



“Take Their Breath Away *How Imaginative Service Creates Devoted Customers”*

Chip R. Bell and John B. Patterson
(John Wiley & Sons, Inc - 2009)

Summary by Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver

In most sports, there are various levels of proficiency: **amateur**, **semi-pro**, and **pro**. That’s the way it’s always been in the business world as well.

Like it or not, we all start out as **amateurs**. Then if we’re lucky, we have great teachers and coaches, at the elementary, high school, college and graduate level, who recognize potential and foster and encourage our creativity. Then if we’re really fortunate, we will have some mentors early in our career who take us under their wing and share their wisdom, just as other ‘pro’s’ whom they had known, have passed down theirs.

At this point in my life, I’m continually amazed at the number of people in sales, as well as the companies they work for, who are still ‘**amateurs**’ or at best ‘**semi-pro’s**’ in the area of providing ‘**customer experiences**’ which in our author’s words, ‘**TAKE THEIR BREATH AWAY**’.

They’ve dropped out at some point in their career before achieving even ‘**semi-pro status**’ and instead have settled for the ‘**status quo**’.

Some of this stems from highly analytical leaders who don’t really understand the power of **emotion** and **passion**, and who think **logic** sells. Sure it does, but **emotion trumps logic** and **logic + emotion** is the real winning equation. And the best news is that it’s never too late to become more creative and plug into those brain waves which can set you apart from the rest of the field.

This month’s book I’m featuring for our “**Don’t Need to the Read the Book**” book club is loaded with strategies for becoming a ‘**pro**’ in the world of creating customer experiences which not only please. . .but surprise and delight. More importantly, they provide ways to provide long-term **devoted** customers.

The authors Chip Bell and John Patterson also provide dozens of real life examples of companies – large and small - who have discovered the secret to ‘customer devotion’ as well as to employee satisfaction and retention. It’s achieved by fostering and providing what they term “**IMAGINATIVE SERVICE**”.

Whether it’s before or after you read this summary, you are certain to want to also buy the book – and not just to have it in your library. As the authors suggest, once you set out

your own strategies and action steps which you will hopefully work out after reading the second part of the book, you should ‘pay it forward’ and give the book to someone else since that in and of itself is a form of *imaginative service*.

What will **you** do in your own business, or encourage to be done within your company, which would make YOU, and them, Pro’s at learning how to be more remarkable.

Introduction

One of the things I’ve learned as I have been writing these summaries over the last year and a half is the importance and the value of reading a book’s introduction. I must confess and maybe it’s from being somewhat ADD and Type A, that before I started writing these summaries, I often skipped many book’s introduction since isn’t the goal just to finish the book so that you could get on to reading the next book? I’ve learned to enjoy the entire book as the complete experience and often to gain insights which you would have missed had you only read the individual chapters.

I must commend Chip and John for writing what I think is one of the most interesting and valuable ‘introductions’ of any book I’ve ever read.

From here on, rather than referring to them as ‘the authors’ or “**Chip and John**”, I’ll reference them as “**C&J**”.

C&J begin picking on ‘**customer service status quo**’ like this:

*“Getting better has meant improving efficiency – making the service experience faster, simpler, or more accurate.. Service designers have typically asked, ‘How can we satisfy our customers?’ rather than ‘How can we take their breath away?’ ‘How can we make what we have better?’ has precedence over ‘What if we made it completely different?’ Enhancement has been about taking the next step rather than taking a completely new direction. **We improve rather than invent.**”*

Then in explaining how we got to where we are today, C&J take us on a journey through the evolution of customer service.

In the beginning – dating only back to the mid-80’s. . . “*the buzzword was ‘customer satisfaction’. Winners, worked hard to understand and meet customer needs. Satisfaction was the brass ring of choice.*”

C&J mark the 90’s as the era when “*the customer service bar got raised*”:

. . .”quality initiatives began to impact product quality, simply satisfying the customer was viewed as nothing more than the price of admission in the game to win the customer”.

The real winners focused on ‘**customer loyalty and retention**’. Making a ‘*customer for life*’ was characterized by companies like Disney and Nordstrom through providing service often described in terms such as “**wowing**”, “**outrageous**”, and “**raving fans**”.

C&J point to the end of the 90’s when ‘a new wrinkle to customer loyalty’ began to appear – “*customized service*” – **one-to-one service**: “*Make customers perceive they are your only customer and you’ll win their loyalty.*”

As an easy way to remember these three stages in customer service evolution, C&J label them “**Satisfaction**” . . . “**Loyalty**” . . . and “**Customization**”. And yet sadly as they acknowledge a rise in service quality for some, “ ‘*customers*’ would probably agree that *service quality is not any better overall than it was 20 years ago.*”

How could this be? “*This is partly because customer expectations for service have gone up*” and so ‘**wowing**’ a customer is harder than it’s ever been .

So what’s this book all about?

“Take-their-breath-away service is about bringing a new spirit to the service world. It is intended as a practical blueprint and a courage builder for the business pioneers who are unwilling lulled into complacency by the same old, same old” . . . a book “aimed at being more edgy than conventional, more vivacious than staid, more sensible than scholarly – and a book much more about practice than philosophy.”

I hadn’t even gotten to the chapters in the book before I started thinking more creatively about what I could do in my own business and especially about “NetWeaving”, to ‘**take customer’s and client’s breath away**’ so hang on. It will only get better.

And if you use the excuse that providing ‘*imaginative service*’ is too expensive to provide in this ‘*belt-tightened*’ world in which we find ourselves today and where we’ll probably be for the next several years, you’ve missed the boat.

Empowering your employees to use their individual creativity to surprise and delight is the key:

“. . .if they [employees] are asked to pleasantly surprise more customers, they feel less like worker bees and more like fireflies. If employees are asked to create a big customer smile instead of just working harder or faster, they suddenly feel a part of an adventure.”

By reading this summary, and then the book to get more depth, you will learn the 12 strategies along with the principles and tactics which C&J offer as ways to provide imaginative service that will ‘take their breath away’. Then in the second part of the book, you’ll find a ‘blueprint for implementing’ the strategies. Your assignment will be to ‘*pick and choose pieces of the blueprint*’ which you will apply to your own situation.

But as C&J stress, the ‘**sequence**’ used in implementing the blueprint involves a ‘**comprehensive**’ approach: “*Half-baked in the world of imaginative service comes out raw, not rare.*”

They conclude the introduction by referencing one of my favorite words – PASSION. It’s also in a world that tends to be too reserved too often - the missing piece. Showing passion takes courage, but it doesn’t have to be that difficult:

“Take-their-breath-away service requires an obvious display of passion – a focused zeal that touches as it contributes. We all know that passion is contagious. People smile at you and what do you do? You smile back. A stranger waves and you acknowledge their greeting. Passion is a way of retaliating against a challenging difficult, and often indifferent world.”

The authors quote the late comedian George Carlin, “*Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the number of moments that take our breath away.*”

”So go take your customers’ breath away.” Chip Bell and John Patterson

Part One – Twelve Take-Their-Breath-Away Strategies

To whet your appetite for what is to come, C& J offer 6 real life examples of ‘take-your – breath-away’ service. My favorite one and one that may entice me to try and rent a Hertz Car from the Atlanta Airport sometime is Archie – a Hertz shuttle bus driver – who earns the dollar bills he paper-clips to the front of his shirt by entertaining his passengers with comedy routines, or singing, or somehow persuading his audience to HOLLER, “*I love Hertz!*” before they get off his bus: “*As customers exit applauding, they realize they have just witnessed a service innovator at work.*”

As this preface concludes, we’re reminded that although an **occasional** ‘take-their-breath-away’ service can come from an array of ‘random acts of service’ . . .

*”. . . sustainable reputations are best harnessed with a **deliberately chosen strategy**. A strategy is a spotlight or focal point that contains a set of tactics that fit together like pieces of a puzzle. An effective strategy reflects a keen understanding of the target audience for whom it is intended.”*

So get ready to learn about 12 strategies for achieving ‘take-your-breath-away’ service with individual chapter names - each which raises your curiosity level and makes you want to discover the next one: **animation, reinvention, decoration, camouflage, concierge, partnership, cult-like, luxury, air, air defense, scout’s honor, and firefighter.**

So if you want ‘devoted’ customers and clients who will stick with you through thick and thin, rather than merely satisfied ones, ready to abandon you for a competitor’s slightly

lower price or a gimmick offering, find the strategy or strategies which will help you ‘take their breath away’ and put them to work.

Chapter 1 – Animation

C&J begin this chapter with an entertaining story about Katie – a waitress at White’s Restaurant where people will stand in line and wait in order to get Katie as their server. From the over-the-top initial greeting. . .to the comedy routine describing today’s specials. . .to leaving the check but making it clear that they’re welcome to stay as long as they like, but so they wouldn’t have to be looking for her when they were ready to leave . . .Katie exemplifies what animation is all about.

“The power of an animated service person is how that person helps everything around them move with them. Katie was an animator. But, then, so was everything about the restaurant in which she worked.”

“Animation is our moniker for the clear and present energy that reflects an unmistakable joy of serving.”

In citing companies like Apple, Ritz-Carlton, Southwest Airlines, Chick-fil-A, Trader Joe’s, USAA, JetBlue, Amazon.com and Lexus, C&J pick out what they all have in common:

*“While their products and offerings may make their prospects’ and customers’ heads turn, it is the **experience** they create that makes their customers’ hearts soar. They have cracked the code on managing the emotional connection with customers.”*

And according to C&J, the reason they begin the 12 ‘take-their-breath-away’ strategies with ‘animation’:

“Animation is a shade of engagement that every service encounter should be painted with. Since the connection with the customer is an emotional one, the attitude you exhibit as a service provider is the most crucial key to success in attracting and retaining devoted customers.”

For some reason, this previous quote from C&J conjured up many visual memories of half-baked lackadaisical service provided by an indifferent, clock-punching server who might just as well have been on an assembly line performing one rote action after another. I’ll bet you have just as many, don’t you?

The last part of this chapter examines five tactics in line with animation which are “important to pumping up the liveliness and the outlook needed to take your customers’ breath away”: **attitude, comfort, personal, respect, and sparkly.**

I'll summarize the first two and then as I do in my summaries, tease you with a couple questions about the last three which will hopefully make you want to have the book to read as well.

Attitude – C&J cite the philosopher/psychologist Rollo May in his book “*Love and Will*” who wrote, “*There is an energy field between all humans. When we reach out in passion it is met with an answering passion. . .*” Like it or not, just tune in to any tele-evangelist program to witness this first-hand.

According to C&J referring to an often-cited Harvard study, “*Eighty-five percent of success in life, is due solely to attitude.*” You’ve heard the common saying, “**Your attitude will determine your altitude**”. It’s true.

I particularly like this line by C&J:

*“While customers like dealing with employees who are committed, they absolutely love being served by someone whose spirit to serve is unmistakable in its passion, pride, and commitment. Occasional animation is not sufficient. It is both the **consistency** and **sincerity** of attitude that brings customers back and causes them to tell all of their friends to ‘ask for Katie’ “.*

But can someone be trained to have a ‘Katie-type attitude’? C&J – “*The most important thing to know about attitude is that it is something one **selects.***”

Another one of my old-time favorite books written back in 1964 is “**Games People Play**” by the psychologist Eric Berne in which he describes psychological games some people play and one of my favorites was ‘*Ain’t it awful*’: “*Boy, I’m so sorry to hear about what a terrible day you’ve had but if you think YOU had a bad day, just listen to what happened to me.*”

Just as a positive, energized, enthusiastic, ‘**can-do**’ attitude raises the tide, causing all boats to rise, such is the opposite effect from those who always see the glass as ‘half-empty’. I love what C&J call them: “**Spirit Leeches**”. . . “*they suck the energy and passion from their target – they remove optimism and hope.*”. . . “*Spirit leeches are removed the same way real leeches are – with fire. Not with a real match, of course, but with the warmth and energy of positive spirit. You do not inherit spirit, acquire spirit, or borrow spirit. You **choose** spirit much like you choose to introduce yourself to a stranger.*”

To emphasize this, C&J point out a second important thing about having an animated attitude. It can be ‘**contagious**’:

“When we are around happy, upbeat people, it is much easier for us to join in the spirit – especially if the invitation to join is coming from someone who clearly prefers we enroll. An unbridled spirit has a magnetic power on customers. It draws out their higher self.”

Comfort – See pages 26-28. Earlier in this section, I gave an example of a statement Katie made which coincides with this ‘**comfort tactic**’ C&J speak of. Do you remember what it is? HINT: “*Comfort is the product of an emotional connection that feels familiar plus an experience that is anxiety free.*” . . .See the bottom of page 27 for what Katie said to increase the ‘**comfort**’ factor as she left the check.

Personal – See pages 28 and 29 – What is the potentially ‘**negative**’ side of automated customer management systems C&J caution against which are tailored to provide service reps with ‘**personalized information**’ about their customers?

Respect – See pages 29 – 32 – Although it’s fairly obvious that as C&J point out, “*Animation must always reflect respect*”, what do they mean when they say “*Respect is also about bigheartedness*” and that you need to avoid a ‘**pound-of-flesh mentality**’?

Sparkly – this is my other real favorite:

*“Sparkly as an animated service tactic is designed to evoke a sense of adventure in customers. Service providers using the sparkly brand of animation serve as **happiness scouts**, convincing us to experiment and enticing us to expand our service horizons. Succumbing to their magic, we try that unique entrée we otherwise might have avoided, or embrace a color, style, or version of clothing we might have formerly thought outside the boundaries of our taste. Persuaded by their confidence and sheer joy in discovering the new, we are jolted out of our routines in ways that renew our spirits and help us see the value of taking calculated risks.”*

Think of a personal experience you had where the person who served you (restaurant, hotel, clothing or electronics store, Home Depot, etc.) enticed you to be adventurous and ‘**jolted your routine**’ which ended up being a very positive experience. I can think of several.

Chapter 2 – Reinvention

What comes to mind when you see the word ‘*reinvention*’? I guessed it means to invent all over again, and that’s pretty close to being accurate.

C&J begin the chapter by reminding us that:

“The most common characteristic of take-their-breath-away service is that it is imaginative, distinctive, unique, unusual, atypical, unexpected, and all the other words you can think of that insinuate a super pleasant surprise.”

But as mentioned before, surprise can just be a random one-time occurrence, or as C&J emphasize:

*“ . . .the power in take-their-breath-away service is that it is **planned, designed, or crafted** that way on purpose – and therefore could be done again. Accidental greatness may delight us, but **handmade greatness** brings us back for a second look.”*

I love the term, “**handmade greatness**”.

The Requirement For Creativity – Right away, C&J attack the question of whether EVERYONE can be creative, or is this attribute and skill reserved only for those who are naturally gifted in this area.

Sure, just as there are all levels of athletic ability - some who are more naturally gifted than others, so it is with creativity. But, armed with some of the tools and techniques C&J provide, ANYONE can be ‘creative’.

C&J point out that a major element of creativity is ‘**pattern recognition**’ which we learn from birth, when you touched a hot stove. . .when a door was closed on your fingers, etc.

One of my personal favorite comedians of all time is Bill Cosby. He had the ability to point out the humorous side to some repetitive ‘patterns of behavior’ which we do.

C&J - “Patterns give us language. Patterns give us societal order. Patterns are the foundation of logic and the basis of all learning.”

But, as they point out, “*Patterns have a limiting side. Since we are always searching for patterns, we naturally gravitate toward the familiar, the tried and true, the tested.*” . . .
“*The essence of take-their-breath-away service is that it departs from the pattern.*”

Vujá Dè – C&J remind us how George Carlin used to reverse “Dèjà Vu” as an example of reinvention – “*seeing things through completely new eyes*”:

“Reinvention involves having a little contest with your brain deliberately making it break the patterns it likes in order to explore new alternatives.”

There’s an interesting exercise on page 40 of the book which you should try which helps you see the way the brain can be fooled into moving outside the box when trying to recognize patterns which can then lead to an entirely new awareness.

Juicers – According to C&J, “Juicers” are “**jump starters**”. . .”*They are a way of force-fitting a seeming irrelevant attribute to unleash a new way to deliver service. They get their name from the way they help juice up the brain to break patterns – getting beyond ‘the way we have always done it’.*”

You’ll want to buy this book, if for no other reason than having the chart on page 42 which demonstrates how by choosing a service application or process and then applying a list of words that gets the brain thinking outside of its current pattern. C&J reference

these *juicers* as part of a process made popular by Alex Osborne in his 1950's book, "*Applied Imagination*". The juicers are termed an "*attribute listing*".

Come to the book club meeting in person and you'll see how we'll have some fun with this one.

Service Done Slower – If you're in very fast-paced business, you might want to try this one and reduce the pace to '*turtle speed*' (complete with posters – ala tortoise & the hare) as C&J point out that an insurance agency in Colorado did to focus more on building rapport with clients than just processing the business efficiently.

Service Done Remotely – C&J cite Netflix's stealth attack on Blockbuster complete with a "*website which included customer reviews and movie reviewer articles plus an easy-to-use search process*". But the real key was the delivery to home by mail, complete with a return mailer.

Service Done with a Helper – C&J applaud Netflix again for the imaginative way they have built an online community of friend-to-friend movie critics and recommenders – much of these new ideas coming from focus groups Netflix holds every week.

Unconventional Perspective – C&J provide a simple two step exercise and don't read the second sentence until you read the first one. First look around the room you're in and notice as many things around you as you can.

Now, instead, go back and just notice the things which are '**green**', and as you probably did, you see that you missed a few of them the first time around.

They refer to this tactic of reinvention as "**unconventional perspective**" which involves '**changing the perspective**'. One of their most valuable points in this section is to recognize that many of the best ways to *change the perspective* come from persons who are '**new**' to the process, and are not mired in the old '*that's the way we've always done it.*'

Wacky – C&J saved my favorite '*reinvention*' tactic for the end of the chapter. They begin by citing all of the inventions which came about largely by mistake – Play-Doh, the Slinky, Silly Putty, Cool Whip, as well as the one which always comes to my mind – Post-it Notes by 3M which came out of a failed 'glue' experiment. In C&J's words, "**Wacky works!**"

But being wacky- really stepping outside your comfort zone - takes **courage**, and so they offer some ways to just get started. Refer to these on pages 48 and 49 and there are two very useful exercises – one of them shows a list of unusual emotions (e.g. *nostalgic, feminine, like a partner, frisky*, etc.) with the question being, "**How Could Our Customers Feel?**" The up-front challenge was to pick a part of a current process, such as the way customers wait in your waiting room, or the way your company processes claims. Then pick one part of the process **which is wrong, weak, or most troublesome**,

and then apply these emotions and ask how would they feel if our customers feel if we could change or eliminate these?

To take it one step farther, there's a great 'juicer' chart on page 50 which stimulates the brain by first posing the question, "**What If Our Service Process Were Like. . .**"? Then a chart with columns labeled "**Arts** (e.g. *character in a movie, musical instrument, etc.*); **Lifestyle** (e.g. *an occupation, a vacation site, a gossip column, etc.*); **Odd Views** (e.g. *You're the product, kid's perspective, a dream come true, part of a circus, etc.*); **Famous People** (e.g. *military, a villain, famous artist or superhero, movie star, etc.*).

Think of a service you, or someone you're trying to help, are attempting to provide. Then test out this 'wacky' approach. It works!!

Since I want to leave room in my summary for some key Sections in Part 2 of this great book, PLUS I have a couple of my other favorite 'take-your-breath-away' strategies among the 12 which I do want to cover, I'm going to just 'tease' you with shorter descriptions and questions for several of the remaining chapters in Part 1 which should make you even more anxious to want to buy the book and read the full explanation and answers to some questions I pose.

Chapter 3 – Decoration (pages 53-71)

- In this chapter C&J describe 4 tactics commonly used to implement the '**decoration**' strategy which is largely all about "*taking a traditional service approach and embellish it in ways that make not only the outcome, but the experience itself memorable*" (p. 55):
- **Theme, Sense, Comfort, and Function**
- In describing '**theme**', C&J break it up into 1) the **main theme** – what you see; 2) the **backstory** – the story behind the story for which you only see the reaction to the story; 3) **Storyboarding** – crafting the look and feel of the experience so as to alter the customer's sense of reality. Disneyland and Vegas are loaded with examples of all three but C&J describe **four main things** to focus on in order to maximize the impact of 'theme' as you put it into action (pp. 60 – 65).
- In describing '**sense**', C&J offer a series of practical 'do's and don't' so as to be congruent with the core principles of design – focus, harmony, balance, proportion, and rhythm."(pp. 63-64)
- A "*Simple Sense “. . . cries for congruence but also for creativity*" - once again visit "Bellagio, the Venetian, MGM Grand, Caesar's Palace, or Paris in Vegas and you'll see all of these put into action.
- You can experience "*Comfort*" personally if you go into Miller Brothers Ltd – Men's clothing store tucked away in a quiet little street in Buckhead. (pp. 66-67).

- For the last tactic – “*Function*”, I’ll refer to a personal example. A Tilley hat was created by Alex Tilley who invented the broad-brimmed canvas hat with two chin straps rather than one so that whether it’s sailing or hiking on a windy mountain top in the Canadian Rockies where we met on a heli-hiking trip, the hat won’t blow off. But rather than Tilley’s expanded ‘**function**’ being just a high-end Canadian clothing manufacturer, Alex’s catalogue is more like an adventure travelogue sprinkled with the pictures throughout mainly taken by him. Attached is a picture of my wife and I with Alex and friends up at his Muskoka lake home a couple hundred miles North of Toronto. As you can tell from the photo, Alex ain’t no introvert.

Chapter 4 – Camouflage (pages 73-86)

C&J draw a striking parallel in the **structure** and **outcome** between imaginative customer service and the structure and outcome of a fine stage magician. Both take the customer/audience by complete surprise and leave them with a smile and a story to tell.

In both situations, the magician and the imaginative service rep are all about “*Making the difficult seem easy*”.

Discover what C&J mean about “*the outcome after the outcome effect*”(pp. 74-77) and how this can create one of the greatest customer surprises.

“*Invisibility*” is another element of camouflage – making a service invisible that allows for extraordinary service to be performed to surprise and delight (pp. 77-80). Read their great examples of how this could be accomplished in a grocery store context.

According to C&J, “*Transference is the magician’s tactic called misdirection.*” Another way of describing this might be making an unpleasant or monotonous situation ‘**pleasant**’ by a distraction. Read pages 80 and 81 for some good examples of this.

Another useful ‘**camouflage**’ tactic is “*Clairvoyance*” which really just demands heightened observance of details along with some creativity. Pages 81 – 84 will give you many good examples which can get you thinking about ways you might apply this tactic.

C&J finish this chapter with a final tactic of camouflage they term – “*Mystery*”. They characterize it as ‘*the maximum use of stealth and subtle use of surprise*’. Pages 84 – 86 will give you several ideas of how companies have used ‘*mystery*’ to provide imaginative customer service.

Chapter 5 – Concierge (pages 87-101)

The “*Concierge*” strategy which C&J describe brings to my mind, a male-female walking/talking computer, armed with an unlimited built-in gigabyte database management system for capturing and retrieving personal information that will make any

service or buying experience extraordinary. C&J equate a concierge to a very competent **butler**, or a highly skilled **military general's aide**.

The **Heart** of Concierge Service is all about making the customer “*feel as though they have been bestowed a unique gift, specially selected just for them.*”

Details (pp. 91-92) – learn what it means to be a ‘*service choreographer*’ (p. 91).

Extras (pp. 92-94) – it doesn’t take too much to imagine what this is all about. It’s the ‘shock and awe’ as C&J tell the story of the plight of two businessmen checking in at a hotel whose luggage has been lost by the airline and a big meeting is coming up the next day. Overhearing this, the front desk clerk notices that they are about his same size and weight; goes home and gets a complete outfitting for both of them – suit, shirt, and accessories. Returning after their successful meeting, “**He’s a miracle worker**” and can you imagine how many people they told that story to and the number of people who stayed at that hotel as a result?

Mentor – C&J differentiate between a ‘**teacher**’ and a ‘**mentor**’ giving the nod to the mentor who not only instructs but ‘*guides*’ and more importantly ‘*facilitates wisdom*’ rather than just imparting facts – ‘*tutors*’ rather than just leading tours. (See pp. 95-97 and note the study where the **Number 1** factor in a customer survey indicating why a customer would repurchase or return was where they “**Proactively provide me new and useful information**”.

Know me - (pp. 97-98) C&J draw an important distinction between ‘personal’ and ‘private’. Read the story illustrating that “*Familiarity can be a positive to most customers, intimacy is a benefit to a few.*” Be careful not to allow good service to **trespass** into the territory of becoming too intimate with the customer.

Thanks – (pp. 98 -101) According to C&J, the “**Concierge**” version of ‘thanks’ is not just an expression of thanks but “*the conveyance of a feeling*”. “. . . *thanks means communicating gratitude in a fashion that makes customers feel your authenticity.*” C&J provide a great list of 25 ‘imaginative’ ways of thanking customers. You’ll want to have this list.

I love the term with which C&J end this chapter on “Concierge” service. They call it ‘**customer courtship**’. “*Take-their-breath-away service providers never take a valued relationship for granted and remain ever attentive for ways to celebrate the joy of the relationship and express gratitude for the return it provides.*”

Chapter 6– Partnership (pages 103-120)

C&J start Chapter 6 with an interesting question, [If you were running a very successful local restaurant and a completely horrendous tragedy hit your business and you were about to run out of money and go under, “**would your customers step in and save your restaurant?**” They did for Mama Cole’s restaurant in Anacostia just outside of DC.

Both of these chapters talk about the connection and the relationship the business owners have created with their customers. The difference between the two according to C&J would be whereas in a **Partnership** relationship the customers might say they are ‘**extremely fond**’ of you, in a **Cult-Like**, they would say they ‘**absolutely love you**’.

As the authors point out, by the very nature of service it’s a ‘partnership’ because there are always two parties involved.

C&J point out the elements in a ‘take-their-breath-away’ partners will always be present: **“a relationship of equality – one with a strong sense of fairness plus mutual give and take”**.

Inclusion – (pp. 108-109) Read their Six Principles of Customer Inclusion and how to do it. C&J say the goal in each of these is to make the customer feel like a ‘*family member*’ while also understanding they are really only a ‘*guest*’ if that’s what they would prefer to be.

Generosity – C&J draw a parallel and a distinction between ‘*giving*’ and ‘*gifting*’ which is very similar to how I distinguish between ‘*networking*’ and ‘*NetWeaving*’.

In networking, you are looking to ‘*scratch someone else’s back in order that they will hopefully turn around and scratch yours*’, whereas with NetWeaving, you are only concerned with helping someone else without expectation of gain - primarily out of the energy and good feeling you know you will derive from helping the other person.

In ‘*giving*’ C&J likewise pose it to be reciprocal. You ‘*give*’ with the expectation that the favor will be returned. They contrast that with ‘*gifting*’ which “**suggests doing something for the sheer joy of giving and the pleasure of watching the response**” . . . **“no expectation of future payback.”**

Trust – C&J say that trust communicates that you are reaching out and they also suggest that it’s most often small little offerings which can be the most powerful: “*This one’s on us*” . . . “The ‘*take a penny – give a penny*’ dish beside the cash register” . . . “*We DO take personal checks*” sign.

Wide Awake – A C&J quote “**Great customer service is all about bringing forth obvious energy, And when that energy is focused on the customer like a spotlight on a stage performer, it communicates commitment and care.**”

Bone Honesty – One last valuable insight from C&J:

“Partnerships that work are bone honest. They are willing to go overboard sharing information” . . . “Constant pursuit of truth also fuels mutual learning and winning partnerships never stop learning.”

Chapter 7 – Cult-Like (pages 121-136)

C&J give several tips as to how you can tell when a company has used ‘take-your-breath-away’ “Cult-Like” strategies to woo their customers: “*They wear your logo, name their children after your brand, or act possessive when you change some aspect of your service offering they do not particularly favor.*” I’d add when they tattoo your logo somewhere on their body.

The authors refer to this ‘take-your-breath-away’ strategy as ‘**cult-like**’ rather than ‘**cult**’ since there can be a very negative connotation to “**cult**” behavior when it’s a Jonestown or Branch Davidians type.

But many of the same principles apply which create that kind of over-zealous appeal and attraction. C&J say,

*“There is clearly a psycho logic to extreme brand appeal. Color, shape, sound, and touch form an intricate pattern in the brain that links with learned preferences and spell **Magnetism**. There is also a social component at work.”*

C&J cite five (5) tactics which will drive devotion to the highest level: network, identify, daring, secret, and character.

Network – according to C&J, “*Network creates ways of socializing the service experience, thus ramping affirmation that the customer made a wise choice.*” They cite Harley Davidson, Mary Kay, and the ‘cheese-heads’ of Green Bay as good examples.

Identity – C&J – “*Identity involves finding ways the experience can be integrated into the customer’s individuality.*” Think of ‘**logo’d**’ paraphernalia or some ‘**coded greeting**’, or the slogan of the Marines – “*The Few, the Proud, the Marines*”.

Daring – C&J – “*Daring is our label for actions that help customers feel special because of choosing you as their service provider*”. This is the stuff that’s really out on the edge.

Secret – C&J – “*Secrets is a broad label for insider information*”. Only those who are REALLY *in-the-know* know it.

Character – C&J – “*It [character] means finding a way to support the customer’s view of self at a superlative level.*” . . . “*It leaves the customer moved and eager for a repeat experience. It is a kind of awakening that cause life’s colors to be richer and the day’s emotions to be rounder.*”

Chapter 8 – Luxury (pp.137-147)

- According to C&J “*. . .more and more organizations have a portion of their customer base at the upper stratum of wealth.*” The question is how to “give

distinctive treatment to their more discriminating customers and clients” . . . as well as “many wannabe high-end customers”.

- Pages 141-142 – **“The Protocols of Luxury Service”**
 - Page 142 – *“Luxury Service is Authentic and Symmetrical”*
 - Page 142 - *“Luxury Service is Magical and Subtle”*
 - Page 143 - *“Luxury Service Educates to Invite Experimentation”*
 - Page 144 - *“Luxury Service Elevates and Enriches”*
 - Page 144 - *“Luxury Service is a Unique Sensory Experience”*
 - Page 145 - *“Luxury Service is the Pinnacle of Comfort”*
 - Page 146 - *“Elegance with All the Arrogance Removed”*

Chapter 9 – Air (PP. 149-158)

- Think of “Air” as *“Consistently doing the fundamentals exceedingly well”*. These are those things which are expected- called ‘**service air**’.
- According to C&J *“It [Air]works if your unit or organization takes care of the basics perfectly and ensures customers remain keenly aware of that fact. It works as long as the organization is in a sub-par niche with no other enterprise that’s getting its air perfect and it really works when the organization adds a little something unique.”*
- According to C&J, **“Air Apparent** means singling out a service air feature at which the organization believes it can excel and then reminding the customer of that fact.”
- C&J call *“Air Show – the capacity to enable an organization to leapfrog competitors and gain competitive advantage very quickly.”* . . . *“It must be bold enough to create a marketplace buzz.”*

Chapter 10 – Air Defense (PP. 159-168)

- C&J – *“Effective service recovery from a broken promise is typically less about correcting an obvious breach to the outcome promised and more about soothing the bad feelings of the customer triggered by perceived shortcomings in the experience.”*
- - Page 163-164 – *“Assessing Air Defense”*
 - Page 165 - *“Managing Air Defense”*
 - Page 165 – *“Anxiety Monitor”*
 - Page 166 - *“Customer Sounding Board”*
 - Page 167 – *“Complaint Forensics”*

Chapter 11 – Scout’s Honor (PP. 169-179)

Having been a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout, when I saw this chapter title, I immediately thought of the Scout’s Law – *Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent.*

- C&J – *“Customers, like children, do not expect service providers (or parents) to be perfect. They do expect them to care enough to manage the trust gap so customers retain unwavering trust.”*
- **“Caring Actions”** – *“Customers trust people and organizations that repeatedly and sincerely demonstrate they care.”* – C&J
- **“Competence”** – *“Competence communicates to customers they are in the hands of a professional.”* - C&J
- **“Core Protection”** – this is a repeat reminder to **“protect the basics”** – C&J
- **“Constraint-Free Execution”** - *“Promise-keeping requires an organization working without silos to ensure seamless operation, flawless handoffs, and constraint-free execution.”* – C&J
- **“Consistency”** – *“Consistency reminds customers that effectiveness was neither accidental nor unique to a particular person or touch point.”*

Chapter 12 – Firefighter (PP. 182-196)

Who are some of our greatest heroes – Firemen, right? In customer service terms, that means **‘rescuing situations’** which COULD have been a disaster, but which are turned into a positive.

“Firefighter” recognizes that one of the ‘take-your-breath-away’ strategies involves doing just that – turning disasters into memorable situations. Here are the principles C&J point out that make **“Service Recovery”** effective:

- **Principle #1** – *“Remarkable Recovery Begins with Planning”*(p. 184)
- **Principle #2** – *“Customers Have a Clear Image of How You Should Fix Their Problem”* (p. 184-185)
- **Principle #3** - *“First Fix the Customer - Then Fix the Customer’s Problem”*(p. 185-186)
- **Principle #4** – *“Offer a Fair Resolution to the Problem – Then Atone for Any Inconvenience”* (p. 186-187)
- **Principle #5** - *“No Recovery Act is Complete without Follow-ups”*(p. 187-188)

Tactics of a Firefighter Strategy: *Partnering, Connectivity, Problem-Solving Prowess, Recovery, Recovery Legends, Metrics* and Mapping. (pp. 188-196)

PART TWO – The Take-Their-Breath-Away Execution Plan (PP. 197-270)

Since this summary is designed for the “**Don’t Need to Read the Book**” book club, I am only going to mention and briefly summarize the STEPS involved in applying the STRATEGIES which we’ve covered. So in order to fully benefit – other than buying the book – which of course most who attend the book club meeting do anyway – you need to come to get the full benefit.

Either way, C&J caution that although the 12 strategies covered were intended to help you ‘**think up**’ ways you could provide ‘**imaginative, take-your-breath-away**’ service, the bottom-line is, “*Will this work with your customers and clients?*”

As they say, it’s easier to ‘**tone down**’ rather than ‘**think up**’ so they started with the ‘**think up**’ strategies, but now they say it’s time to ‘**tone down**’ with a **reality check** asking yourself:

“What will work? . . . What can be sustained? . . . How to make it work?”

According to C&J, there are 5 steps in order for the execution to be successful:

Chapter 13 – Insight” - Identify and understand your target customer. “*It is important you have an up-to-date view of your customer’s wants, needs, hopes, issues, and aspirations. That may involve using a data-gathering tool or process for continuously reviewing that picture.*”

Chapter 14 - “Oversight” – Assessing Your Launch Pad - Do a comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis. The authors call this “**the toughest chapter in the book**” – “*a clear-eyed assessment of your capacity to launch and sustain the chosen strategy*”.

Chapter 15 – “Spotlight” – Choosing a Take-Their-Breath-Away Strategy
This is what we will examine during the breakout session at our book club event – discussing how you can apply some of the tools and strategies explained in the book – to your own situation. Hopefully though you will have done a personal SWOT analysis so that what you come up will be workable and sustainable for you and your company.

There’s an especially useful chart on page 239 which should be very helpful in choosing the strategy best suited for you and your company.

Chapter 16 – “Foresight” – *Unearthing Potential Customer Stressors*”

C&J – *“Foresight is about taking an advance look at the factors likely to derail the launch of an effective take-their-breath-away strategy execution.”*

Chapter 17 – “Green Light – *Launch Lessons for Leaders*”

C&J – *“Take-their-breath-away service is a handmade original surprise. Its power to attract and retain customers lies in its capacity to make the customer feel they have been bestowed a value-unique expression that honors the very nobility of service. Its originality and imagination telegraph an innate commitment to excellence. Its handmade distinction signals an unmistakable spotlight on the customer. And, like a perfect rainbow, it leaves us astonished, affirmed, and served.”*

So hopefully, you have found this book to be as valuable as I have and that you will not only apply the principles and select a strategy best suited to your own situation, but that you’ll spread the word about this book to others who might benefit as well.

If you would like to contact John Patterson about possibly working with your company, he can be reached at Progressive Insights, Inc. at 404-350-1746 or his cell 770-329-1459.

Email: jrpci@mindspring.com