

## Model Teams

***“You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world...but it requires people to make the dream a reality.”***

***Walt Disney***

Several years ago, a software engineer named Paul English, tired of the frustration he suffered when calling companies with automated phone systems, so he decided to fight back. He made a list of the 10 companies that frustrated him most and then developed a cheat sheet to bypass the systems and get to a human being. He posted it on his website and asked others to share their experiences and tips. Before long, he had instructions for bypassing the phone systems of over 100 companies and a whole movement was born [www.gethuman.com](http://www.gethuman.com).

Most of us can relate to English's frustration. We've all experienced the irritation of being asked to key in question after question, and choose from menu after menu all the while a captive audience to “on hold” marketing. It's ironic that this is usually the pathway to the customer service representative. All of this wasted time and frustration, when all we really wanted was just to speak with another human being.

We live in a fast-paced, highly stressful world and it's becoming more and more impersonal all the time. Howard Schultz, founder and chairman of Starbucks Coffee, believes this loss of human connection is creating a fundamental change in the way consumers buy products and services. He's often quoted as saying “Starbuck's is not in the coffee business serving people, but in the people business selling coffee”. He believes that, today, people want products and services that create a powerful and enduring emotional connection. Schultz believes traditional marketing and advertising isn't enough to build the connection and create strong, lasting loyalty, it requires real people...employees that are passionately devoted to winning customers over.

Are we in the dentistry profession serving people or the people business providing dentistry? Many practices have recorded, after-hour, phone messages telling patients “This machine does not accept cancellations; please call back during business hours”. I often wonder if patients feel offended or frustrated when they can't leave a message. Especially, if they feel that they were trying to do the right thing to give the practice as much notice as possible. Of course, getting the Monday morning list of recorded cancellations was the impetus for this type of practice management solution, but, the truth is, many of those patients won't call back, they just won't show up, which, in the long run, can make even greater interruptions to the daily schedule. The next practice option

is often the “broken appointment” charge...still; might there be something more fundamentally wrong here?

The success of a dental practice, like any business, is directly related to customer loyalty and loyalty is derived from relationships of trust, respect and connection. It’s much harder to cancel or “forget” an appointment with someone you know personally and you genuinely like. And, I’m not just talking about the doctor...since the doctor probably won’t be answering the phone. I’m also talking about the relationship between the team members and patients. If I know that you sincerely care about me and trust me...I’m not going to want to disappoint you or let you down. Canceling is much easier for patients when they’re speaking with an anonymous person than with someone they know and respect. Customer loyalty and trust is also what generates new patient referrals, keeps the recare schedule full and is the basis for case acceptance.

This kind of loyalty can’t happen without employees that are passionately dedicated to developing these genuine human connections with their customers. The question is how can we nurture and develop this kind of caring passion in our own dental teams? In business, the most passionate employees are generally the ones that feel most appreciated, rewarded and respected. And, in a world of growing cynicism and distrust, intention and vision are also important...maybe more important than ever. Employees and customers want to believe in and be part of something worthwhile...something bigger than themselves. So, creating an organization that cares about people and encourages them to care about each other is part and parcel of the Starbucks Philosophy. And because they walk their talk, Starbucks provides healthcare and stock options for all employees, even part time. They are consistently rated one of the best US companies to work for and their philosophy has paid off. High morale and low employee turnover has more than paid the cost of benefits.

It isn’t difficult to figure, then, that strong, dedicated leadership is essential in creating the vision, core values and driving principles. Schultz believes people want to know about a company’s principles and ethics and how they demonstrate them in their business, with their employees, with their customers...even in the wider sense with their community. For Starbucks it’s a matter of balancing profitability with social responsibility. And, Schultz has repeatedly demonstrated that a business can be wildly successful and also be socially conscious.

Schultz also believes in the principle of replicating, or modeling, success. This principle is built on the assertion that trial and error is a lot more costly than looking for insights and correlations in other businesses or fields of endeavor. Simply put...it’s “not reinventing the wheel”. The Ritz – Carlton Hotel Management Company has won the Malcolm Baldrige Award for customer service twice. One of the stipulations for acceptance of the award is a willingness to share the basis of their success with other

businesses...in other words, helping others to “not reinvent the wheel”. It is just this concept of modeling that created the foundation for Starbucks. Howard Schultz wanted to transplant the Italian-style espresso bar to the United States. He wanted to create a place for people to go...to meet...to commune, not unlike the British pub.

Learning from the success of great companies and great leaders just makes sense. I’ve listed below some valuable components of the Starbuck’s philosophy. With a little imagination, it’s not difficult to see correlations or gain insights on how the same principles might improve our own businesses.

## **Lessons from Starbucks Chairman Howard Schultz:**

**Lesson 1:** Dig deep to identify what you are truly passionate about (hint: it’s not always the product itself) and convey that message to employees, customers and colleagues. When you are passionate, you come across as excited, energetic, and enthusiastic...all of the qualities people like to see in others. And if people like you, they’re more likely to do business with you or to back your vision.

**Lesson 2:** Inspire your colleagues, investors and employees by painting a picture of a world made better by your service, product, company or cause.

**Lesson 3:** To get the most out of people, a leader has to tap into their emotions as well as their minds. People can relate to stories. They can see themselves in other people’s stories. “The ability to use stories to get people to buy into one’s vision with their hearts is a powerful leadership capability.”<sup>1</sup>

In a world of globalization, outsourcing and “swim with the sharks mentality”, the above lessons may seem somewhat naïve, but time has proven otherwise. The success of the Starbuck’s brand is astounding. Achieving his vision through a leadership philosophy of shared passion and dedication to the success of others has ultimately led Schultz’s to his own success. He would argue that making a profit and giving something back has created an even higher level of profitability and success as it has created greater respect in the eyes of consumers and employees alike. He believes that many companies are missing a great opportunity by not focusing on “giving back”...it’s just one more way that Starbucks is developing an emotional connection with its market.

The popularity of emotion-based reality television programming should be proof positive of the relevancy of Schultz’s philosophy. Programs such as *Extreme Makeover* and *Ten*

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<sup>1</sup> “Starbuck’s Secret Ingredient”, Carmine Gallo, Viewpoint, BusinessWeek Online Magazine, May 5, 2006

*Years Younger* present emotion-based stories that viewers can relate to. Viewers can identify with the show participants and see themselves in the stories of others. At the same time, viewers have had the opportunity to observe the enthusiasm, passion and compassion of the professionals dedicated to helping these patient participants. It's obvious that this message is, as Schultz says, "powerful"...as these programs have done more to promote the life changing aspect of our cosmetic procedures than all the money the profession has spent collectively on marketing and advertising combined.

In the dental practice the new patient interview is the ideal opportunity to create what Schultz calls "a powerful and enduring emotional contact". Reading off the questions from a dental history questionnaire may give us information but it doesn't necessarily create a human bond. This is the time, the magic opportunity, for genuine human connection. Canned questions and scripts, no matter how well rehearsed can sound insincere and don't replace the give and take of honest dialogue and sincere communication. In fact, nothing damages credibility faster than using sales "techniques" that might be recognized by patients with sales training of their own. When an interview is done by a treatment coordinator, hygienist or other team member, it's important that the information gathered be passed on to the doctor prior to his/her communication with the patient. Being asked the same questions by both the doctor and other team members can seem insulting and frustrating.

Likewise, the ability of administrator's to connect with patients over the counter or on the telephone is every bit as impactful as the patient's first interview. In fact, a lack of connection and human caring might even be enough to cause patients to reject the practice altogether. Often employees are hired for positions and immediately given responsibility for answering calls, making financial arrangements and collecting fees and even handling conflict resolution...all without any specific training on the part of the practice. There is sometimes an assumption that because the employee has had previous "experience" they will know how to handle patients and situations the way *we* would expect. Dedication to the patient starts with dedication to the team and team training.

Anyone interested in finding out more about Starbucks employee training program can stop by their local Starbucks and ask for *The Green Apron Book*. This book is a sort of employee manual in miniature. Less of a rulebook it is more about goals and suggestions to empower *partners* (employees)...for example, "Be welcoming; offer everyone a sense of belonging." Additionally, there is a book by author Joseph Michelli, entitled *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary*. The book is the result of an 18 month study by the author of what makes Starbucks successful.

Howard Schultz's dream of modeling the success of the Italian espresso bar is what created the Starbuck's Phenomenon. He observed the sense of community regular customers enjoyed there and believed that the same opportunity existed in the US. Schultz believes that there is a fundamental change taking place today in the way

consumers buy products and services and that people want more than just a cup of coffee...more than just the service and convenience...they want an emotional connection with others...the human touch. If replicating success has worked before, it can work again. Looking for correlations between Starbucks' success and our own might lead us to some interesting connections...maybe even emotional connections...with our patients...with our teams? In his book, *Pour Your Heart into it: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time*, Schultz talks about his dream and challenges us to "Care more than others think wise. Risk more than others think safe. Dream more than others think practical. Expect more than others think possible". Go ahead...dream!