

WHAT'S THE SECRET?

To Providing a
World-Class
Customer Experience

John R. DiJulius III



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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Preface](#)

[What's the Secret?](#)

[What Is Secret Service and Why Is It Secret?](#)

[Secret Service Terminology](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[I - The Customer Service Crisis](#)

[Chapter 1 - The Smoking Gun](#)

[In Denial](#)

[Perception Is Reality](#)

[Customer Service and Its Impact on Sales](#)

[Irrefutable Evidence](#)

[Stone Ages](#)

[Service Vision—To Be the Most Customer-Centric](#)

[Company in the World](#)

[Companies and the Customers Who Hate Them](#)

[Artificial Growth versus True Growth](#)

[Making Price Less Relevant](#)

[When the Brand's Message Contradicts the Customer's](#)

[Experience](#)

[Customer Satisfaction Is a Fortune Teller](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[It Is Time to Either Get on, Get off, or Get Run over](#)

Notes

Chapter 2 - The State of Service

The Customer Service Crisis

Return on Hassle

The Bar Has Been Set

Cracking the Code

The Customer Service Revolution

The Experience Formula

Get over It!

Customer Rage

Customer Service Is Not Just about People

It's All about Service

Notes

Chapter 3 - World-Class Service Sins

Lack of Service Aptitude

Decline in People Skills

Inability to Connect Employees and Jobs to Success

Poor Hiring Standards

Lack of Ongoing Experiential Training

Not Letting Employees Have Input on Systems

Failure to Implement and Execute Consistently

Lack of a Strong Employee Culture

Lack of Measurements and Accountability

Focus on Artificial Growth

Service Blunder: An Example

World-Class in Action

Experiential Reports

Notes

Chapter 4 - Service Aptitude Level

[What's the Real Service Aptitude Level of Your Company?](#)

[Company Service Aptitude Test](#)

[Recommended Action Plan](#)

[Notes](#)

[II - The Customer Service Revolution](#)

[X Commandments for Providing a World-Class Customer Experience](#)

[Chapter 5 - Commandment I: Service Vision](#)

[Creating a Successful Service Vision](#)

[Disney's Service Vision](#)

[How to Create a Service Vision](#)

[Creating a Service Brand Promise](#)

[How Inspirational Are Your Service Brand Promises?](#)

[Is It Expensive Coffee—or Inexpensive Rent?](#)

[What Is Your Company's Priceless?](#)

[A Few of My Favorite "isms"](#)

[Personal Service Brand Promises](#)

[Marketing Your Service Vision](#)

[What We Do Today Impacts Our Customers' Lives](#)

[Everyone Plays a Part in the Success of the Service](#)

[Vision](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 6 - Commandment II: Creating a World-Class Internal Culture](#)

[Why People Leave](#)

[Disney's Approach to People Management](#)

[Build the Culture and the Customers Will Come](#)

Notes

Chapter 7 - Commandment III: Nonnegotiable Experiential Standards

Experience Tax

Teacher Becomes the Student

The Six Components of a Customer's Experience

Task Focused versus Customer Focused

Focusing More on What Drives Customer Satisfaction

World-Class Service Is Not Restricted to Upscale

Businesses

Notes

Chapter 8 - Commandment IV: Secret Service Systems

Brief Review

Giving a Customer a Memorable Experience

If You Know It, Use It

Distinguish New from Returning Customers

Secret Service Lawyers

Guestology

Secret Service for Retailer

Whose Experience Is It?

Secret Service Case Study: The Melting Pot Restaurants

Peripheral Vision

Notes

Chapter 9 - Commandment V: Training to Provide a World-Class Customer Experience

Hard-To-Soft Training Ratio

Shadow Training Is a Shadow of What You Need

Customer Experience Promise

Systems and Processes That Remove Variation in the Customer's Experience

Million Dollar Keynote Presentation

Only Companies That "Get it"—Want It

A Smile Is Rare Today

Notes

Chapter 10 - Commandment VI: Implementation and Execution

Consistency and Continuity

Guillotine Filtering System

Manage the Experience

Notes

Chapter 11 - Commandment VII: Zero Risk

Don't Ask If You Don't Want to Know

Fine or Okay Is Unacceptable

Management Service Recovery Training

How Accessible Are You?

Problem Solved = Loyalty

Service Recovery Quiz

Silence Is Not Always Golden

Notes

Chapter 12 - Commandment VIII: Creating an Above-and-Beyond Culture

Creating Loyal Customers

Above and Beyond Is a Matter of Service Aptitude

The Answer's Yes . . . What's the Question?

Anticipating and Delivering on Your Customer's Needs

Become a Storytelling Company

Train and Test for Above-and-Beyond Opportunities

[Customer Service Revolution](#)
[Being a Daymaker](#)
[Notes](#)

[Chapter 13 - Commandment IX: Measuring Your Customer's Experience](#)

[Don't Try This at Home](#)
[Why Measure Customer Satisfaction?](#)
[The Enemy of "Great" Is "Good Enough"](#)
[Five Things Learned from Talking to 100 Million People](#)
[Measurement Can Prevent Costly Mistakes](#)
[Word of Mouth Is Much Louder Today](#)
[Service Recovery](#)
[Is Customer Engagement Overrated?](#)
[What Gets Measured Gets Managed](#)
[The Ultimate Question](#)
[Sport Clips](#)
[Closing Ratio](#)
[Can't Be All Things to All People](#)
[Notes](#)

[Chapter 14 - Commandment X: World-Class Leadership](#)

[Guess Who](#)
[Habits of World-Class Leaders](#)
[Chief Visionary Officer](#)
[Secret Service at Home](#)
[Daily Journals](#)
[Blocking Off the Calendar](#)

[Index](#)

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To what matters most in the world to me—
my family: Stacy my wife and
my three sons (and best buddies),
Johnni IV, Cal, and Bo.

Nothing would have been possible or worthwhile
without your love and support.

Thank you for the honor to be known as
your husband and father.

Preface

What's the Secret?

- What's the Secret to why good customer service is so hard to find today?
- What's the Secret to why is it so hard to find employees who know how to deliver it?
- What 's the Secret to why companies don't train their people better?
- What's the Secret to why companies don't see the value in providing good customer service?

The next time you are with your professional peers and you overhear a conversation about *Secret Service*, do not immediately start sharing your knowledge of the CIA and the department responsible for protecting the president of the United States. Chances are that is not the *Secret Service* they are referring to.

Although sales for my previous book, *Secret Service: Hidden Systems That Deliver Unforgettable Customer Service* (AMACOM, 2003), have been remarkable, and hundreds of businesses across the world have implemented these systems, the term *Secret Service* still can be confusing to some.

Before you read this book, it is imperative you truly understand the meaning of *Secret Service* as it relates to helping your organization become a world-class customer service organization. Since the release of the book in 2003, the term *Secret Service* and what it represents has evolved and today, *Secret Service* is no longer just a book title or a term but a concept, a strategy that thousands of businesses

incorporate as their value proposition, to differentiate themselves from their competitors and make superior customer service their point of difference.

Out of curiosity, I looked up the definition of the Secret Service that operates under the government:

Secret Service: Governmental service of a secret nature charged chiefly with the protection of the president, responsible for the collection, analysis, and appropriate dissemination of intelligence.

Absolutely nothing to do with my version of Secret Service, as it relates to customer service, right? Actually, by substituting just three words, it fits my meaning of *Secret Service* perfectly:

Secret Service: Customer service of a secret nature charged chiefly with the protection of the brand, responsible for the collection, analysis, and appropriate dissemination of customer intelligence.

What Is *Secret Service* and Why Is It Secret?

Secret Service uses hidden systems to deliver unforgettable customer service. These systems obtain customer intelligence and utilize it to personalize the customer's experience, leaving the customer to ask themselves:

"How'd they do that?"

"How'd they know that?"

Secret Service employs behind-the-scenes systems that employees use to anticipate and deliver on the unexpressed needs of the customer, by using a system of *silent cues*, *visual triggers*, and *visual aids*.

Customer intelligence is customer data (i.e., buying habits, purchasing history, referrals, personal preferences, where they live, or work) that fuels secret service.

Secret Service systems allow the front-line employees, of your organization to consistently create a memorable experience through:

- Engaging the customer.
- Personalizing their experience.
- Remembering their preferences.
- Distinguishing between new, returning, and VIP customers.
- Anticipating and delivering on their unexpressed needs.

As a result of providing *Secret Service*, companies:

- Create stronger relationships with their customers.
- Build emotional capital and brand equity with their customers.
- Turn their customers into brand evangelists.
- Make price less relevant to their customers.

To effectively deliver Secret Service, your employees need to act as detectives by collecting customer intelligence and then using silent cues that alert their coworkers and allow them to personalize the customer's experience.

It should be more obvious now why it is called Secret Service, it has:

- Hidden systems
- Customer intelligence
- Silent cues
- Visual triggers
- Detectives

After seeing a few examples of Secret Service actions, you will quickly realize why it can make your company a world-

class (secret) service organization.

Secret Service systems should not add cost or complexity to your organization. Secret Service systems are what we call low-hanging fruit; they must meet the following criteria:

1. Low or no cost;
2. Simple to execute consistently; and
3. Make an immediate impact on the customer.

The following are simple examples of how easy, yet powerful Secret Service systems can allow companies to create memorable experiences:

- *Distinguishing between new and returning customers:* This Secret Service system identifies new from existing customers. For instance at John Robert's Spa, returning customers are draped in black capes for haircuts, and new customers are draped in white capes. Every team member throughout the salon knows this fact and can address our guests accordingly. Thus, the color of the cape is the *silent cue* and *visual trigger*.
- *Anticipating and delivering on customers' unexpressed needs:* A customer purchases a gift card for his spouse for Valentine's Day and the receptionist pulls out several Valentine's Day cards and offers him one to give with the gift card to save him a trip to another store.
- *Personalizing the customer's experience:* In the restaurant industry, by simply asking the question, "What's the occasion?" at the time of reservation, you can trigger a multitude of responses: We are celebrating a promotion, a graduation, an engagement, an anniversary, a reunion. When the customer arrives, the greeter presents him with a special-occasion greeting card and several employees

congratulate the customer throughout their experience.

- *Remembering their preferences:* Another one of my favorite Secret Service systems is where a restaurant kept preprinted labels of their top VIP customers. Anytime they came in, their favorite bottle of wine would be waiting for them at their table, with a label on it that read: “From the Private Stock of Tom Smith.”

This book is more than a discussion of the problems and warm and fuzzy feel-good customer service stories. It contains the solutions, systems, and answers. It tells how the top customer service companies in the world execute world-class service consistently.

By executing Secret Service consistently, it is possible for your organization to *make price irrelevant*: Based on the experience they receive, customers feel your prices are an incredible value.

Secret Service is a strategy that thousands of businesses incorporate today as their value proposition, differentiating themselves from their competitors and making superior customer service their point of difference.

Because of the *Secret Service* systems we have put into place, we know our guest better than ever. What’s more, there is a greater sense of a “heroic cause” within our team. We are doing more than serving our guest; we are helping them enjoy life more in the company of people they care about.

—Bob Johnston, President, *The Melting Pot Restaurants*

We are all about Secret Service. Our clients think it is amazing what we deliver in our Haircut experience, but it is just a part of being a part of Sport Clips and following our system. Secret Service just validated

much of what Gordon Logan and Sport Clips has been doing over the past 13 years and most importantly helped us take it to the next level by engaging our whole organization. John's team was a great facilitator of this improvement process and Sport Clips is positioned to do even more in the years to come.

—Clete Brewer, President, Sport Clips

As Partner-in-Charge of client service at our firm, Secret Service is paramount. It is what allows us the opportunity to continue to serve our clients, build new relationships, and generate opportunities to assist new clients.

—Mike Trabert, Partner, Skoda Minotti

Secret Service Terminology

Above-and-Beyond Opportunities: Random acts of heroism providing legendary service to the customer.

Customer Experience Cycle (CEC): The traditional points of contact/interaction a customer will encounter when doing business with you.

Customer Intelligence: Customer data (i.e., buying habits, purchasing history, personal preferences).

Experiential Actions: A personal engaging experience delivered to the customer, by an employee that makes them say “WOW,” a delightful surprise that the majority of your competitors do not provide. It could be a standard or random (above and beyond) action. It is the reason why our customers return, refer others and become brand evangelists. Examples of experiential actions include using a customer’s name, remembering their preferences, or having their order ready before they placed it.

Nonnegotiable: Standards that team members absolutely must deliver, regardless of the circumstances.

Operational Actions: Actions that team members must execute to assist in the efficiency of the day-to-day transactions with our customers. Examples of operational

actions include cleanliness, dress code, inventory, and lighting. They are unnoticeable to customers and are not the reason customers return.

Secret Service: Hidden systems that deliver unforgettable customer service.

Service Aptitude: A person's ability to recognize opportunities to exceed customers' expectations, regardless of the circumstances.

Service Defects: Obstacles and challenges that can occur at any stage of the CEC and that can ruin the customer's experience.

Service Vision: The true underlying value of what your organization brings to your customers, that provides a meaningful purpose for your employees.

Stages: The individual contact/interaction points within the Customer Experience Cycle, such as a phone call, greeting, or checkout.

Zero Risk: A customer has no risk in doing business with your company because you have service recovery protocols. Regardless of any circumstances, in the end the customer knows your company will always make sure they are happy.

Acknowledgments

Many times, after you give so much toward something—more work, time, and energy than you originally thought—when you are finally done, it can feel a little anticlimatic. Not this time, I can easily say that there have not been too many projects in my life that required the amount of time, commitment, and sacrifice this book has. However, I am finally done, and it feels great. I have given this book everything I had and could not be more proud of the finished product.

What's the Secret? has truly been a labor of love that has taken me over five years to complete. It is the culmination of many years of research, exploring, and working with the top world-class customer service companies. Like any great endeavor, I could not have done this alone. I was blessed to be surrounded by an incredible group of people who have inspired me, supported me, and most of all believed in me.

This book would not have been possible without my leadership team in both my organizations, The Dijulius Group and John Robert's Spa. I am so blessed to have so many talented people who have dedicated their professional careers to my vision. People like my wife Stacy Dijulius, Artistic Director; Eric Hammond, Vice President of Operations; my brother Barry Dijulius, COO; my sister Kathy Cheyfitz, Director of Guest Care; and Denise Thompson, Chief Xperience Officer of The Dijulius Group, all lead my companies with so much passion that it has enabled me to focus on this book.

Thanks to all my team members at John Robert's Spa and The Dijulius Group, who daily live up to the heavy burden of being a world-class customer service organization.

I would also like to thank Service Management Group in Kansas City, Missouri, especially Jack Mackey, Vice President of Sales and Marketing and Andy Fromm, President and CEO, for being so generous in sharing all their time, expertise, and research, which provided me with significant data to support my findings. Also, Darlene Campagna and her team at Direct Opinions in Cleveland, Ohio, that also provided me with key customer measurement research, as well as helping The DiJulius Group in the development of the Company Service Aptitude Test (C-SAT).

Thanks to all the great world-class companies that have repeatedly hired me and my team at The DiJulius Group to help them continue to raise the bar for service excellence. I have to admit, I benefited as well by learning their (organizations like The Ritz-Carlton, The Melting Pot Restaurants, Nemaquin Woodlands Resort, Starbucks, Cameron Mitchell Restaurants, The Cheesecake Factory, Panera Bread, Sport Clips, Charming Shoppes, Progressive Insurance, Chick-fil-A, Westfield Insurance, Service Management Group, Lexus, Nordstrom, Hallmark Cards, Breakers Hotel, and Goodyear Tire) best practices, which in turn allowed me to produce this masterpiece.

I want to thank Heather Thitoff, Director of Training at Cameron Mitchell Restaurants and Melissa Gottlieb, Vice President of Sales at Smart Business Network magazine. They both have been a great resource, supporters of Secret Service, and performed the punishing task of reading and critiquing early versions of this book.

A special thank you to my mentors, who have not only been so generous in sharing their brilliance, but are people I proudly call good friends. People like Verne Harnish, founder of Entrepreneur's Organization, CEO of Gazelles, Inc., and author of *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits*; James Gilmore, coauthor of *Authenticity*; Hal Becker, author/speaker;

Fredrick Holzberger, CEO of Fredric's Corporation; and Charles Penzone, President of Charles Penzone Salons.

I also have to thank Matt Holt and his team at John Wiley & Sons who believed in this book.

Most of all, thanks to my family: my wife Stacy, and my sons Johnni, Cal, and Bo, who remained patient, supportive, and always believed in me.

I

The Customer Service Crisis

1

The Smoking Gun

Definitive proof of the return on investment in providing superior service

You can have a great product, but it takes world-class service to create brand loyalty.

Based on extensive research, interviews, and analysis of various businesses, The Dijulius Group has determined the following trends in levels of customer service:

Level	Description	Companies (%)
1	Unacceptable	12
2	Below average	29
3	Average	38
4	Above average	18
5	World class	3

According to this study, 41 percent of companies are operating at unacceptable (1) or below average (2) levels of customer service, while 38 percent of companies are delivering average customer service (3). If you total that up (1, 2, and 3) 79 percent of the companies provide a level of customer service which is average at best. Which leaves us

having a good customer experience about one-fifth of the time (level 4) and we only have an exceptional experience with 3 percent of the companies we deal with (level 5).

You can say what you want about who you (think you) are, but people believe what they experience.

—Jack Mackey, Vice President, Service Management Group

In Denial

Think about your business, what level of customer service does your company deliver? Now, from a customer's perspective, reconsider your answer. The sad truth is that the majority of businesses rank their customer service higher than their customers rank them. The following research reveals how much companies are in the dark about the level of service they are providing.

Bain & Company, a business consulting firm, surveyed customers of 362 companies and found:

- Only 8 percent of customers surveyed described their experience as superior.
- Yet, 80 percent of the companies surveyed believe that the service they provided was indeed superior.¹

How can 80 percent of the companies think they are providing superior service, but only 8 percent of their customers agree with them? Who's right? The customer!

These findings are very similar to those uncovered by The Dijulius Group. Thousands of companies have taken our Company Service Aptitude Test (C-SAT), which is a detailed, self-assessment survey that managers take to find out what level of customer service they deliver. The C-SAT has proven

to be an accurate indicator of the company's customer service level.

Prior to taking the test, participants are asked to rate their company.

Before beginning, please select which level you believe best describes your company's customer service:

Level 1 Unacceptable

Level 2 Below Average

Level 3 Average

Level 4 Above Average

Level 5 World Class

In this pretest question, approximately 53 percent of participants rate the quality of their service at one to two levels higher than the level determined by the C-SAT. You can take the C-SAT by visiting www.thedijuliusgroup.com/SAT. It is also discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Levels of Customer Service.

Perception Is Reality

The majority of companies don't realize the level of customer service they are delivering or that their own

standards for good customer service are considerably lower than their customer's standards.

Could *They* Be *Us*?

After I speak about how to improve customer service, several people line up to tell me their personal horror stories, offering me material for my next book. I constantly hear things like, "You wouldn't believe how bad *they* treated me." and "Listen to what *they* did." This begs the question: If all of us agree and nod our heads at how bad they are at customer service, then who are the *they*? The answer is: *They* are *us*! We all can't be the victims. We need to assess our own businesses and accept that there is a good chance we and our companies are contributing to the crisis in some way.

No one will argue that there is a customer service crisis and that the majority of businesses do not make customer service a priority in their hiring, training, or treatment of their customers. Why is that? The answer : Because providing excellent customer service is a lot of work. It means you have to have systems, processes, hiring standards, training, and service recovery protocols in place. It is much easier for an entrepreneur, who is very educated and skilled at his profession, to open a business, hire some people, and start operating. Many assume that providing customer service is common sense: Just take care of the customer. Most organizations make significant investment in customer service a very low priority and it is the first thing that is cut out of the budget when times get tough, not realizing the major impact it has on the bottom line.

Customer Service and Its Impact on Sales

Is an investment in customer service really worth it? How does the level of customer service a company delivers truly impact key drivers such as customer retention, sales, profit, cash flow, stock prices, employee turnover, and a company's vulnerability to fluctuations in the economy and third-party conditions (i.e., gasoline prices, housing market).

Customer Satisfaction and Stock Prices

In an article from the *American Management Association's Journal of Marketing*, January 2006, titled "Customer Satisfaction and Stock Prices: High Returns, Low Risk," author Claes Fornell asks the question, "Does an investment in customer satisfaction lead to excess returns?" The empirical evidence presented in the article suggests that the answer is yes!² Let me repeat that:

The empirical evidence suggests that an investment in customer satisfaction does lead to high returns at low risk.

Claes Fornell, is the director of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and a professor at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. ACSI is a leading indicator of consumer behavior, measuring the satisfaction of consumers across the U.S. economy. Extensive research proves that an increase or decrease in customer satisfaction, not only greatly impacts each individual organization, but has a significant impact on the future health of the economy.³

Equally amazing, the author's findings suggest that satisfied customers are economic assets with high return and low risk. The study also proved that the leading ACSI

companies consistently outperformed the market by considerable margins.⁴

It is conclusive that organizations that consistently deliver superior customer service generally enjoy more repeat business, less price elasticity, higher price points, more cross-selling opportunities, greater marketing efficiency, and a host of other factors that usually lead to earnings growth. These companies also enjoy lower expenditures related to warranties, complaints, defective goods, higher employee satisfaction, and market share. In addition, several research studies find that higher customer satisfaction has a positive impact on employee loyalty, cost competitiveness, profitable performance, and long-term growth.⁵

These findings are consistent with previous studies that revealed that companies with higher levels of customer satisfaction are more likely to enjoy higher levels of net cash flow. Similarly, superior customer service companies typically have lower costs of sales and marketing. Remarkably, a one-point improvement in a company's ASCI score can result in as much as a 7 percent increase in cash flow.⁶

If good customer service translates into all the previously mentioned gains, such as repeat business, future revenue, increased market share, productivity, cost competitiveness, long-term growth, less customer defection, and lower employee turnover, it is logical that these factors will eventually affect stock prices and company valuations. And if that is the case, it would be difficult not to take seriously the notion of customer satisfaction as a real, intangible, economic asset.⁷

Irrefutable Evidence