examples (by organization), 41
Federal Student Aid (FSA) example, 43–44
implementing your core values and, 46–47
vs. a mission statement, 40
vs. a “vision statement,” 40–41
Walt Disney Company “We create happiness” example, 42–43
visual design, display, and packaging, 169–170
Vitality: Igniting Your Organization’s Spirit (Lofy and Lofy), 122
Volkswagen, 86
W
W. L. Gore & Associates, 61
walk
executives’ frontline experiences, 31, 62
J. Willard Marriott example, 30–31
USAA example of showcasing customers’ military experiences, 31–32, 70–71
Walt Disney’s Disneyland visits, 57–58
Walmart, 85–86, 147, 152, 169–170
Walt Disney Company
“80 and Go!” strategy for action, 163
attention to details and anticipation of problems, 145
behaviors aligned with long-held values, 129–131
Disney Difference compensation package, 107–109
The Disney Institute, 211–212
Disney Leader Basics, 65–66
Disney Vacation Club example of expectations, 24–25
engineering division 510, 95
FastPass to save time in line, 151–152
language choice, 61
Smellitizer smell machine, 142–143
theme park “culture clues,” 87
“tip board” to indicate attraction wait times, 155
toy monorail example of providing one-stop solutions, 156, 157
Twitter real-time responses to customer questions, 158
Walt Disney’s Disneyland visits, 57–58
Walt Disney World fountain example of inefficient processes, 90–91, 98
Walt Disney World interviewing process, 68
Walt Disney World Resort MyMagic+ initiative, 21–23
“We create happiness” vision, 41–43
wheelchair line example of equitable waiting times, 152–153
workplace accommodations, 83–84, 92
Walton, Sam, 84–85
Waterman, Robert, 43
Watson, Thomas, Sr., 58
Wells, Frank, 211
Wells Fargo example of recalibrating to its core values, 187–188
Westin example of paying attention to the entire product package, 168
What If!, 87
The Wonderful World of Customer Service at Disney (Kober), 42–43
working effectively with others
building morale, 55, 212–213
communication, 94–95, 214–215
empowering and involving people, 202–203, 213
flattening the organization, 91, 214
getting people to comply using hard-wiring vs. soft-wiring, 212–213, 224
knowing your customer, 212
working hard and working smart, 211–212
workplace optimization
break areas, 81–82
creativity and innovation, 86
“culture clues,” 87
employee support, 84–86
“front of the house” vs. “back of the house,” 82
garage origins of large corporations, 83
messages being conveyed about the workplace, 139–147
office resources, 82–84
Southwest Airlines example, 87
teleworking, 85
things that external customers should never see, 81
Walt Disney Company examples, 83–84, 87
?What If! example, 87
World Class Excellence Model
  coffee example of the customer experience, 50
  Customer Compass overview, 13–15, 35–36
  expectations, 23–26, 32
  needs, 15–23
  of service recovery, 199–201
  six Ps, 47–50, 105, 111, 175, 178–180, 186–187, 192
  styles, 26–30
  values, 37–40
  walk, 30–32

X
  Xiaolce, 159

Y
  Yohn, Denise Lee, 189

Z
  Zappos, 176
  Zillow, 104