

# The Apple Experience: Secrets to Building Insanely Great Customer Loyalty

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**Carmine Gallo (2012). *The Apple Experience: Secrets to Building Insanely Great Customer Loyalty*. TATA McGraw-Hill, Price: Rs. 325, Pages 256, ISBN: 9781259027680.**

It's often said that "nothing succeeds like success" and no company seems to know better than Apple right now. "The Apple Experience-Secrets to Building Insanely Great Customer Loyalty" by Carmine Gallo (by TATA McGraw-Hill) explores the ways by which Apple could reach millions and make a difference to their lives. The author analyses their retail business model-The Apple Store. Once we read the book, we can't help but ask ourselves-"Good customer service is not a rocket science. But how come so many companies fail...And fail miserably? Why is this common sense so uncommon?" The book is written after the death of their visionary leader and legend, Steve Jobs.

## About the author

Carmine Gallo is not really a stranger to the legion of Apple fans. If you consider Apple as a religion, then you may call Carmine an evangelist. He is a communication consultant for leading brands worldwide. He is an author and columnist for Forbes and Monster.com. He has also written best sellers based on Apple and its legendary leader Steve Jobs, which are: "The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs (2009)" and "The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs (2011)". Other books written by him include "The Power of Foursquare", "Fire them up" and "10 Simple Secrets of the World's Greatest Business Communicators". Carmine has worked as a presenter and business correspondent for CNBC, CNN and CBS. He is an Emmy Award winner. His book ""The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs" won the Axiom award for one among the top three business books of 2011. As you might have noticed, three of his books feature Apple or Steve Jobs (both are synonymous to each other). His book on World's greatest communicators also features Steve Jobs, and the only book not to feature Apple majorly is the one on Foursquare. Hence I believe

I am not wrong when I call him an Apple evangelist.

## About the book

To understand what do you mean by "Insanely Great Customer Loyalty", you need to speak to an Apple customer. And most customers are hardcore loyalists and advocates of the brand. My cousin, who works with a leading telecom company in a senior management role, used to be a Blackberry addict. He is so much into technology; I could hardly make sense out of his sensibilities and logics whenever we had a discussion. But when he met Apple through an iPad, I could sense his change. He was bowled over. It seemed like he has fallen in love. I didn't believe him when he passionately described his object of affection. One day, I had a chance to sit with him and learn more about Apple and its products. To my surprise, I discovered needs, which I thought never existed. He is what the author calls "Insanely loyal"- an advocate, a promoter. How do companies create such loyalty? The book deals with just that, and the author uses the business model of Apple's retail outlet-The Apple Store-to drive home the points. Obviously the next question would be-is it purely retail business oriented-meant for people in retail? Not really, because, a happy customer is the aim of every business entity and the recipes for customer satisfaction are more or less the same. The author is able to focus on key points, keeping them as simple and lively as far as possible.

The book is not really a story of Apple's success in retail. It's all about how the company's DNA- the core beliefs, and how these beliefs were formed, established and internalised by each and every one-from the top management to the frontline sales staff at Apple Store. The frontline sales staff matter the most, since they are

the ones who bring the product or service to the end user. The book often refers to how a great product can fail, if the delivery is not just right. The author mentions how Steve Jobs was inspired by other brands; where the focus was on delivering a better experience-not just profit or sales maximisation. For example, Steve and his colleague Ron Johnson went on a search to find out who offered the best customer service experience in the world. They found that it was no retailer, but a hotel by the name Four Seasons. The founder of Four Seasons, Isadore Sharp shared the same views as Jobs, and was responsible for many innovations which changed the end user experience. Many of the innovations are the ones which we take for granted now, like small shampoo bottles in rooms. They focussed on customer delight, and succeeded in it. Similar analogies of restaurants and hotels can be seen all throughout the book.

The book ponders on three major factors, which the author believes are critical to create insanely great customer loyalty. One are Inspiring internal customer (the employees or partners in progress), Second Serving external customer and, Third Setting the stage. The first part is all about the importance of being nice. Apple believes that everything else can be taught, but being nice can't be. It also talks about having a culture of open feedbacks. Apple believes in cultivating fearless employees. It is mentioned that Steve Jobs loved people who were able to match wits with him. Now, having an open culture in practice is said easy. Many companies are so vocal about having an open culture and open feedback system. But how much of that is internalised and is a way of life is highly debatable. With an open culture, there are increased levels of trust between employees. The book also mentions about another bestselling author Stephen Covey and his book called Speed of Trust. It takes courage to say what one genuinely feels and only an open culture will encourage employees to be honest- to be brutally honest, when it matters. Steve Jobs loved the so called 'rebels'. He believed that only they could change the world for the better.

The author here introduces a unique parameter for analysing the employee engagement, called Net Promoter Score. It is engaging to read about this concept. It forces you to do introspection, with respect to your

own score and your organisation score. This portion is not to be missed.

The second part discusses how the customer service (or the customer experience, as they say) can be made better. No theories here, just practical observations from the day to day functioning of Apple Stores across the world. This part talks about the five steps of service which the employees follow religiously. It talks about how Apple store employees handle a customer on a very busy day. How they 'reset the customer's internal clock'. Carmine further explains these with examples, which are from his own experiences and that of his near and dear ones. For example, he narrates how he went along with his mother-in-law to select i-Pad, and how they were treated. This portion of the book also discusses how to sell the benefit rather than the features, and this is the only portion which seemed closer to a true blue management book like Marketing by Philip Kotler. Customer experience is greatly enhanced when they are encouraged to explore. The employees are trained for this and the book has many fascinating experiences of such customers. Apple strives to create customer delight moments which are called 'wow moments'. It's when an experience goes beyond the expectation of a customer.

The part on external customers also mentions the importance of a well-rehearsed script. The importance of external communication is reinforced by the fact that a seemingly simple product presentation by Steve Jobs is detailed, rehearsed and perfected well in advance. The script, the employee approach towards a customer and the sales experience he delivers is all part of a major plan to deliver a consistent experience, anywhere in the world.

The third portion talks about setting the stage for the customer experience. The author here starts with a mention of his own experience with a hotel. How the ambience, and even the scent of the place matters. This part talks about the effort which has gone into making the Apple store the most profitable retail venture in the world. Apple stores can take pride in the fact that they earn more business per square feet, than many of the luxury retailers. The secret is in eliminating the clutter and making the space large and spacious. The author

mentions in detail how employees go to the finest detail in cleaning the glass doors, for example. He also explains how Steve Jobs was involved in even designing the hand rails and how focus to each detail mattered. The book ends with the recap of the soul of Apple, and it says how "average is officially over" quoting Thomas Friedman.

The book follows a simple, but effective narrative by which we are able to understand and analyse the key points. Every chapter ends with a 'Checkout' section, where in the author gives key takeaways and points of action. Some chapters give you some minor exercises, like doing a Twitter survey, to know about live feedbacks from real customers. That is interesting. To have a richer experience, the author recommends watching videos from YouTube, like that of an employee dancing.

It is amusing to see how much importance internet social media has gained over the years. The author has quotes from Twitter in almost all chapters, from real customers. And most of them are fun to read, which gives a fair reflection of how they felt when they experienced the difference. These days, you don't really need to do a customer survey to find what people think of you. Search for hash tags plus the topic, and you get it, in your face. Good or bad.

The mention of Steve Jobs and Apple immediately compels comparison with another visionary Jack Welch

and GE. Jack Welch too had led the company from the front, with similar expectations from his employees. There are many similar patterns here. He evolved from a "Neutron Jack" to a people's leader, who led GE to the commanding position of current times. He too advocated an open feedback policy and encouraged 360 degree feedback for its employees. But, at some places, we can't help but doubt- Is Apple really the best place to work? Can it sustain over time? After all, it's said that reaching the top is easier, sustaining there is the difficult part. The motivation factors of today can turn into hygiene factors of tomorrow. Expectations are increasing-from employees and customers (or, as the author put it, internal and external customers).

The author also mentions other companies who have a stellar reputation of customer service, and how they are similar in their outlook. For example, the shoe manufacturer Zappos and manufacturer of handmade cosmetics, Lush. There are several additional materials which the author has given in notes section, which makes it even more interesting.

Overall, the book is worth a read. Not just for people in retail, but for entrepreneurs, employees and anyone who is interested in increasing his/her productivity. Because, in current times, each individual is a brand, and his/her brand value is a function of the quality one delivers.

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