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Successful Otherness in a Selfish World

In 1991, I read *The Rise of Selfishness in America* by James Lincoln Collier. Its core premise was that Americans were becoming increasingly self-focused. Kirk's reviews described the book as a "vibrant, sweeping analysis of the roots of American self-indulgence...a valuable overview of the changes in social attitudes from the Puritans to the 'Me Generation.'"

Back then, Collier's book started me thinking about the counter balance to "selfishness" -- "otherness."

Putting this discussion into a business context, "otherness" seemed like a fascinating business opportunity. If, as Collier suggests, people are self-focused, instant gratification seekers, then businesses should be poised to feed those cravings. If anything, since 1991, technology and mobile connectivity have escalated the intensity of consumers focusing on "my time, my wants, my preferences." While we might debate the long-term social impact of "selfishness," "make it easy for me," and "I want it now" trends, business leaders should be positioning themselves by:

1. Hiring people who have innate talents to demonstrate "otherness"

I often liken today's business environment to a networking function where everyone is in a selling mode and no one is buying. Organizations rich with people fully committed to serving will dominate in a world where so many customers are looking to be served.

2. Obsessing about delivering customer ease at every touchpoint

Since customers increasingly expect brands to deliver experiences congruent with their lifestyle needs, companies that win today consistently listen, observe, understand and execute such that customers expend little effort to get their needs met.

3. Leveraging technology to increase service speed (particularly on repetitive tasks)

We live in a world of technology-fueled consumer short-cuts. Great brands analyze every customer touch point to look for ways to simplify, expedite, and drive consistency through apps, on-line self-service/scheduling, and payment tools.

4. Maintaining a healthy perspective on incessant customer demands

Every time I become cranky about the escalating demands of customers, I remind myself that I, too, am a consumer and my demands aren't all that different than the ones being placed on me. I reflect on the classic, albeit ancient, scene from an "I Love Lucy" television episode in which she and her neighbor Ethel are working on a candy wrapping assembly line. The speed of the line increases to the point where Lucy and Ethel comically can't manage the through-put.

There isn't a lot of time for introspection or complaining about escalating customer expectations! The wants, needs, and desires of our customers are firing down the line at breakneck speeds and we must keep moving at their pace!

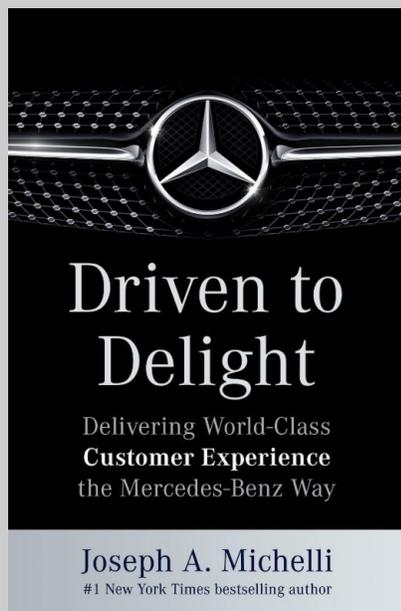
I am at peace with the rise of selfishness in America and have crafted the following business moral to the story:

In times of selfishness, professional service organizations become increasingly rare and important!

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Watch



Service is Not a Mystery

From the Blog:

Soliciting and Using Customer Feedback: Learning Without Annoying

Maybe it is an occupational hazard, but every time I receive service I make two rather important decisions:

1. Does this company know how to "care for" my presenting need?
2. Does this company "care about" meeting those needs?

I carry that evaluation process through every touch point with a brand including if/how they solicit feedback from me about their service delivery.

As someone who consults with companies on how to effectively listen and act on the feedback provided by customers, I thought it might be helpful to share a few best practices (which clearly many brands who attempt to engage me simply don't utilize): [Read More](#)

