

INTERVIEWING GUIDE



iPad 12:29 PM 63%

Joseph A. Michelli Driven to Delight: Delivering W...ience the Mercedes-Benz Way

2

Building the Map

How do you want customers to feel when they are being served at your business? What is your aspiration for the customer experiences that your company delivers? Do you want to be the best provider in your neighborhood, your region, or your industry? Because the leaders at Mercedes-Benz USA took the time to answer these types of questions, the

desired vision for the MBUSA journey was both clear and challenging. Steve Cannon encouraged his leadership team to help lift the brand to be “the undisputed best provider of overall customer experience.” He knew that Mercedes-Benz customers were receiving extraordinary service experiences from a wide swath of luxury providers, and he envisioned their Mercedes-Benz sales and service relationships consistently eclipsing what they were encountering elsewhere.

Within his first 60 days as CEO, Steve sought to align his team members with his vision and to inspire them to begin laying out the road map that would help them delight their customers on a consistent “world-class” basis. To that end, Steve had an offsite retreat in February 2012 and included leaders not only from his organization but from Mercedes-Benz Financial Services as well. As a strong signal that Mercedes-Benz would have to learn from other providers of legendary experiences, former Disney executive Doug Lipp was brought in to help participants focus on the importance of driving a customer-centric culture. During the early phase of the offsite,

62 of 561 63 of 561 35 pages left in this chapter

NOTES OVERVIEW:

The first few pages are from a book on Mercedes Benz and how they turned around their sales and then lagging brand image back to in-line with the way that Mercedes thought they should be seen.

The takeaway here is that they focused on the client, stayed calm and remained level-headed, persistent and thoughtful during the down time.

- This is always something that you can say that you attribute your success to.
- All sales hiring managers want someone who can get along with the client and make a very good impression. Therefore, it may be in your best interest to talk about how you cultivated strong relationships with clients and that the result was both monetary as well as a lasting business relationship that can last at any company.



the presenter shared the trials and tribulations that the Disney leaders encountered as they sought to flawlessly create “magic” in the lives of their guests. A compelling part of the Disney presentation was the link that was made between a culture of guest experience excellence and Disney’s overall business performance. In essence, Disney guests who are delighted by their experience produce meaningful profits, which, in turn, delight shareholders.

With strong messages about Disney’s selection, training, and empowerment of employees (referred to as cast members) and an emphasis on the importance of crafting a clear customer experience value proposition, leaders at Mercedes-Benz USA were benefiting from an outside resource, benchmarking a world-class customer experience provider, and articulating the benefits and challenges of executing the type of customer-obsessed, Driven to Delight approach that was being considered at MBUSA. Participants at the offsite heard real-world examples culled from outside the automotive industry. These stories included situations at Disney theme parks, where Disney cast members are empowered to delight guests. In one such

example, a cast member observed a child crying over spilled popcorn and not only replaced it but did so while saying, “Mickey saw what happened and asked me to deliver this.” Armed with these types of examples, leaders at Mercedes-Benz USA could appreciate the elevated nature of experiences that people have with customer-focused brands.

Harald Henn, MBUSA’s vice president finance & controlling, shares the benefits of looking at global brands outside of one’s own industry: “We would have limited ourselves if we had only looked to the best practices of other car companies. That’s what we did in the past. But to achieve a true transformation, we needed to look beyond automotive and even beyond product-focused businesses. By looking at service and experience-creating businesses, we set an even higher bar. Having worked in Japan for three years, I have seen very advanced approaches to service delivery. We wanted to learn from world champions, not just the best providers in the United States.” Armed with examples from “world champion” experience providers like Disney, leaders were primed to assess the current state of their Mercedes-Benz USA

iPad 12:29 PM 63%

Joseph A. Michelli Driven to Delight: Delivering W...ience the Mercedes-Benz Way

As the leadership team at Mercedes-Benz USA wrestled with these questions, the fruits of their discussions were captured in both words and hand-drawn pictures. Whereas many leaders return from offsite planning meetings with lengthy Word documents and photos of scribbles on flipcharts, Mercedes-Benz leaders understood the wisdom behind the adage “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Therefore, a detailed visual map was created. The complete depiction will be shown at the end of this chapter (see [Figure 2.4](#)) and also can be found at www.driventodelight.com/map, but for now let’s look at this visual map in terms of three component parts: current state, future state, and action plan.

The artist’s rendering of the beginning state of the Mercedes-Benz USA customer experience (see [Figure 2.1](#)) reflects many of the observations I shared in [Chapter 1](#). Specifically, the new leadership team viewed the brand as being strong and relevant in the consumer’s mind. They noted that the company had award-winning products and the efforts and strengths associated with being recognized as one of America’s best places to work. They evaluated the existing and

upcoming product offerings as being attractive to Mercedes-Benz buyers. The leaders also valued strong sales numbers and an aesthetically pleasing and well-designed “Autohaus” dealership environment. What was lacking in the current state was a consistent set of customer experiences that would differentiate the brand into the future.

Current State

68 of 561 69 of 561 29 pages left in this chapter

This part is management finding solutions to problems in a proactive manner which is key for a successful sales representative.

You can discuss how despite rejection, you always tried to think of things from a perspective of how can I get better and better connect with the client rather than get pessimistic.



and Mercedes-Benz Financial Services customer experiences and set clear aspirational goals for the journey ahead.

Several key leadership lessons emerged from even this most rudimentary step in the Mercedes-Benz USA transformational journey. Beyond active listening and a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, Steve Cannon began his tenure by:

1. Seeking alignment at the top leadership level for aspirational, inspiring, enterprisewide change initiatives
2. Providing leaders an opportunity to remove themselves from their day-to-day work demands and envision the optimal customer experience they wish to deliver
3. Offering examples of customer experience greatness and having those examples presented by recognized leaders outside of their traditional competitive landscape

Visual Wayfinding

So where should you start your journey to an improved customer experience? The obvious and accurate answer is that you should start where you are. Map makers, website developers, and customer experience designers like myself will tell you that orientation is the first step in wayfinding. In other words, before you set off on any journey, it is important for you to know your exact location. Think of the “you are here” indicators that are typically prominent on mall directories. Based on their renewed appreciation for service excellence and inspired by stories from benchmarked companies like Disney, the leaders at Mercedes-Benz USA set off on their customer experience journey by asking questions that are relevant to every change leader, namely: Where are we now with regard to our customer experience? What will success look like as we approach our destination? How do we get from where we are to where we want to be?



So far we have looked at all sorts of different ways we humans project and perceive warmth and strength. Now it is time to see how all these projections and perceptions play out in a range of everyday settings: the office, the stage, the bar, the living room. Looking through the strength and warmth lens at how people judge each other helps explain how things unfold in each of these situations. And wherever you find yourself, at the executive or entry level, campaigning for office or campaigning for a second date, it also lets you see how dialing up your own strength or warmth might be just the thing to get you where you want to be.

At Work

A friend of ours once had meetings with senior executives at two Fortune 500 companies—a bank and a media conglomerate—in the same week. For her bank meeting, she presented herself very conservatively: dark suit, hair up, plenty of poise in her demeanor and grace in her movements. Not surprisingly, this fit their culture and expectations, and her meeting went well. Later that week she went to the media company, and she showed up dressed and carrying herself the same way. It took her a few minutes to realize something was not right. Initially she thought it was great how friendly everyone was to her. But it slowly dawned on her that they were also very skeptical of her steely demeanor. She found herself tap-dancing quickly to convince the people at the media company that she was a good fit with their culture, which placed a premium on openness, creative expression, and collaboration.

Looking at our friend's experience through the lens of strength and warmth, we see a few different dynamics in play. While both companies place a premium on strong market performance, the bank's culture is colder and the media company's culture is warmer. Our friend showed up at both places looking and acting all business, which projects strength. At the bank, that helped earn their respect, and it also helped show that she shared their sensibilities.

At the media company, her appearance and demeanor suggested that she was out of sync with their culture. Her hosts likely saw her as strong but not warm.



They may also have seen her as neither warm nor strong: Since she misjudged their company, they may not have respected her.

As any Ayn Rand acolyte can tell you, a modern capitalist economy is all about getting things done—all strength. On the other hand, an organization where people are aligned around their collective mission is a team that shares a bond of warmth. And even when the shared interest is not so clear, getting things done in organizations means dealing with people effectively, which usually requires warmth. There are some organizations that see themselves as all business, with no time for warmth. But many organizations see some form of warmth as key to their effectiveness, whether it is good client service, appealing marketing and branding, or attracting top talent by keeping employees happy.

Strength judgments at work are based on more than personal presence and job performance. The workplace is full of status symbols that confer strength. The most obvious of these is someone's place in the organizational hierarchy, but status signals like access to decision makers, compensation, and even distance from the proverbial corner office also count. A senior position carries prestige and often direct authority to make decisions that affect coworkers' lives. Job status is won and lost based on a variety of factors ranging from hard-won experience to nepotism. But it is exactly because life is complicated that we use social status signals like job titles as shorthand.

These three strength elements—presence, performance, and position—exist in a balance at work. Over time, the shorthand of position does not always match the reality, and when someone in authority neither projects a strong presence nor gets the job done, position alone will not be enough to maintain coworkers' respect, and they will start to question whether that person is a good fit for the job. If you look the part, you may end up getting and keeping the job even if the results are not what they should be, to some extent because acting the part will help divert people's suspicions that you might be the problem. On the other hand, if you are achieving outstanding results at work, you may buy yourself latitude in the way you present yourself. This recalls the old saying that the difference between a crazy person and an eccentric is that an eccentric has lots of money; success creates a buffer of respect.



The Interview

One of the most important moments of self-presentation is the job interview, especially if the candidate has no prior connections at the company. As always, the candidate's basic goal is to project strength and warmth, but the stylized ritual of the interview has its own particular challenges.

From the interviewer's perspective, there are three basic questions to answer:

1. Can the candidate do the job? This is the competence aspect of strength.
2. Does the candidate want to do the job? This speaks to the candidate's determination, also a dimension of strength.
3. Do our people want to work with this candidate? This is warmth.

Projecting strength is an applicant's primary goal, and the hiring process reflects that. If you know people at the company or have been recommended by an intermediary, you may have made a first impression before the formal process even starts.

The typical first impression is made on paper through a resume, an important though increasingly dated means of projecting strength. What institutions have you been associated with, and for how long? How expansively can you describe what you did there without calling your honesty into question? And not least, how flawlessly can you present all of this information? People who buck tradition and try to stand out by adding displays of warmth to their resumes might luck out once in a while, but for the most part they are missing the point. The resume is about documenting evidence of strength. The cover letter offers slightly more latitude to humanize oneself. You can express emotions here, but the expectation is still that your primary emotion is joy at the prospect of helping your potential employer get the job done. Lots of people now also use professional networking sites to post professional profiles that can be enhanced with photos and videos. Anything that goes beyond the information on a paper resume should add to the overall portrait of you as a capable professional, not distract from it.

Once your resume has gotten you in the door, the interview brings all of your other strength and warmth signals into play. Like our friend who forgot to recalibrate her approach when moving between the worlds of high finance and media,



4

LESS EFFORT, MORE CUSTOMERS

I've never encountered a business owner or leader who said, "I wish fewer of my customers were raving fans." We all want to maximize that special group of high-value customers who not only support our business through steady repeat purchases, but also eagerly refer new customers to us. While a great deal is known about the factors that drive customers away from a business, the attributes that lead to customer evangelism are the subject of considerable debate. That exact debate played out very clearly in two vastly different articles in a single issue of *the Harvard Business Review*. The titles of the two articles were "Stop Trying to Delight Your Customers" and "How I Did It: Zappos' CEO on Going to Extremes for Customers."

The authors of "Stop Trying to Delight Your Customers," Matthew Dixon, Karen Freeman, and Nicholas Toman, reported, "Conventional wisdom holds that to increase loyalty, companies must 'delight' customers by exceeding service expectations. A large-scale study of contact-center and self-service interactions, however, finds that what customers really want (but rarely get) is just a satisfactory solution to their service issue." "How I Did It: Zappos' CEO on Going to Extremes for Customers," written by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, suggested that service excellence requires dedicated commitment to such Zappos service values as "deliver wow through service."

So when it comes to customer loyalty, which is it—to wow or not to wow? The answer is actually simple. It's *both*!

Consistent with Tony Hsieh's perspective, "wow" is an important dimension of customer loyalty and should be pursued. The first step in that pursuit is achieved by making sure you are simply "getting it right" (delivering exactly what customers want the first time you serve them) and "making it easy" (reducing the overall effort required for customers to get their needs met). Once accurate and



easy service delivery occurs consistently, customers can be “wowed” if the business exceeds their expectations and/or offers personalized care. The importance of accurate and easy service delivery is well demonstrated by Dixon, Freeman, and Toman’s research, which, in a nutshell, shows the following:

- Delighting customers should not be the first priority in building customer loyalty.
- Reducing your customers’ effort to get their problems solved is the low-hanging fruit in the loyalty journey.
- Acting to reduce your customers’ effort can actually reduce your service costs.

Given the importance of effortless customer service and the Zappos commitment to delivering wow through service, let’s examine what Zappos does to increase customer ease.

EASE OF SERVICE COMES IN MANY FORMS

Overall, 95 percent of all Zappos sales happen on the company’s website! Thus, despite the emphasis placed on handling customer calls, most customers connect with Zappos through the Internet. For a brand that is known for personal service, it is striking that so much of the “service experience” has to be translated through the company’s website.

The online service world in which Zappos thrives is itself an outgrowth of making life easier for the customer. Remember Nick Swinmurn walking around San Francisco looking for his size 11 Tan Airwalk Chukka boots? Zappos was created so that consumers could, at their convenience, search from an available inventory of 5 million or more items. That inventory eclipses what customers could find by going down to their local brick-and-mortar stores. Better yet, consumers do not need to conform their shopping to a store’s hours; there are no transportation costs or parking challenges, and customers don’t need to check their hair or make themselves otherwise more presentable before they shop.