

The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary

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Publisher: McGraw Hill

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Joseph A. Michelli spent 18 months observing the inner workings of the Starbucks Corporation. The resulting interpretation of the company's philosophies is The Starbucks Experience, which provides the reader with principles gleaned from the author's thorough combing of Starbucks' values, and can be applied to both business and the reader's personal life.

Michelli breaks his observations down into five principles, which he deems instrumental to the astronomical success of Starbucks. The first of these principles is to "Make It Your Own." According to Michelli, Starbucks expects its employees to be engaging and involved. Instead of setting too-rigid rules that govern the employee- customer relationship, however, senior management created a booklet called "The Green Apron Book," which suggests ways of creating a closer relationship with customers by forging personal connections and elevating customer interactions. Without these rigid instructions, Starbucks management hopes to maintain the environment they are famous for.

The author suggests that these principles can be applied to any business. He believes that simply creating a welcoming environment and knowing a customer's name will help to create a lasting relationship between a business and its customers. Learning a customer's wants and desires and then responding to them, also helps create a stronger company-client bond.

The second observation, "Everything Matters," explains how Starbucks pays attention to every aspect of the Starbucks store, right down to the very last coffee bean. Missed details, Michelli explicates, create unsatisfied customers who will go elsewhere. He also brings up the very good point that there is no way to hide poor quality. This is one of the reasons that Starbucks has become such a prosperous company - they pay close attention to every minute detail, and make sure everything in the store is of the very highest quality.

"Surprise and Delight" is the idea behind the third observation. Michelli uses "Cracker Jack" as an example: people buy Cracker Jack for the popcorn, but the prize inside is an added bonus that keeps the customers returning for more. He discusses his theory that people these days hope to be dazzled in every experience, and the best surprises are natural and spontaneous - the effect of seeing a need and filling it immediately. He reminds the reader, too, that even though breakdowns in the business can potentially occur, delight can come from how efficiently and easily these breakdowns are fixed.

The fourth observation, "Embrace Resistance" is closed with this idea: "Nothing in nature grows without facing limiting forces." The author believes that one must learn the skills needed to face these forces and see the business and relationship opportunities that may be garnered from overcoming them. Michelli again emphasizes the importance of correcting mistakes and misinformation quickly and efficiently, taking direct responsibility for the errors made, and subsequently taking corrective action.

The author's last principle is that every company should "leave [its] mark." This section focuses on the community aspect of every company, and how being an active member of the community will help business. Business owners should realize, however, that this community-minded business model is ultimately not just the right way to do business, but the only way. Community activities can serve as team -building activities for employees, and also send out a positive image of the company as a whole.

Even though The Starbucks Experience uses just one corporation as an example, the ideas in the book can be applied to any business, and even some personal aspects of life, too. The book is laid out in a comprehensive format, divided into sections for easier reading. Michelli keeps the tone light throughout the book, offering many anecdotes and interesting insights into the nuances of Starbucks, but never sacrifices education for entertainment. Although Michelli can appear subjective when describing the company's many successes, one can tell that he might just be charmed by Starbucks' philosophy of business.