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G Guestology 2.0

*For my mother,
with whom I took my first steps
in life and in hospitality.*

The step-by-step business methodology
to implement hospitality and customer
experience in any organisation



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Introduction



Be really honest with yourself

You already know what great service, warm hospitality or an amazing customer experience is, don't you? You could define it as soon as you receive bad service, couldn't you?

The only thing missing in your organisation are perhaps the tools and methods to bring it to the surface of your organisation, however small or large that is.

Do you agree that if you had these techniques that lead to more sales and better customer experience, that you would use them? You are probably saying, "yes". If not, you wouldn't have picked up this book.

I have spent my whole life looking for ways to implement amazing customer experience in organisations, and you know what? I finally cracked it! The only thing left for me now, to be 100% sure they work, is to share them with the world.

AND THAT IS WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK...

Best wishes,
Vincent

“ If you have knowledge,
let others light their candles in it.

MARGARET FULLER
(1810-1850, Journalist, Critic and Women's Rights Activist)

There is not one company in the world who *wants* to offer a bad experience to a customer

There are only companies that know how to do it, and companies who don't

You have been honest. Now it's my turn.

As a young boy entering the world of hospitality, I quickly found myself in some ugly situations. At least for a 14-year-old. Customers were rude, unfriendly and didn't understand that things could go wrong. Looking back now, I think, why would you be rude to a 14-year-old? Was it because these guests were paying for a service or a product? Perhaps they felt they were entitled to great service? To warm hospitality?

I realised it didn't get any better over the years. On the contrary, it got worse. People became more and more demanding. They had no empathy at all. I was new to this. I didn't have a clue what to say, what to do or how to act when their food was late, their order was wrong or, when I became a butler later on, the car wasn't ready.

I clearly remember one occasion where a groom yelled at me because, in his opinion, lamb had to be cooked the way your leather belt is made. I froze mid-air, didn't know what to say, and ended up giving him a discount that sent my profits down the drain in less than five minutes. Even though the lamb was perfectly cooked. Rosé, as they say, to perfection.

After that incident and a few that followed, I started wondering why I didn't have the skills to cope with what to me were the most horrible moments in my profession. Why wasn't I shown in hospitality school how to handle difficult guests, unrealistic demands, or how to set up a system that would allow me to give your customer an amazing customer experience? Because the system didn't exist. But it does now.

When I look back on my training and education in general, there was no methodical, step-by-step technique to handling the one thing everyone needs every day in every job: dealing with people and their emotions. So I became a student of life, specifically human behaviour. It quickly dawned on me that the techniques I learnt and developed could be applied to every possible situation, both private and professional. After 20 years of trying, failing, testing and succeeding, I now know what works and what doesn't.

To create the future, we sometimes have to look at the past. The influences have changed. There were a lot fewer people on the planet. After the Second World War came the Swinging Sixties, a time when we didn't have to think too much about human emotions in business. The opposite was true. The seventies was the time where individuals became more important, and values started dropping. Think about the barefoot hippies. Less than 50 years later, the world of human emotions is a whole different ball game. Every word, every action you deploy needs to be carefully considered or you can get into serious trouble. An emoji can ruin your life if wrongly interpreted, and most employee evaluations must be conducted with two other people present to ensure neutrality. It has all become much more sensitive.

In my two decades of study, I have become aware that the solution has always been around, for the most part that is.

To be fully transparent, I applied the system gradually over the years. Testing what specific actions, phrases and non-verbal methods were effective.

The art of recovery is a technique I will show you in a later chapter, but it has allowed me to do anything from help a person after hearing his father had had a heart attack to selling my services with a success rate of 90%. I'm not afraid any more to go into whatever 'meeting' I have to. Whether it's a dinner with a person that initially made me nervous because of their status, or a board meeting where the company is facing the most difficult time of its existence.

People who know me understand that I'm always questioning myself, not second-guessing but just testing things against real life. Once the system was clear to me, the ultimate test was to see if this would work for others. I started with my own team. They began mimicking my techniques and achieved the same results. They stopped using certain words and expressions, and immediately gained from this. The next step was other teams. Dysfunctional teams from a small enterprise or bigger teams within multinational corporations. Despite all the variables of location, culture, type of product or service, all of them came to realise how important, easy and necessary this system was.

Personal growth

Even though I have worked in hospitality all my life (in fact I was born into it), I need to confess that I didn't always see the relevance of being customer focused. *Just have your meal, pay your bill and leave me alone.* That is what my naive 22-year-old self was telling me. Every complaint or remark I got, I took personally: *What do*

you know about a restaurant? What do you know about food? You don't know what I have to go through every day to make a living, and you're criticising me? How dare you!!

Later, when working in bigger companies and starting other companies myself, I realised that customer focus was THE KEY to succeeding. There is absolutely nothing without the customer. No sales, no staff, no office building, no recognition, no income! Nothing. And you know what? To hell with your product or service!! The thing you think is the best in the world, the thing that no one can beat or copy. I can list you a ton of products and services that went out of business because they neglected to connect with the customer.

Just look what happened to Kodak, who missed the digital photography boat because they didn't listen to the customer. Or Blockbuster, who refused a 50 million dollar offer from Netflix because the CEO didn't believe in a 'niche' business that was losing money at the time.

Quotes to remember:

“ Five hundred dollars? I said that is the most expensive phone in the world, and it doesn't appeal to business customers because it doesn't have a keyboard. Which makes it not a very good email machine.

STEVE BALLMER'S COMMENT ON THE FIRST IPHONE,
former founder/CEO of Microsoft

“ I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.

THOMAS WATSON,
president of IBM

The moment I realised this, it changed everything. It is ALL about experience. It is in every single detail. So I started looking for ways to implement it, and came across many books, lectures and inspirational people related to the topic. As with everything, there is a lot of inspiration in places you don't expect to find it. But there was one thing I could not find: an integrated system. All of the elements were just loose components. Figuring out values, setting up the CX (customer experience) DNA of the company, training people and measuring the results... they were all stand-alone systems. I missed this integration during a number of my consultancy projects, and the more I thought about it, the more I was convinced that companies and organisations can benefit from this. So there was only one thing to do: create it. Creation is unfortunately not enough. With development there is always testing. So I decided to draw inspiration from Barry Marshall, an Australian medicine specialist who won a Nobel prize for his work, which involved trying his own potion to cure a gastric disease. Luckily, in my case it didn't end up making me sick, but it did give me the results I was looking for. Guestology 2.0 was born.

Why customer experience is the ONLY thing that can set you apart, and what you can do about it

Let me make you another promise about this journey we are about to go on together. This is not a good news book. I will be really direct and at times harsh with you. In order to achieve Guestology 2.0 in your organisation you will need to put even more effort into your actions. You will need to do things differently compared to yesterday. If you are in a leading role, you will need to lead by example. I'm not here to throw rose petals at you for being involved but I'm here to push you and push you some more, until the moment you reach the point you want to be at. Maybe you feel a bit attacked by the last few phrases, but that is just an emotion. Your emotion.

Human emotions are probably the easiest to influence if you know how to do so. Most things we do are based on emotions, some on habits (we'll talk later on about how customers make decisions).

Every time a customer enters your business, they are not looking for new sunglasses, they are looking for a way to express their identity. They are not buying a building, they are buying a home for their family. A bride is not just buying a wedding dress, she is buying a memory for life.

I still cannot grasp the fact that so many 'sales professionals' start their conversations by listing specifications and showing off their technical knowledge.

I will make you a bet! I can sell anything that I don't have any technical knowledge about.

“ Sell me this pen...

JORDAN BELFORT
The Wolf of Wall Street

In the first minutes of a sales conversation, or of any conversation for that matter, you should be listening! That is what traditional training teaches us. However true, let's turn that up a level. What if we offer hospitality instead? Listening is a part of hospitality. In fact, hospitality is a set of subconscious emotions.

“ When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.

THE DALAI LAMA

Why do you cry when you see certain movies, for example? You KNOW it is a movie. Your subconscious takes you into the emotions that the filmmaker presents to you. You believe the story. It is portrayed in such a way that the storytelling and your emotions go hand in hand towards an experience. You relate to what you see, hear and feel.

In what way are you relating to your clients?

- Walking into a shop, five minutes before closing time, and being welcomed with the famous words “we're closing in five minutes!” instead of a friendly hello.
- The salesperson that ‘attacks’ you with, “how can I help you?” A phrase that sounds like they just repeated it for the 254th time that day, and one that makes you want to run out of the shop because you just want to be left alone.
- Entering any business and being left on your own, no eye contact, no interaction, just being seen as a body in the room.

Do you know what all these examples are? Ways of NOT relating to your client and signs of bad culture in a company, the loss of their soul. Possibly, companies who care more about spreadsheets than the customer. The strange thing is that customers influence not only that spreadsheet but also how employees feel at the end of the day and more importantly, how they can be groomed to become an ambassador for the company. The most powerful tool in the marketing toolbox.

In fact, you are making withdrawals from (what I call) the emotional bank account. In the first seconds of interaction, you should be making deposits *into* the emotional bank account. Give, give, give. There is no taking, there is only giving back. *How can I give back if the customer hasn't purchased yet?* Well, they already invested in you. They took time out of their day to visit your shop, to read your website, to test-drive your software or even listen to a friend that was raving about your organisation. For that alone you should start with giving back.

The consequences of failing at customer experience

All this can lead to grave consequences for any business:

The **first relating to reputation**. In 2018 I was speaking at a conference in Bucharest, Romania. The theme of the conference was reputation. More specifically, the timing of it. The length it took to build it up, how it could be destroyed in the blink of an eye, and the eternity it takes to fix it.

“ It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.

WARREN BUFFETT

Fixing reputation is about isolating and going in head first at 150 mph. This means you focus on that one customer and you treat them so well, they will never let you go. Do you know the story of Gary Vaynerchuck?

On Christmas Day, a customer of his parents’ wine shop complained that the case of wine she ordered hadn’t arrived in time for the holidays and that a courier service would never get there in time during this busy period of the year. This was not some corporate client, just an individual, so the customer service department mentioned the complaint very late to Gary.

He immediately put the case of wine in his car and drove for three hours in a snowstorm to deliver the wine to the client’s house.

Later, he said that he probably lost a lot of money that day since his time is very valuable in busy periods but he knew how much it had gained him: he had set an example to his whole team and installed part of his business culture with that one act of kindness. An act that made him a lot more money in the future than the six hours of driving time he lost.

Don’t forget, the first thing a client does is tell someone the next day what they did the day before. And if not, plenty of people ask that client, “how was your day yesterday?” So you better be the good story. It will build your reputation.

Another consequence is you lose talent. Your very best team members will never want to work for a company with poor customer service. It adds to frustrations during the day, they have nothing to be proud of and probably don’t have the resources to fix it, however badly they want to.

Oh, and what I experienced is that bad customer service always has something to do with management. It is very rare that it is NOT a top-down issue. How many CEOs come to me, complaining that their employees are ‘not friendly’ to clients and that I need to fix it? Well, too many to count. My question to them is always the same: how do YOU treat your team? The same way you want them to treat your customers?

If you, the leaders, the supervisors, the CEOs, truly care about your people, you will give them the tools that Guestology 2.0 brings to the table, to shine every day. To come home and feel recognised. **Lastly, brand devaluation.** Granted, an isolated issue will not put your brand in a bad light. Repetition is the enemy here. When procedures are not well defined and they lead to multiple complaints over and over again, the sum of those complaints become

conversations. A friend telling you during a barbecue how he got bad service and another friend confirming that claim. Boom! It's done, two different people saying the same thing. You think, *wow, I'll never go there*. In the blink of an eye, the brand has been scorched.

Even if the procedures were well defined, the issue will be in the execution, the scalability of hospitality, but how do you scale human emotions? Through training?

Here is something that always makes me chuckle. You have probably called a customer services line, only to hear, "this call is recorded for training purposes". When you finally get someone on the line, you ask a question that the thousands of customers before you have asked. This is when you realise that the calls have not been recorded, or used for training purposes.

The obstacles that we can't see but are there

So why are people underperforming in customer experience?

A 2018 Forbes article stated that companies lost upwards of 75 billion dollars – that's billions, not millions – due to poor customer service. The main reasons were:

- Customers not feeling appreciated
- Rudeness and unhelpful employees
- Being sent from one person to the other before actually being helped

The difference between how a company thinks it performs in customer service and what the client thinks of it is huge, to say the least. About 80% of organisations think that their service is 'good to outstanding'. When their customers were questioned, only 8% (!) said they received outstanding service. How could those two feelings be so far apart?

There is one main element at play here: attitude. The old cliché of 'hire the attitude, train the skills' is all of a sudden not so old any more. It is more relevant than ever before!

In a Guestology 2.0 coaching session, a participant once asked me how he could attract the right people. He had issues with some of his co-workers not cleaning up after themselves. There were always dirty coffee cups floating around and no one would throw them away, even if they were the ones who had drunk the coffee.

He wanted to know how he could avoid that kind of attitude at the very start, by recruiting the right people. I told him to put a scrap of paper on the floor at the entrance of the room. As if it had been dropped by accident. “The candidate who picks up the paper is the one you should hire,” I told him. “That person will have the right attitude.”

I came to that idea from something my grandmother used to say. In the sixties, she started a small guesthouse at the coast. She was looking for someone to do the dishes in the restaurant. She told me that the one who brought their own apron on the first day would be the best one. I never forgot that and find it to be true to this very day. Getting people involved is so very difficult and you want to find people who already show that involvement. It is those little signs that set you on the right path to attracting the right people.

Speaking of grandmothers, do you know the story of a grandmother who wanted to buy a book for Christmas for her granddaughter? She didn't buy one. Why? She was looking for a specific book but couldn't find it. She walked up to a customer service employee who was stacking books in another part of the shop with a colleague. She asked where she could find the specific book she was looking for by mentioning the title. “It's over there!” said the employee while pointing at the children's section. When he went back to stacking the books, he turned to his colleague and said, “ugh, she didn't even TRY to look for it herself”. So the grandmother bought the book in another shop.

The big misunderstanding some people have is that the customer is a disturbance to their work. No! They ARE your work! They pay your salary. Not the CEO of the company, but the client. Your first and only focus should be on the client in that moment of interaction. Don't have the arrogance to say, “the client should

be happy that they can shop here”. No, you should be happy to welcome them.

Fun fact, when you connect the letters of the word ‘ATTITUDE’ to their place in the alphabet you get this:

A = 1
T = 20
T = 20
I = 9
T = 20
U = 21
D = 4
E = 5

100

This means that attitude is key. It needs to be at 100%. More than anything else in your organisation. Not only in your team, but most definitely in your leadership as well. Perhaps leadership should even be at 110%.

Another upsetting story is about a postal software service that was communicating internally about an issue with a client. The CEO ended the discussion with the legendary words ‘someone also please tell her to f**k off’. Unfortunately, the client was accidentally in cc, and on receiving the email gladly shared it on social media.

Here is the essence...

In many cases, attitude is a top-down problem. It is the story of the circle of influence. If you hang out with five people who smoke, it is likely that you will be the sixth. If your five friends are into football, you most likely will be too. If you hang out with five millionaires, there is a very good chance you become the next one. It is a primal instinct. It is the law of influence, if you will.

It is no different in companies. If a certain attitude is condoned, it will most likely spread like a virus in the organisation. Consequently, it will end up at the customer. The one who pays you, remember?

You can have the best product or service in the world.
But if you can't persuade your team to actually show the right attitude... you're in for disaster.

The next obstacle is discipline. It is about giving the customer a consistent experience. Whenever, however and how much they buy from you should not be a factor. Consistency is key. Do you know how a restaurant is awarded the highest honour of three Michelin stars? By being consistent. The criteria for receiving the highest honour is a well-kept secret by the culinary guide but as a hospitality insider, I can tell you that it takes many, many visits, anonymous and otherwise, to get the three coveted stars. If the consecutive visits are increasingly better, an award is much more likely but the main thing they look for is consistency. A Monday lunch should be at the same level as a Saturday dinner. When the maître d' is on holiday, the service must be equally anticipatory. From what chefs have testified to me, it can take up to 20 visits in one year to be awarded the mark of excellence in the world of restaurants. So consistency is vital and it can only be delivered by one

thing: discipline. Every day they need to choose the best products and apply the same (or better) standards in terms of housekeeping, first impressions and service.

Coming back to attitude being a top-down problem, well so is discipline. In fact, discipline is a form of attitude, isn't it? I always applaud the management teams who come to us for help integrating Guestology 2.0 into their organisation, since they feel the need for it. They have the notion that something is off in the delivery of their product or service. Many competitors simply ignore it or are too arrogant to admit it. That is the reason that a lot of my clients are one step ahead.

However admirable the fact that the management teams make the reflection that something has to be done about customer experience. That the team doesn't answer the phone within three rings, that they don't smile enough. I once again challenge them, asking if *they* have that discipline.

In fact, I do it without them even knowing it. I show them discipline even before they enter the school. We park all the cars facing forwards so you can see them in their full glory when you drive into the grounds. In order to do the same, you have to manoeuvre your car a number of times. I can tell you that about 90% follow my lead. They actually take the time to park so the front of the car faces the same way our cars do. What does this tell us? When you demonstrate discipline, results follow. Yes, indeed, leading by example is crucial here.

Parenting provides us another good comparison. The full-time job no one is paid for and the one you perform 24 hours a day. You try your best to raise your kids with manners and discipline, but the moment you want to have a meal with friends, you drop your

discipline and give in to them staring at a tablet for hours. You drop your discipline, and consequently theirs.

It is no different in organisations. The moment the discipline drops, the domino bricks start falling. I hold myself accountable for being on time for my students. Because, if I'm five minutes late, they can be too. If I don't polish my shoes, they don't have to either. Now, don't get me wrong, you need a healthy balance of discipline. Too much discipline or processes that are enforced too much can paralyse an organisation as well. I remember the story of a new CEO who made a rule in the factory that workers had to wait for the bell to go to the toilet or to urgently call their wife if something came up. That discipline was too much. It paralysed the whole culture of coming forward with fresh ideas from the floor. People were afraid to speak up, even if *they* were the experts on the floor and *they* were the ones with a clear view on possible solutions.

Discipline should only be there when everyone agrees that it adds value to customer interaction. Enforcing discipline should be seen as that little nudge when someone forgets or has lost sight of the emotional value of the process, because they were emotionally invested at the time the decision was made. Their state of mind when they agreed to it was simply different. They might have seen the importance then, but don't see it as much now.

The last obstacle is **structure**. The structure to build a CX culture that will do several things at the same time. An integrated system that allows an organisation to:

- Give clarity to employees/team members on how to act based on the company's hospitality values. How powerful would it be if an employee knows exactly what to say and how to act in a friendly way with an upset customer. All this coming from the company's culture, its soul.
- Set up a system to identify a common language. Not something vague or virtual. No, real language, chosen words and expressions that are unique to the organisation.
- Deploy a feedback system that is never ending and furthermore triggers a number of actions to go back to the start of the system and automatically improve the processes.

This structure leads to an organisation where not only customers but every stakeholder will feel the tranquillity of a spa, the welcome of their grandmother's freshly baked cake and the hospitality of their own home, just the way they like it.

If we can overcome the obstacles of attitude, discipline and structure, you are well on your way to creating something that exceeds the status of a company. You're building something much more than four walls filled with furniture and computers. You are creating *purpose!*

That's a big promise, isn't it? Well, I'm up for the challenge. Even better, in the next chapters, I will deliver on that promise. Not just a theoretical or academic process. A pragmatic results-driven powerhouse.

How to overcome those obstacles?

This is not that kind of book!

What can you do about the fact that customer service or the design of customer experience is not present or embodied in an organisation? There are a multitude of possibilities but what if you focus on results instead of delivery channels? What do I mean?

I read as well. I see what CX experts recommend and what their philosophies are. Great work is being done here. Insights that really offer actions towards the value creation of an organisation. However, a company is not run from the top, at least not the interaction with the client. It is the front-line employee that delivers that experience in many cases. That first phone call, that 14th visit to the same customer, that wrong invoice that needs to be communicated. Those are the instances where it happens. Values will steer you towards how you behave in the name of the organisation, but they will not tell you what to do in the moment of decision.

Another topic to think about is how management realises the general importance of a good welcome. How vital hospitality can be to the organisation. Of course, whenever management receives customers, they want to be the example of great service and hospitality. When the deal is done, the order is confirmed or the contract is signed, it is the middle management or front-line employees who are in contact with the client. Whenever things go wrong at that stage, the customer will realise that the exemplary attitude of the CEO is not in line with the team. It is as if the CEO has not clearly explained to the team how much they value good customer service. Mostly it goes downhill from there. In some cases, the opposite can be true as well.

A well-known pharmaceutical CEO once said: “I can write you the chemical formula of cholesterol in 10 seconds, but when a grieving widow stood in front of me in my pharmacy, I didn’t know how to react.” That, ladies and gentlemen, is the very essence of what you can do about it!

This book is not about amazing philosophies you will read as quotes in 30 years’ time. No, it will give you real world answers as knowing how to react and what to say make you feel better and genuinely help the customer. This book is about helping grieving parents in a hospital with the right words, about magically creating a smile on the faces of kids when they least expect it or lifting your organisation to the next level thanks to a few human skills.

So, why has nobody nailed the CX solution yet?

Why? Because it requires courage. Sometimes it means breaking the eternal battle between budget and emotions. Making hard decisions requires corporate courage. That will ultimately lead to a consistent overall attitude.

Did you know that McDonald’s makes about 65 million hamburgers a day? Their margin for error in preparing this food is nearly 0. This raises the question:

How is it they can produce so many products with so much precision and, even more importantly, have a system that allows this level of production, but...