



How Every Employee Can
Create and Deliver the
Ultimate Customer Experience

**7 TENETS
OF TAXI
TERRY**

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INTRODUCTION

“I’m just a _____.”

Whether on a personal errand or at a professional engagement, it seems that whenever I ask someone, “What do you do?” the answer tends to be, “Well, I’m just a . . .,” followed by the title of his or her job. That response has always bothered me intensely for two critical reasons.

First, what you do isn’t what you are.

Personally, I may be an author and a professional speaker, but I’m also a husband and a stepfather. Depending on when you ask me, I’m also a golfer and a guy who likes to do a lot of other fun stuff. There’s a difference between *do* and *are*.

Sometimes people confuse the two, usually to their detriment. I don’t want us starting our experience together in this book with you wondering if I understand that being a taxi driver, for example, doesn’t mean that is what you *are*. I understand that it is *the activity you perform* as a job. It’s your profession.

However, I also believe that the way you approach what you do for a job—the *do*—can affect the type of person you become—the *are*—and we’ll discuss that in greater depth later in this book.

It’s the second aspect that really rankles me, though. In the vast majority of cases, a person describing what he or she does adds a modifier to the response. Instead of saying, “I’m a bank teller,” the answer is, “I’m *only* a bank teller.” Many times the retort isn’t, “I’m an insurance professional” but is expressed as “I’m *just* an insurance agent.” For some reason, many of us feel that we have to disparage—or at least trivialize a bit—our careers. This is especially the case if

we find ourselves in a profession or position that we don't believe others find unusual or remarkable.

It's hard to imagine a political figure saying, "I'm *just* our country's representative to the United Nations." A famous driver might exclaim, "I just won the Indianapolis 500." However, he or she definitely would not proclaim, "I'm *just* the winner of the world's most famous race" unless it was a comment meant to be understood as sarcastic.

Let's face it: most of us won't be guzzling milk in Victory Lane or debating diplomats about a sensitive geopolitical crisis in Manhattan. Yet why do so many feel this extraordinary need to downplay something they spend so much time doing?

When I was a child, part of the way in which I learned about how government works (or at least is supposed to operate) was from a simple cartoon shown on a program called *Schoolhouse Rock*. The success of those little videos with their songs and characters continues to this day. The Arlington Heights, IL, *Daily Herald* reports¹ that a cast that is "82 members strong, ranging in age from 7 to 15 and hailing from 15 surrounding communities" has created a live production of *Schoolhouse Rock* and currently performs at a local theater to bring learning home to students in that area.

CNN told the story of the musician Bob Dorough, the originator of *Schoolhouse Rock*.² He "was approached in 1971 by a New York advertising executive whose sons were having great difficulty in math class. He asked him to set the multiplication tables to music." Now, 40 years later, those songs still resonate with the baby boomers they educated as well as the Generation Xers and Yers and millennials who have watched them over 30 million times on YouTube. More than 1,000 people recently jammed into the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, to hear Dorough perform—and to sing along with him—his famed *Schoolhouse Rock* songs.

Remember the one about how a bill becomes a law?

The character wasn't a "bill"; he was "*JUST* a bill . . . on Capitol Hill." In fact, in the song we all memorized, he didn't (and wouldn't) view himself as being important until the president signed him and he then became a "law."

Don't misunderstand me here: I'm not implying that our frequent self-esteem challenges as they relate to our respective jobs are somehow rooted in a four-decade-old song about legislation.

What I am asking you to consider is that just as our friend the “Bill” felt, we often fail to consider what we do as truly valuable. Or we want to defer to someone else's approval (such as “Bill” needing the president's signature) or we require a change in our position (from a “Bill” to a “Law”) to reach a point of usefulness. Therefore, we are “*just* a . . . whatever” until an external action or some other individual or group confers on us a higher level of achievement.

That's a significant problem.

The world needs extraordinary taxi drivers and bank tellers. We have enough “just” cabbies and clerks. We are lusting for passionate sales professionals and customer service representatives. We already have plenty of order takers and operators.

The reason for this book is to illuminate for you the seven tenets of creating Ultimate Customer Experiences for the customers and prospects you deal with every single day.

By the way, you'll see the phrase with capital letters—the Ultimate Customer Experience—because that term is a federally registered trademark owned by my company. We have a specific and strategic approach regarding how you and your organization can deliver that type of experience to your customers, and you'll learn a few of those steps on our journey through this book.

However, at this point you may be asking:

- *What if the only reason I have this book is that the company or my boss gave it to me?*

If your company presented you with this book, it says some very positive things about them!

First, it means that they are committed to improving the experiences you create for your customers and colleagues. No organization or individual would invest in an activity in which it had little interest.

You wouldn't buy season tickets to the games of a sports team you didn't care about. You wouldn't watch every episode of a television show you didn't enjoy. Your company would not have given you this book if it was not focused on your important role in enhancing the customer experience.

It also says they are interested in *you*. (Remember, you don't invest in something you aren't interested in.) Your company recognizes that you are its most important asset.

- *What if I, on my own initiative, am investing the time to read this book?*

Well, it obviously means you have initiative in taking the most important step any of us can ever take: the step toward personal growth. You don't acquire and read a book if all you want to do is keep treading water and maintain the status quo. You are making this effort because you have decided to improve yourself personally and professionally.

- *But what if the people I work with do not have the same dedication to internal and external customers that I do?*

Honestly, that's a tough one. It's so much easier to create Ultimate Customer Experiences when the commitment runs throughout the organization. However—and this is a very important point—you have to take personal responsibility for the way you engage the internal or external customers with whom you have contact.

Think about it. I've received great service from companies that I know don't give a darn about my business. You have, too, I'll wager. How did that happen?

There is only one possible answer: an *individual* cared more about you and overcame the obvious deficiencies in his or her colleagues' approach to dealing with customers.

Design your own personal program of growth and development. Listen to audio programs, sign up for online learning, and create your own PhD in

achievement. It will make you more valuable wherever your career takes you, whatever you decide to do.

There will be times when you may question whether it is worth it to go the extra mile to serve customers if you aren't receiving the support you deserve.

This can create enormous difficulties for customers. Too many people seem to be behaving as if they believed that if the confirmation of their personal importance fails to come from above in the organization, they will extract it from below. A slang term used in the United States is *mall cop syndrome*; it is employed to criticize people who use the authority of their position to hide behind “company policy” or “corporate procedures” to make things tougher on the very people they should be serving: customers. In some cases, for some people, the top level doesn't make us feel important, so we take it out on our colleagues or our customers and show them that we are the gatekeepers, totally in charge of their customer experience.

You are better than that.

That's why you're reading this book, why it is important to learn the seven tenets inspired by Taxi Terry,—who, through the power of the experience he created for me on a simple cab ride, sparked a story that I will relate in the next chapter—and why you are making the commitment to create and deliver the Ultimate Customer Experience.

I will let you in on a secret: there is very little in this book that you will find new or exclusively original. There are no groundbreaking or revolutionary philosophies and no business school theories or high-level management concepts for you to consider. If you've read any of my previous books or my blog, you will come across some ideas and concepts you've already seen; this, of course, is natural because these are the principles about which I am very passionate.

This is a book intended for all of us, from the management team to frontline employees, from executives to executive assistants. It was written to remind each of us of some basic steps we already know but often fail to consistently execute, steps that enable us to connect with the very people who determine our success and our future: customers.

You may think of customers and visualize only those outside the organization who purchase your products and services. However, what if you don't deal directly with external customers?

One of the most important concepts for you to integrate in your efforts is that of internal customers. Popularized in the 1950s by the Romanian-born management consultant Dr. Joseph Juran, it still has great relevance today.

The Elsmar Cove Forum describes it this way³: “A simple definition of an internal customer is anyone within an organization who at any time is dependent on anyone else within the organization.”

It will help if you develop categories so that you can list all the internal customers you serve and their individual requirements and needs. In addition, you should make a list of the departments and individuals within your organization who are serving you, the places where you are the internal customer.

This is important, because it means that if your boss fails to provide the information or training you need to do your job, he or she has failed you, the internal customer. Therefore, internal customers consist of *everyone* up and down the line within the organization who would be affected if you failed to do your job.

Just as with external customers, internal customers seek, desire, and deserve an Ultimate Customer Experience.

As we discuss the seven tenets in this book, most of the examples will revolve around external customers. However, if your role is exclusively serving internal ones, the steps toward creating the Ultimate Customer Experience are practically identical.

You may be thinking, how can I learn anything that applies to my business from a taxi driver, given the complexity of the industry in which I work? That's a great question.

It's completely possible that you work for an innovative leader in technology or own the local dry cleaners. Perhaps you are a part of a global automotive behemoth, or you could be building your direct-marketing business by selling nutritional products. I understand that there is great variation among

the professionals who make up the potential audience of readers for the book you are about to read.

Vast differences will be found in the complexity of the following elements:

- Product
- Selling process
- Technology
- Organizational structure
- Customer

That is just to name a few. One might be selling sophisticated networking hubs for communication platforms, whereas someone else wants to market more T-shirts; some may be serving customers who are larger corporations, whereas others are retail stores; some of you work for companies with thousands of employees, and others are self-employed and working from a home office.

Regardless of where you work or what you do, the fundamental tenets of Taxi Terry are critical for your success. Here are two vital keys to your success:

1. Learn the tenet and understand the guiding principles behind it.
2. Adapt the tenet to your specific situation and adopt it as a practice in your work.

The important point to remember is that you, regardless of your position within the organization, can become an even more influential professional and can do so in your current job, right where you are, right now.

You can enjoy your work more than you currently do. You can earn more money for yourself and deliver more profit to your organization. Perhaps most important, you can have a powerful impact on the customers you serve and the people with whom you work, and you can become an extraordinary example for the lives of those you love and seek to inspire in your personal life.

How do I know you can do this? There are two primary reasons.

First, let me share the experience of my father. He didn't grow up in the greatest circumstances; he was raised in a family with 11 other siblings during a time of great financial hardship. He was a truck driver, butcher, and small-town grocery store owner in his career, yet I never heard Dad say he was, for example, “*just* a meat cutter” at any time. His approach, dedication, and passion continue to inspire everything I do in my life and work.

However, I do not want to give you the impression as we begin our journey in this book that I'm one of those “only do what you love for work” or “make a living at your passion” authors. I do believe your job and your life become easier if you love what you do; however, I also firmly believe that this approach has been incorrectly and inaccurately advised to an astounding degree.

I absolutely love the Indianapolis Colts. When they are playing a game, the world shuts down for me and everything revolves around what they're doing on the football field. I'm fanatical about their games and revel in their success as one of their supporters. I am passionate about the Colts; however, regardless of my degree of fervor, I will never, ever be a member of the team and make my living playing the game along with them.

You see, passion isn't the sole requirement for successful execution of the responsibilities of a job. There are others that are just as critical.

It's akin to those folks who read the book *The Secret* and learn about what they term the law of attraction. Then those readers sit on their tails, thinking intensely about becoming wealthy and hoping to attract riches into their lives. It never—yes, I mean *never*—works.

Think about it: even those who have been the most fortunate in attaining wealth—such as the winners of the multistate lottery game known as Powerball—had to get up, go out, and purchase a ticket for the game. It's not as if they were reclining at home, no Quick Picks in hand, and someone knocked on the door and handed them \$200 million.

Passion without effort equals *failure*.

In addition to the element of passion, there is another aspect you should consider.

One of the most fortunate circumstances in my past occurred during my teenage years, when I worked at the local radio station in a nearby town: WMPI radio in Scottsburg, Indiana. A high school friend of the station's manager was a member of a gospel quartet that was singing in various high school auditoriums and churches around the country. On multiple occasions my boss booked his friend's group to play concerts for our station, and I was asked to emcee. The group was known then—and now—as the Oak Ridge Boys.

William Lee Golden—childhood buddy of my boss—became my friend as well and remains so to this day. And I am honored that I can count the other Oak Ridge Boys—Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, and Richard Sterban, as well as their road manager, Darrick Kinslow—among my closest compadres.

Even now, when I go see the Oak Ridge Boys perform in concert, I am still thrilled by the passion that they continue to bring to their music four decades after that first concert of theirs that I had the pleasure of attending. However, the last thing I would want to see, especially from longtime friends of mine, would be passionate performers who could not carry a tune.

The Oaks are damn fine singers—individually and collectively. They continue to sound fantastic—and they had better continue to do that if they want to continue to pack concert halls around the world.

Regardless of their passion, the Oak Ridge Boys must deliver a significant degree of performing skill at their concerts in order to thrill their audiences. The same is true with Taxi Terry. As you read the story of the cab driver that follows, please remember that if my cabbie didn't have the skill to drive his taxi or didn't possess the knowledge or ability to deliver me to my destination, all the passion in the world would not create a highly engaged customer.

Passion for what you do is a critical element.

However, it is not the only element required for success.

Can you make the effort required to improve at your job? Of course. Can you learn and develop the skills required to improve at your job? Of course.

In fact, the questions for you should be, “*Will you* make the effort required to improve?” and “*Will you* learn and develop the skills?”

If you can answer these questions in the affirmative, you are on your way. You will never be “just an” *anything* ever again.

My experience with Taxi Terry is really an amazing story: and here is a portion of why I have personally found it so surprising. You see, I’ve been extraordinarily fortunate in my life to encounter many exceptional people. I’ve met the chairman of General Motors in the boardroom of its Detroit headquarters. At the White House, I was the main speaker for an event that the president of the United States attended. I have had the honor and privilege of addressing the world’s finest corporations and their leaders as well as giving speeches for prestigious universities and top business schools.

Yet seven of the most important tenets I have ever observed about business, success, customer service, and creating distinction came from the driver of a cab in which I was riding several years ago.

Certainly, he didn’t classify them into seven specific points, and I doubt that he called each one a tenet—which is defined as a belief or principle that you hold as being vitally important even to the point of its being the moral code by which you operate your business or focus your life.

However, everything he did served to display the primary qualities that I find are critically important for every individual—no matter what you do, regardless of where you work—if you want to be better at what you do and grow who you are.

He combined his passion with effort and skill to create distinction in his job and in his life. In addition—and this is a critical aspect—*all* of his elements for greater success and delivering an Ultimate Customer Experience are easily available to you.

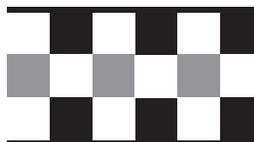
It’s the story of Taxi Terry.

THE FOURTH TENET

Think Logically and Then Act Creatively and Consistently.

CHAPTER

5



Dr. Charles Jarvis was often called “America’s Painless Dentist,” and with good reason. After about 12 years building his practice, he decided to forgo his work on molars and dentures in San Marcos, Texas, and become a humorist. For three decades he enthralled audiences across the nation with his special brand of insight.¹

As a young man, I attended one of his talks. I’ll never forget Jarvis asking members of the crowd to “raise your hand if you believe you possess common sense.” Dutifully, like just about everyone else in the crowd, I held my hand aloft.

“Of course you do!” he exclaimed. “There is lots of common sense in this crowd, in this state, in this nation. And, do you know why there is so much common sense around? Because people don’t *use* much of it!” All of us in the audience started to laugh.

Dr. Jarvis was on a roll. “Yep,” he said in his Texas twang, “you see it all the time. You’ll ask yourself, ‘Now, why did I do something stupid like that?’ Here’s the reason *why*—evidently you’re afraid that if you use your common sense . . . why, sooner or later, you might just *run out of it*!”

I'll wager that you see it all the time: customers, whether external or internal, have a way of doing and saying things that often leave us scratching our heads in disbelief.

There are several websites that collect stories of some of the ridiculous and illogical things that customers say. My favorite is Notalwaysright.com, obviously so named because they believe the customer is not always right.

For example, here's one of my favorites: a call to the reservations center of a major airline:

Caller: I want to book a flight from here to LA.

Me: From where?

Caller: From here.

Me: What city are you in?

Caller: Same as you.

Me: I'm in Baltimore. Is that where you are?

Caller: No. Can't you tell?

Me: I have no way of knowing. Just tell me what city you'd like to depart; I can look up flights.

Caller: If you don't know where I am, what good are you? *Click*²

Chances are that if you spend much time with external customers, you have plenty of stories about your industry that are similar to that one.

Those examples of illogical behavior aren't limited solely to customers who are external to the organization, are they? Occasionally, we wonder what the people with whom we work—our internal customers—are thinking.

I liked this one from StupidCoWorkers.com:

Coworker on phone: Hold on a minute. [Presses "hold," then says to Team Leader], John is on the phone and needs to talk to you.

Team Leader: Tell him I'm at lunch.

Coworker: [back on phone] Hi, he says to tell you that he's at lunch.

Team Leader: [rage in eyes]

Coworker: Whaaaaat?³

As you read this next Taxi Terry tenet, which requires logical thinking, you may be saying to yourself, "I understand why this is important, and I do think logically. It's those knuckleheads I have to deal with who are causing all the trouble."

You may be right. However, one of the most fascinating aspects to me when it comes to this topic of logical thinking and acting with common sense is this: almost every person I've asked—out of the million or so who have attended one of my programs over the years—says that he or she thinks and behaves rationally.

In other words, it seems to always be the other guy—or the other organization—not thinking straight.

Here is an important point: People almost always behave logically—from their point of view.

My wife will come home loaded down with shopping bags from purchases at the mall. I go crazy. "How could you spend all that money?" I ask desperately.

She smiles sweetly, holds the bags higher, and announces, "I saved us *so* much money today."

"How?" I ask, perplexed.

Of course, she replies confidently, "I bought all of this *on sale!*"

Now for the critical question: Which one of us is right?

When I ask this question at seminars, men typically shout, "*You* are!" Women jump to their feet to declare, "*She* is!"

The answer is that we *both* are from our own individual, respective, logical points of view.

As the person in our family in charge of the budget, I am logical and correct to be highly concerned about expenditures. As the person with most of

the responsibility for buying clothes and school supplies for the children, she naturally looks for savings on her purchases.

For me, it is entirely correct to get emotional about how much she is spending. For her, it is entirely correct to get emotional about how much she is saving.

In other words, for one of us to appear irrational to the other is totally logical.

Therefore, I'd like to suggest a slight amendment in the way you understand this tenet, which states, "Think logically and then act creatively and consistently." You will be better served if you consider it in this manner:

Think logically from the customer's point of view; then act creatively and consistently to deliver what is of value from the customer's perspective.

There is a three-step process to accomplish the goal expressed in the tenet, and my bet is that it will seem very familiar to you. It's the same way in which you connect with individuals of significance in your personal life. Perhaps you haven't thought of it in this manner: you didn't clinically break down the process of getting acquainted and dating someone who became a significant other, life partner, or spouse into three steps, for example.

However, it's always important to keep reminding ourselves that as we have discussed in this book, customers are people just like us. Therefore, the behaviors and emotions we have noticed others display in our personal lives are identical to the behaviors and emotions we will see them display in our professional relationships.

The three steps are

1. Align
2. Engage
3. Commit

Align

Why would customers do business with you? There has to be a fundamental reason or they would be staying at home or at least spending their money elsewhere. What need drives them to look at your organization as an option? What motivates them to make the effort to engage with you?

Once you know the answer to those questions, you can begin the process of alignment.

I've often heard it said that in people's personal lives opposites attract. Over my years of observing as well as being involved in personal relationships, my conclusion is that although opposites may attract, such relationships often have a difficult time enduring.

We tend to associate most with people we perceive to be like us. Personal relationships flourish when there are common areas of interest. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying you have to enjoy everything your partner appreciates or vice versa. It's that our common interests, values, and desires pull us together.

When you align your thinking with another person's, you begin to appreciate and understand that person more deeply. I am not suggesting that you have to adopt the other person's choices or beliefs; instead, I am strongly recommending that to connect emotionally with another person, you must at least temporarily be able to approximately think as that person thinks, choose as he or she chooses, and feel as he or she feels.

It would not be overreaching to suggest that this simple act is at the basis of many of the world's problems and has been for centuries. Because of our unwillingness or inability to even temporarily align our thinking with those of another religion, ethnic background, culture, or national diversity, we act and communicate in a way others with different experiences fail to comprehend.

This reinforces our earlier and critical point: people rarely behave illogically. People almost always behave logically—from their point of view.

The fundamentally important aspect here is illustrated in the story of my wife's shopping trip: if she seeks to influence my logic and my emotions, she must first align with my point of view and communicate with me on that

basis. Simply insisting that she saved us money because the items she purchased were discounted won't persuade me.

However, once she begins to communicate from my logical perspective—"Honey, I know you are worried about our finances. These are items you have been thorough enough to have already considered, and I was able to spend less than we anticipated for items we were going to need to acquire anyway."—she has won the day.

It doesn't mean she has to change her beliefs. It just means that to be effective at the next stage—engage—she needs to align her thinking to a point where I feel we are connected.

Engage

Note that my wife won the day when she aligned and then engaged. What good would it do for her to align—to make the effort to understand my logic—and then just keep it all to herself?

Engaging without aligning wouldn't have accomplished what she desired.

If she had said, "You don't understand. The sale was 50 percent off! It's half of what it normally would have been," it would not have engaged me, because we wouldn't have been aligned. The problem is that without the alignment, I would have been hearing, "You don't understand. Because it was on sale, I spent money I didn't need to spend, and because it was half off, I bought twice as much."

In today's world of marketing, there is a significant amount of discussion about the term *customer engagement*: what it means and how to measure it. For our purpose here in learning the tenets of Taxi Terry and creating an Ultimate Customer Experience for our external and internal customers, the word *engagement* has a precise meaning: the effort you are making to initiate and sustain an aligned interaction with customers.

People respond more enthusiastically and productively when they are engaged. According to an article in the June 2007 issue of *CFO* magazine, the electronic retailer Best Buy initiated research that revealed that "where

employee engagement increases by 0.1 [on a 5-point scale], [the store] experiences a \$100,000 increase in annual sales.”⁴

If you can increase sales by enhancing the engagement of your internal customers, why aren't you working right now to create a team of Taxi Terrys to deliver Ultimate Internal Customer Experiences so that they in turn create Ultimate External Customer Experiences, enhancing sales, retention, and referrals and growing your organization?

Commit

Let's say you coach young kids on a team in a local sports league. You align with them because you understand a bit about the challenges they are facing as they learn a sport and compete with other teams. You engage them as you call each one by his or her name, share a smile and some encouragement, and attempt to keep their spirits high.

Every young person on the team is pretty terrific. However, one of the kids is your daughter. To you, which person on the team is the most special?

Pretty obvious, right? Although you are aligned and engaged with every young person, you have a commitment to your own child that runs deeper than words can describe. That commitment makes all the difference.

To be blunt, there is no way you will ever possess a commitment to a customer as strong as your bond with your offspring (nor should you). However, this example should illustrate that when there is true commitment, there is additional—and significant—emotional intensity.

In our personal lives, we have acquaintances, friends, and true commitments. With individuals with whom we have shared commitments—whether romantic or platonic—we develop a higher level of concentration on making certain we are contributing to their well-being in a positive, productive manner.

It's a similar phenomenon when we exhibit a commitment to our customers. We simply develop and display a higher level of concentration and

intensity in regard to creating an experience that contributes to their personal and professional success.

If you are willing to align your thinking with your customers' logical point of view, engage them in a dialogue regarding their perspective, and commit to deal with them by intensely focusing on their needs, you've met the first standard of this tenet.

However, as with many aspects of business and life, there are exceptions.

There is nothing here about aligning with another's point of view that should make you believe that you have to sacrifice your own beliefs. F. Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."⁵ You don't have to change your beliefs; just use your first-rate intelligence to hold the customer's point of view in your mind.

Along a similar line, there is nothing in this material about engaging and committing that should imply that any conversation with any customer is ever permitted to cross a line of ethical behavior and good manners. Taxi Terry is a perfect example to me of the Ultimate Customer Experience, yet I promise that if a customer in his backseat crossed the line of reasonable behavior, Terry would have the offender's butt out of the taxi and on the sidewalk even after promising the best cab ride of his or her life. The fact that you're engaging at a higher level with the customer doesn't mean that you have to put up with anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Now that we have repositioned our logical thinking to the perspective of the customer through the process of align, engage, commit, we have to deliver to the customer what he or she desires in a creative and consistent manner to attain the goals of this tenet. Let's examine how we can become both unique and uniquely reliable.

Act Creatively

If you've read my previous books, either *Collapse of Distinction* or its revised edition, *Create Distinction*, you are aware that I devoted major sections of

those works to a study of how businesses must develop the strategies required to enhance their creative output. To get you up to speed if you haven't read them and as a review for those who have, here are some ideas on the importance of acting creatively. For our purposes here, as opposed to the target readers of those books, let's focus our attention on expanding our creativity for internal and external customers.

What makes you different? Obviously, if we're going to act creatively, that implies that we cannot do exactly the same things for our external customers that our competitors do or that our internal customers are accustomed to seeing all the time.

After I chatted with the person sitting next to me on a recent flight, she gave me her business card at the end of our conversation.

I was interested in her organization because she was involved in a business very similar to the one my late wife, Sheri, worked in for many years. Going online to the website that was on her business card, I noted something very striking: The page touted the headline "What Makes Us Different."

Naturally, as I'm fascinated by what makes one company or department stand out from the competition, I read the bullet points detailing what they believed separated them from the others in their industry. Here are their four points and my commentary after each one:

1. *Experience* (Is the competition totally staffed with rookies who have no background?)
2. *Depth of knowledge* (You're asserting that the competition is dumber than you are, right?)
3. *A company founded by innovative entrepreneurs* (Since by definition the competition had to be founded by entrepreneurs, too, I guess those organizations must have been started by *traditional* entrepreneurs?)

4. *Depth in multiple market segments* (As my wife said the same thing about the company where she worked in the late 1990s, I promise you this is nothing new.)

None of these points would be interpreted by savvy prospects or clients to suggest that the company was creative or different in any manner. These points would be required, however, to make that company relevant in the hypercompetitive industry in which it plays.

However, from a client's or prospect's perspective, there is absolutely nothing here that is creative enough that it would truly qualify to be listed under the heading "What Makes Us Different." In other words, the company has clearly displayed that it doesn't know what would make its customers perceive it as one that acts creatively and delivers service that is superior to that of the competition. If you don't understand that, why wouldn't a prospect also surmise that you might not get other salient aspects of doing business together?

This obviously raises the question: What should my seat mate's company do?

As you might imagine, I would suggest that they can advance their cause to a significant degree with this tenet—as we've stated, one should start by thinking logically from the customer's perspective—and then really get creative.

Noncreative, nondistinctive organizations and professionals frequently find themselves in difficulties that are challenging to resolve, as proved by one of my favorite television programs, *Restaurant Impossible* on the Food Network. The show is hosted by the extraordinarily charismatic chef Robert Irvine, and its premise is that this highly successful restaurateur has two days and just \$10,000 to totally revamp a restaurant that is on the verge of failure.

Every episode I've seen, although it follows a format that is easy to identify after a couple viewings, has been totally compelling.

It begins with Robert describing a bit about the restaurant and then arriving on-site to meet with the owners. Oddly, in many episodes the owners

have a difficult time admitting that there is anything wrong with the menu and the management even though they're losing money, are about to go under, and have even requested Irvine's assistance. Robert confronts them with the facts about their impending failure.

Lesson 1: Denying the Problem Never Solves It

I've talked with everyone from CEOs to store managers who are blind to the challenges they face. They fail to think about how things appear from the customer's point of view and shy away from creative solutions and approaches. I've talked to some who honestly believe that the only solution is to cut the price.

The problem with these responses is that each of them denies the critical problem: they aren't creating experiences that are creative and compelling enough that customers naturally want to do business with them, and therefore they will never find the solution.

Next, Robert has the staff bring him the dishes that the restaurant normally serves to its customers, which he usually rips to shreds. Often, the restaurant owners are using frozen or canned food because it's easier to prepare, thus delivering an inferior product to the customers and simultaneously driving up the costs and overhead. In addition, on several episodes, the kitchen crew and owners have lacked the daily discipline to keep the kitchen clean and sanitary.

Lesson 2: Taking the Easy, Noncreative Way Out Can Drive Away Customers and Escalate the Cost of Production

Sure, price matching so that customers know they'll get the same price from you that they get from another retailer is one way to address a problem in sales. But what will that do to your margins? Could it mean that all you become is a showroom? In other words, if price matching is all you're known for, could a customer desiring assistance presume that qualified help won't be available from you?

Many times, the quickest, most traditional way to solve the problem ends up creating additional problems.

Robert then approaches the servers, seeking to create accountability and standards of performance. In several of the episodes, the wait staff will argue with Robert about their abilities. They frequently see themselves as being much better at their jobs than the reality of the situation and the finances of the business make blatantly obvious to the viewer.

Lesson 3: Often, Some People on Your Team Will Overvalue Their Creativity and Contribution and Undervalue the Negative Impact They Have on Customers

I'll wager that right now you have team members who have fantastic product knowledge that they cannot wait to elaborate on for your prospects and customers—and that they believe this information makes them extraordinarily special members of your organization.

I will also bet that some of them are driving the customers absolutely bonkers.

Those team members are delivering what they value and know but *not* what many of today's customers desire. Every employee becomes the chief executive officer of the Ultimate Customer Experience to the prospects and customers he or she connects with at your store. Are you certain they are delivering in a creative manner what the customer really wants? Do they—and you—truly realize the impact we all have on customer acquisition and retention?

Each episode of *Restaurant Impossible* concludes with the owners being brought into their newly designed restaurant, and they (and we) are stunned by what Robert's team has done with an investment of just \$10,000. A large crowd waits outside to be thrilled by the new menu Robert has planned, and it appears that the owners have had their business revitalized and are on their way to success.

Lesson 4: You Can Make Creative Improvements with a Smaller Financial Investment Than You Might Imagine If You Do It Smartly

Being creative and delivering the Ultimate Customer Experience doesn't mean that you have to break the bank. In fact, it probably does not require as large an investment as you may think.

When you search the Internet for what happens to these restaurants after Robert leaves, you'll find a few websites complaining that some of them close and go out of business after his departure. If you dig a little deeper into the subject, however, you'll find that in many cases the owners who fail have simply gone back to their bad, noncreative habits once the expert has departed.

Lesson 5: Over the Long Haul, It Won't Help to Bring in an Expert to Grow Your Business and Enhance Creativity and Then Go Back to Doing What You've Always Done

If you're going to become a Taxi Terry, you're going to have to do a few things differently. That doesn't mean you are just shuffling or rearranging; it means you are changing your approach and being more creative to establish the true connection with customers that you may have been lacking.

However, a problem I've noticed with many people is that when I start talking about acting creatively in their engagement with customers, they flinch a bit and say something like "That might be a great approach, but you see, I'm not very creative."

Especially in today's world—with 24/7 news channels, constant entertainment options via online companies such as Netflix and Hulu, movies available for instant download from your cable company and Apple TV, and a video about anything you can imagine available at any time on YouTube—we are surrounded as never before by creativity. Perhaps we assume that raises the pressure on folks like you and me to be just as excellent when we attempt to deliver innovative solutions for our customers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unlike our personal situation when we watch television or movies, our customers today, along with the vast majority of us, are facing a dearth of creative encounters. In fact, we are fairly bored with the way many companies treat us as we offer them our hard-earned money—organizationally and individually—in return for their goods or services. As I wrote in my book *Create Distinction: What to Do When “Great” Isn’t Good Enough to Grow Your Business*:

Over the past several years we have seen the homogenization of practically everything. The box I drive probably looks a lot like yours, no matter the nameplate. The big store where I shop almost certainly appears and feels a lot like yours, no matter the logo on the door, no matter the community where it is located.

If you cannot find it within you to become emotional, committed, engaged, and . . . yes . . . FERVENT about creating distinction, then you had better be prepared to take your place among that vast throng of the mediocre who are judged by their customers solely on the basis of *price*. As mentioned earlier, it is the singularly **worst** place to be in all of business. If you aren’t willing to create distinction for yourself in your profession—and for your organization in the marketplace—then prepare to take your seat there in the back, with the substantial swarm of the similar, where tedium reigns supreme.

You can’t stand out if you are the same as everyone else. You can’t become a Taxi Terry by driving your cab the same way that all the other cabbies in town do. You can’t create distinction without thinking—and *acting*—creatively.

How can you act more creatively?

Many years ago, when I first set a goal to become an author of business books, I knew that I was going to have to become more creative to succeed. I discovered that there are many terrific books on the subject of enhancing your creativity, such as my personal favorite, *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger von Oech (Creative Think Publishers, 1983). I strongly encourage you to discover your own favorites.

In addition, let me share four of the action steps that I take to enhance my ability to deliver creative solutions to my customers:

1. Get it down—now.
2. Ask, “What if . . . ?”
3. Have fun.
4. Pretend you are someone else.

Get It Down—Now

For many of us, it’s not that we don’t think creatively; it’s that when an idea springs into our thoughts, we don’t capture it. Therefore, we often catch ourselves saying, “Now what was that idea I had yesterday?” Perhaps this explains why we’ll point at the television or to a magazine when a new product is promoted and silently think, “Hey, *I* thought of that!” This also emphasizes an important point: to gain the reward, you have to take action on your creativity, not just think creatively.

I keep a notepad and pen by the bed so that if I wake up with a good idea, I can write it down and return to sleep knowing that I won’t have to worry about forgetting it in the morning. Every iPhone and Android device can easily record your thoughts and ideas. Use that function on your smartphone to be certain that the good ideas don’t get away.

Ask, “What if . . . ?”

My good friend and Speakers Roundtable colleague Mike Rayburn has an entire program based on that question. Mike employs his extraordinary talent as a guitar virtuoso (he’s played several times at Carnegie Hall) to dramatically display the potential impact from asking the simple question “what if?” An example would be “*What if* . . . the illustrious rock band AC/DC performed the words of Dr. Seuss’s legendary *Green Eggs and Ham*?”

Although that may sound outlandish at first, consider that, for example, Enterprise Rent-A-Car is now the largest company in its industry. That success is really based on one simple question: “*What if*. . . instead of making the customers come to us to acquire their rental vehicles, we picked them up?”

Herb Kelleher and Rollin King basically asked, “*What if*. . . we let people choose their own seats on the plane, told jokes, and had fun instead of doing it the way it has been done by the major airlines?” The end result, of course, was the creation of Southwest Airlines.

It won’t come naturally at first; however, if you practice asking yourself that question, it will most likely enhance your creative abilities.

You’d probably be amazed how many major breakthroughs in every industry and within specific departments and activities in every organization came about because someone asked those two critical words that stimulate our creativity: “*What if*. . . ?”

Have Fun

It’s difficult to be creative when you feel beaten down, broke, tired, sick, and ugly. We have all had those days, haven’t we? My guess is that there are more of them in store as well. However, if you want to be more creative, you can’t allow those days to dominate your existence; instead, you’ve got to have some fun.

By fun, I do not mean being frivolous. While we shouldn’t be solemn in our approach, we do need to be serious about the customer experiences we are creating.

However, undertaking enjoyable activities builds creativity in two major ways. First, the disconnection from the day-to-day commotion we normally endure frees us to consider more than just making certain that our to-do list gets completed.

Second, because our brains tend to seek patterns in our activity, a new undertaking may open our minds to thoughts we wouldn’t contemplate otherwise. For example, taking a cooking class may cause us to wonder what ingredients it would take to achieve a higher level of customer interaction. Or we might ask, How could we sweeten the experience of our internal customers

so that our employee retention is enhanced? Maybe we will ruminate on how we can add some spice to the office environment so that it is not so drab.

Having fun encourages the mind to skip barefoot through new pastures of thought and makes us more productive as a result.

Pretend You Are Someone Else

Jim Cathcart, a legendary motivator, sales trainer, and professional speaker, has a great line in his programs: “Ask yourself this question,” Jim encourages the audience. “How would the person I’d *like to become* handle the situation I’m currently facing?” Isn’t that brilliant? All of a sudden, you start making decisions that are based on what’s important instead of what’s urgent. You begin to respond to situations in a much more thoughtful and mature manner as a result of Jim’s question.

When it comes to creativity, there is a variation that will assist us. Ask yourself “How would” and then insert the name of someone you admire, your manager, or someone else you respect in the business world before finishing with “creatively enhance this situation?”

You may find yourself asking, for example, “How would Steve Jobs have handled our product development problem?” or “How would Steve Martin make our people more committed to this project?” Then make a list of some of the steps you think they would take if they were the ones facing your current challenge.

I have friends who envision a dialogue between two famous people and imagine they are debating each other on a particular issue. For example, if you own a dry cleaner and want to expand your business, imagining how Steve Jobs and Bill Gates would have argued with each other about the proper course to take may stimulate some original thinking from you on the subject.

While you may not want to ask yourself how Tony Soprano would’ve handled a problem employee, putting yourself into the mindset of a leader who you admire is a terrific tool to help you fuel your creativity.

These four approaches can help you think more creatively. However, as we mentioned earlier, it’s not enough to just think creatively; you must act creatively as well. Don’t invalidate your innovative ideas with inaction.

Nike has never said, “Just think about it.” The key is to “just do it.”

There are many examples of artists who disparage consistent performance. For example, Oscar Wilde wrote, “Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative.”⁶

Taxi Terry is a wonderfully creative example.

However, his business would fail if I and his hundreds of other clients could not be certain that he would be at the airport for the pickup. The world is filled with stories of creative types who were so woefully disorganized and unable to consistently apply their ideas that they went belly up.

I prefer a more contemporary example: that of one of my favorite comedians, Louis C.K. “I’ve learned from experience that if you work harder at it, and apply more energy and time to it, and more consistency,” he wrote, “you get a better result.”⁷

Even in the highly creative field of show business, creativity alone won’t make you a success.

On a hectic road trip filled with major presentations, I had a Sunday afternoon all to myself, alone in Manhattan. Taking a walk down one of the multitude of busy streets in the Broadway area, I passed the marquee of the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre. It had the name of an actor I had always dreamed of seeing in person but never imagined the opportunity would be realized: Al Pacino.

Not only was Pacino playing in that very theater on that very afternoon, he was also starring in one of my favorite plays: David Mamet’s brilliant *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

Walking up to the box office window, I naturally assumed that this and every other performance was sold out. However, an opportunity like this probably would not come my way again, and so I had to inquire. Standing behind two couples at the ticket window, I waited my turn. Seeing their discouragement as they turned to walk away, shaking their heads, I didn’t figure the odds were in my favor.

“Excuse me, sir,” I began. “I just had to inquire if there were any tickets available for this afternoon’s matinee.”

Peering over reading glasses, the old man gruffly asked, “You want *one*?”

“Yes, sir,” I responded. “Just me.”

“You’re in luck. I have one ticket.”

I would have been happy with any ticket; imagine my thrill upon receiving a tenth-row-center seat for the performance.

Alfredo James Pacino is quite obviously an acting legend. In addition to an Oscar for best actor, he’s won two Tony awards, two Emmy awards, and four Golden Globes.⁸ One solitary performance on a single Sunday afternoon to the audience in a small theater would not affect his reputation in the slightest.

Yet from the opening scene until the moment the curtain closed while the audience loudly cheered, Pacino’s performance was electric. I watched in awe at his remarkable delivery and marveled at his extraordinary consistency.

Pacino delivered that exceptional level of performance throughout the production—every show, every time. If you were sitting in the audience, would you want him to perform at any other level? As another Tony winner, Sir Jim Dale, said about the craft, “Good acting is consistency of performance.”

What if after you had stood in line and were breathlessly awaiting the opportunity to see such a master, Pacino sauntered onto the stage, took a deep breath, and said in his unique style, “Folks . . . I ain’t *feelin’* it tonight! Sorry. Just gonna say the lines, man. Just *sayin’* the lines.”

Would you jump up and cheer? Would you shout, “No prob there, Al. You’ve earned it!” No! You would be stunned and thoroughly disappointed.

That is the point: when *we* are the customer, we expect and demand a reliable performance after we’ve invested our time, money, and effort. You can even be an incomparable artist such as Al Pacino, and we still expect you to hit the mark and consistently deliver excellence.

The same principle is true for you. This tenet states that you have to act creatively and *consistently*.

To attain a higher level of consistency, here are six steps you can take:

1. Set a goal.
2. Decide about the required amount of investment.

3. Develop a calendar.
4. Select an accountability partner.
5. Create momentum.
6. Reward yourself.

Set a Goal

It's really difficult to consistently perform when there are no clear objectives regarding the standards or requirements of your performance. Perhaps this is the primary reason some people aren't consistent: they don't know what's expected or the repetition with no goal line in sight becomes excruciatingly boring, and so their performance erodes.

Goals have three critical properties. They should be

- Specific
- Realistic
- Written

Specific

It's impossible to be consistent when your goal is nonspecific. For example, I believe it's not a good plan to have a goal to be happy. Happiness is the residual benefit of a continual progression toward a worthy goal.

The more precise you can make your goal, the greater the probability that you'll achieve it. For example, I set a goal to write the book you're reading right now. That's pretty specific; I'll know I've attained the goal when I complete this manuscript. However, just setting the specific goal isn't nearly enough; next, I have to be specific about other aspects, such as the length of the book and the date of completion and whether my publisher approves its content.

Unlike the open-ended questions we discussed in Chapter 4, the key ingredient here is to be able to ask yourself if you know exactly when you will have attained the entire goal or some of the steps associated with it. If you can answer yes or no at each point, you have a specific goal.

Realistic

Unlike some motivational speakers, I don't believe that you can do anything as long as you want it badly enough. No matter how much I channel a burning desire to be the starting center for the Indiana Pacers or the winning jockey at the Kentucky Derby, neither will become an element in my future.

In the long run, an unrealistic goal will neither motivate you nor inspire you toward highly consistent behavior. Instead, sooner or later you'll become frustrated.

However, as I have been teaching audiences for many years, most of us do not set unrealistic goals. Instead, we establish unrealistic time frames.

In our world of instant gratification, it seems that we want everything to be resolved immediately. Perhaps part of this springs from all the years we've watched everything from murder mysteries to world wars successfully summarized and resolved in only an hour on television. When we've observed that for decades, why should we have to work hard and deliver a consistent performance over an extended period to please our internal and external customers?

If you want to enhance your consistent performance, give your specific goal a realistic time frame for achievement.

Written

If you keep your goals locked in your head, then by our definition here, you do not have a goal. Instead, you have a wish or a dream.

A written goal is your contract with yourself for consistent performance and higher achievement. It's not something that you are required to share with others, although that's a personal choice and you certainly can if you want to. Transcribing your goal is a strategic decision to put it in writing because for some reason, when we write it down, a goal seems more definite.

Decide about the Required Amount of Investment

If you want to be more consistent in your performance, you have to make investments. I'm not suggesting that you have to spend money, although you may decide to invest in tools or technology that improves your personal efficiency. You will, however, be required to invest time, effort, intellect, and more.

Depending on the goal and on your professional and personal preferences, you are going to have to decide about your investment level. What you may find to be an acceptable level of investment, I may decide is too demanding.

You will be consistent over an extended period only when you are investing at a level to which you are willing to commit. If you've ever felt that an organization or an individual was taking advantage of you, it probably involved making a consistent contribution at a level you weren't prepared to invest.

You're better off at a comfortable level of investment for a longer period—as we covered in the segment on setting your goals—than you are trying to consistently maintain an uncomfortable effort, even if it takes a little less time.

Develop a Calendar

One uncomplicated method to enhance your consistency is to get a calendar and schedule your activities.

For our company, one area in which this activity has really helped is improving our efforts on social media. With the advent of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Foursquare, LinkedIn, blogging, and more, we were very irregular in the way we were using new media to connect with our clients and develop new contacts and friends. Developing a social media calendar has greatly enhanced our consistency—and results.

All we needed to do was create a calendar that said, for example, "We'll do a weekly YouTube video every Monday, which means that Scott needs to shoot the content on the preceding Thursday to allow for editing."

Here's another example: "We want to post five original tweets daily as well as five retweets of items we find interesting and want to share with our tens of thousands of followers." With the help of HootSuite, a web-based program that allows the user to schedule the postings around the timing the user determines in advance, we're able to consistently achieve our goals.

Notice as well how this synchronizes with our point about goal setting. We are specific in what we want to accomplish, we're realistic in terms of how much we're going to achieve as a result, and not only have we written the goal, we also write the specific action steps on our calendar. Whatever your desired outcome, this approach will work for you, too.

Select an Accountability Partner

Here is a step where I cannot cite research behind the principle explaining why it works; however, I can assure you that it does. Having a person who requires that you report on your activities to him or her will help you maintain consistent performance. You'll find that you will hold yourself more accountable if someone is going to be asking if you kept your word.

Here are three suggestions for selecting an accountability partner:

Have Specific, Predetermined Times to Touch Base

If you both agree that you'll speak, for example, every Tuesday at 3 p.m., it will become a ritual that you'll both schedule and uphold. If you are lackadaisical about your timing in contacting each other for some reason, you'll soon find that you're inconsistent in your efforts.

Challenge Each Other but Don't Condemn

Your commitment to each other is to hold each other accountable and to reassure and challenge each other to achieve higher levels of consistency and performance. It's not to overly criticize or condemn your accountability

partner. Be certain to keep your comments uplifting and encouraging. You can help your partner do a better job if you give him or her in advance insights on how he or she might inspire you to higher levels.

One financial service professional related to me that his accountability partner provided the challenge necessary by getting him to agree that if he didn't make 25 prospecting calls, he would contribute \$250 to Hillary Clinton's campaign. The financial advisor then said, "I do not like her politics or policies. That was motivation enough to move me to make all the calls!"

Be Willing to Give as Well as Receive

It's not just about accountability; it's also about partnership.

When you select an accountability partner, make certain that you've chosen someone from whom you can receive encouragement and that you can provide it for that person as well. There is a reciprocal nature to accountability; it does not flow in a single direction. You've got to be just as willing to hold someone accountable as you are willing to look for someone to keep you consistent in your performance.

Create Momentum

As a rabid sports fan, I can tell you that the expression "the Big Mo" has been around for ages. Play-by-play broadcasters as long as I can remember have loved describing what happens on the field or court when one team is able to change the momentum in a game from their opponents to themselves. This is important for a critical reason: having momentum evidently increases the likelihood of success. If it didn't, it would not be so important for the announcers to describe or for the team to try to seize.

Although I believe that sports analogies are frequently overused in business, this is an area where there is relevant application. Momentum is basically the force and power gained from movement. A train sitting still on the track won't affect a thing. When the train gets rolling, however, picking up

speed and moving rapidly—gaining and growing in force and power—imagine the impact it would have if it collided with another object.

As you strive for greater consistency, you'll find much the same thing. Building momentum is critical. If you have it, you'll find it easier to maintain consistency in customer relationships, and customers will tell their friends, do more business with you, and improve their engagement with you. As a result, your business grows and your momentum is enhanced even further. If you don't have momentum, it is admittedly difficult to initiate. (Try to envision the concentrated effort it takes to get that train started and moving down the track.)

This is not to imply that you haven't been working hard. However, for many of us, a lack of consistency is not the result of a lack of effort but of a lack of focus. To get the train moving, concentration is centered on the track: the specific target the train seeks to advance upon. If you don't have goals—from our previous point—that are precise and provide direction and focus, you're what Zig Ziglar used to call a "wandering generality instead of a meaningful specific."

You probably had a similar experience to mine: a boring class in school in which a teacher droned, "An object in motion tends to stay in motion and an object at rest tends to stay at rest." I never realized in my school years how significant a role that law of physics would play in business success and personal achievement.

If you procrastinate and delay, you'll never connect with customers. You can't be a Taxi Terry if you keep the car in the garage. As trite as it may sound, the key to creating momentum is simply to change from being at rest to being in motion. Once you get going, however, you'll realize that momentum builds upon itself: that's why it's easier to lead it than it is to launch it. Creating momentum can become a critical key in connecting with customers in the Taxi Terry manner.

Reward Yourself

One of my favorite business books of all time is my friend Dr. Michael LeBoeuf's *The Greatest Management Principle in the World* (Putnam, 1985).

Here's the principle that Dr. LeBoeuf says is the greatest in the world: "behavior rewarded is behavior repeated." Pretty simple, right? We get what we reward.

However, upon further examination, that's a lot more profound than it might first appear. For one thing, it means that we don't get what we *want*; rather, we get what we *reward*. This, of course, implies that we had better be very careful about what we reward with our customers, our colleagues, our kids, and ourselves.

Many times, I've seen people make extraordinary efforts to improve their consistency and performance—make headway toward their goals—and then almost inexplicably lose their momentum. I've realized that one of the major reasons is that they have failed to reward themselves for the success they are beginning to attain. Frequently, they'll reward their colleagues on their teams or make their customers feel like a million bucks but withhold any kind of personal compensation or incentive.

The facet that will hold the previous five points together is this: reward yourself for improvements in consistent performance, because behavior rewarded *is* behavior repeated.

Taxi Terry created the best cab ride of my life, in part because he approached his business—and my needs as a customer—very logically. Simultaneously, he created distinction from everyone else in the marketplace by delivering his service with extraordinary creativity and remarkable consistency.

Follow this approach and you too—no matter your position in the organization or industry in which you work—can deliver at Terry's level.

Taxi Terry Takeaway

Being both creative and consistent are critical factors in delivering an Ultimate Customer Experience.

- Think of a specific internal or external customer with whom you may have a communications problem. Write a specific action plan on how

you will attempt to first align, and then engage, and finally commit to improving the situation.

- Take just two minutes to consider some of the challenges you may be experiencing. Ask the question for each challenge, “Could a part of the problem be rooted in my denial to see the real issues here?” Then, answer why or why not.
- After you’ve selected your accountability partner, ask him or her to help you evaluate whether or not you have the “Big Mo” working in your favor—and how to initiate or maintain it.

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