

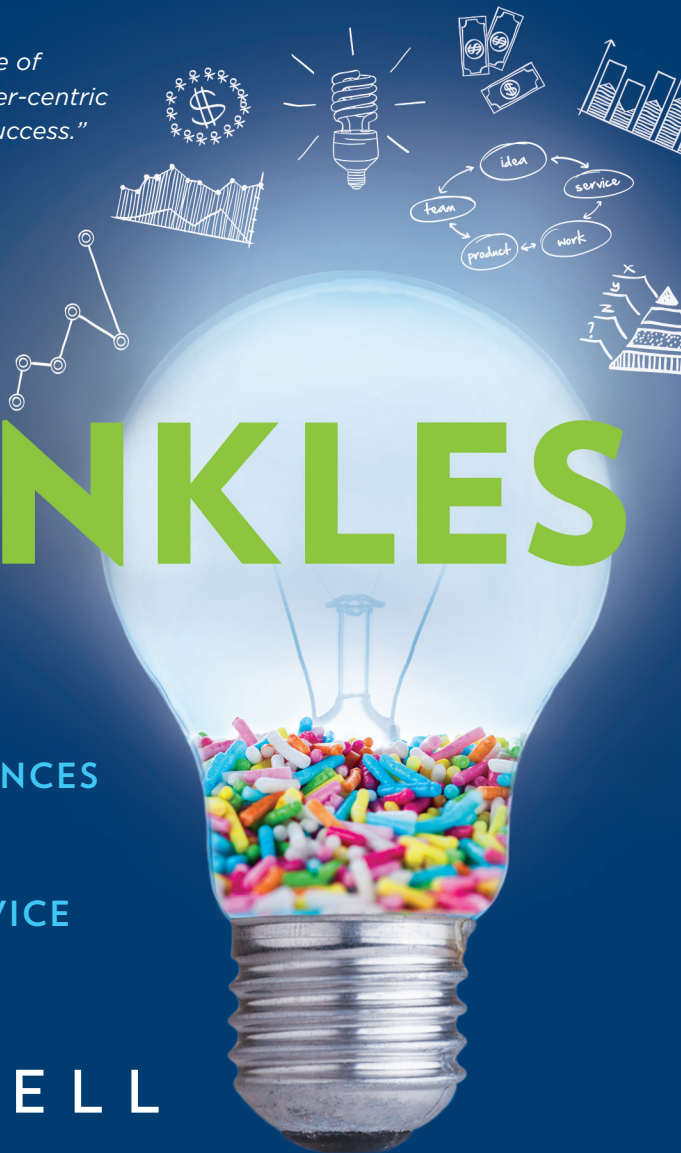
"Chip Bell understands the importance of gaining trust while running a customer-centric business, and shares the secrets of success."

—Herve Humler, president and COO,
The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company

SPRINKLES

CREATING
AWESOME EXPERIENCES
THROUGH
INNOVATIVE SERVICE

CHIP R. BELL



BE MY GUEST!

*"It is not the quantity of the meat, but the cheerfulness of
the guests, which makes the feast."*

—Edward Hyde

Welcome! I'm honored you elected to join me on a delicious journey to innovative service. Think of this book you're holding like a floating banquet. You know, the kind where you enjoy the appetizer at one friend's house, the salad at another home, and end the evening with dessert at the last house. This banquet we share will feature various approaches to delivering an unexpected, tantalizing experience to all you serve. It's all about a customer experience that is served gourmet style.

The origin of this book came from two sources. The first was a quote by Anthony Bourdain, celebrity chef and host of the TV show *Parts Unknown*. “Anyone who’s a chef, who loves food, ultimately knows that all that matters is: ‘Is it good? Does it give pleasure?’” Innovative service is a blend of these same two sentiments. As customers, we all want service that is good—meaning it successfully fulfills our needs or accomplishes the outcome we seek. But, we remember service that comes with an experience that gives us unexpected pleasure.

The second source for this book came from my three granddaughters, Kaylee, Annabeth, and Cassie. They taught me that a great cookie becomes a really special cookie only when adorned with sprinkles, icing, or a cherry. Service is the same. Customers want their experiences to be more than great . . . they want them special. As customers, we like great service; but we love service that takes our breath away—the kind that leaves us “awed” not just “wowed.” This book is about how to deliver an experience as enchanting and memorable as a special cookie.

In 2013, I wrote *The 9½ Principles of Innovative Service*. The emotional

response to that book from buyers, reviewers, and talk show hosts was very gratifying; it was also very revealing. The book gave readers the freedom and rationale for making service ingenious and creative, not just good or even great. It made frontline employees feel less like worker bees and more like fireflies.

Leaders of organizations have spent years focusing on delivering value-added service. Yet today's customers, with their inclination toward elevating their expectations every time a service provider adds more, have almost run the delivery of service delight straight into the too-pricey zone. Each time a service provider adds more in their effort to exceed customer expectations, it comes closer to completely eliminating profit margins already razor thin for most.

The new perspective reflected in both this book and *The 9½ Principles* is this: value-unique service and not value-added service provides a more promising path to delight—one with ingenuity, not addition. We all have unlimited ways to serve uniquely but only a finite number of ways to add more. My hope is the gourmet cooking metaphor will unleash fresh ideas and tasty

techniques for delivering innovative service—the kind Bourdain spoke about: good, but also pleasurable enough for customers to remark about it to others.

Bottom line—this book is about your bottom line. Customers today crave special and unique. They are not only tired of ho-hum, they are bored with the “pretty-good-but-nothing-to-write-home-about” kind of service. When a large brokerage firm decided to have fun with their phone tree by adding “punch 8 to hear a duck quack,” they were stunned when over a million people a week called just to hear the duck. The punch line? Customers want service à la mode. They gravitate toward people with spirit, organizations with imagination, and leaders with spunk. They want their service experiences delivered with sprinkles.

Get ready for a decadent banquet that will stretch your menu in new ways to serve with innovation. And, when you get to the dessert at the end, please drop me a note to let me know what you thought of this gourmet recipe!

CHAPTER ONE

EVERYTHING GOES BETTER WITH SPRINKLES

*“I doubt whether the world holds for anyone a more
soul-stirring surprise than the first adventure with ice cream.”*

—Heywood Broun

It was late Thursday afternoon when I checked into the Ritz-Carlton in Atlanta. After a tough week on the road, this was clearly an elegant venue for my last stop. My dress pants needed pressing for my Friday morning keynote, so I dialed the hotel housekeeping department. I was told someone would be right up to get my pants.

Moments later, a tiny Asian women in her mid-fifties knocked on my door. Taking my pants she informed me she would have them back to me in less than an hour. Forty-five minutes later, she was back.

“Thank you for giving me the honor of pressing your beautiful pants,” she said with an excited smile on her face. “This is the nicest pair of pants I think I have ever pressed.” I wondered about the source of her gracious style and passionate attitude. What made Nuriya Mohsen so guest-centric?

“Here is my business card,” she politely said. “Call me anytime and I will take care of your laundry needs.” Her card revealed her job title: “Laundry/Valet.”

It was at that point she added sprinkles to my already great service. “And, on behalf of the Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, I would like to present you with this package of stays for your dress shirt collars.” Now, think about it. How many hotel laundry employees on the planet have their own business card plus a special surprise gift to present to guests?

Unlike elegant icing or fancy cake decoration, sprinkles are not complex or arduous. They are super easy, random performances available to all of us

all of the time. As a performance, they should be sprinkled on with deliberate abandon, much like a fairy with a wand. When the person in the vehicle in front of us pays our toll in the tollbooth, we tell people. When a departing customer gives our child their unused tickets as we arrive at the county fair-ground, we tell people. As customers, we are thankful for random acts of kindness. And, when those acts are totally unexpected, we are also talkative.

With three granddaughters aged six, eight, and ten, we keep a very large supply of sprinkles. You might say we are sprinkles experts! We have multi-colored sprinkles, chocolate sprinkles, and heart-shaped sprinkles. There are sprinkles that look like colored dots and ones that look like tiny tubes. Sprinkles typically live their very short life on top of a cupcake or a cookie. But, if you see the world through our granddaughters' eyes, they belong on just about everything in life. Sprinkles adorn, enrich, enliven, and excite. Sprinkles make ice cream look like it was prepared by a clown, not a cook. They make pancakes seem prepared by a gourmet chef, not by a granddaddy!

What would your customer's service experience be like if it was sprinkled? Checkout clerks would shake your hand, not just say "hello." The newspaper





SPRINKLES

- delivery person would leave a thoughtful note tucked in your newspaper. Pizza delivery boxes would have funny faces inside waiting to greet you when the box was opened. The bank teller would give you an extra thousand in play money just to make you laugh. The reception area would look like the interior decorator got extra leeway. And, there would be fresh flowers in the middle of the boardroom table, not just water pitchers. Operators would have a humor in their voice, and flight attendants would offer you pink lemonade, not just soft drinks or water.

“I figured if I was going to make the world a better place, I’d do it with cookies,” said *Stranger Than Fiction* character Ana Pascal. It is a powerful concept for innovative service. “Sprinkles” is code for any heartstring-plucking surprise that takes service from great to awesome. Paraphrasing famed restaurateur Danny Meyer, great service happens to you; innovative service happens for you.

When the only FirstBank & Trust ATM in the rural town of Tahoka, Texas, went down, customers were unhappy. They were forced to use the only other ATM in the area at a convenience store where fees were considerably higher.

And, when it took several weeks to get the ATM operative, unhappy customers were accustomed to going to the convenience store for their cash. FirstBank & Trust marketing executive Andy Hartman found a way to lure customers back to the bank's ATM—"sprinkles." He ran an ad in the local paper that told customers not to think it was a mechanical glitch if they received a fifty dollar bill instead of a twenty dollar bill when they used the bank's ATM. Word spread as customers told neighbors when they hit the ATM jackpot!

How can you deliver gourmet service with surprise? What if you treated every customer like today was his or her birthday? What would your service be like if it came with balloons, candy kisses, a chocolate coin, a funny one-liner, or popcorn? A hospital in Milwaukee asked new patients their favorite flower during admission. They then arranged for a single stem of that favorite flower be placed in a bud vase on the patient's bedstand. What would a spunky eight-year-old suggest you do? If the service experience you deliver became a super hero, how would it change? What would you do differently if you wanted your service experience to win the Cracker Jack Award for amazement?

THE SECRET SAUCE—AMAZEMENT

“I want a cookie” is a favorite request of most toddlers. Permissive parents give in; disciplined parents say something akin to “After you eat all your lunch!” Grandparents say, “How ’bout I get you two!” The cookie request in some ways becomes code for who can influence whom.

When a child hits five or six years old, this simple cookie request changes to the more theatrical “I *need* a cookie.” Most parents spot the ploy and parry the child’s request with something like “How about you *need* an apple instead.” Most grandparents spot the ploy and couldn’t care less!

Customers have always wanted customer delight. It was the sizzle that went with the steak; the cherry that went on top. We pointed to ways that Nordstrom was different than Sears, Disney World was different than Six Flags, or Amazon was different than Borders. But, customers have changed. Today, they need a cookie so to speak. They assume they will get a quality outcome or product at a fair price. And, they assume they will get good service. Without these features, they take their business elsewhere, leaving bad tweets, snarky YouTube videos, and poor reviews littered along their exit path.

The secret to differentiation today is amazement. And, everything a service provider can do to unexpectedly take customers' breath away moves them closer to ensnaring customers' hearts and completely ruining their appetite for any competitor.

SHARE



BUY



“The moments of happiness we enjoy take us by surprise.
It is not that we seize them, but that they seize us.”

—Ashley Montagu