



Frontline Coaching Playbook

The Seven Habits of Empowered Frontline Teams



The brand with the best experience wins.

Consider some of the fastest-growing businesses in the world today like Airbnb, Southwest and Uber. All are experience brands.

Experience brands are more profitable than their competitors. They grow faster with rates of repeat purchase and referrals that outclass their rivals. These businesses also understand that great customer experience comes from investing in the experience of their frontline staff.

So, how do these brands, which each rely on thousands (or in Uber's case, millions) of frontline workers ensure that every customer experience is awesome?

Over the past six years, we've worked with thousands of experience brands around the globe and conducted deep interviews with dozens of the world's best, like Starbucks, Uber, The Ritz-Carlton and Disney. We discovered that each of them operates around a set of daily habits to focus and motivate their frontline employees to deliver great customer experiences.

We've distilled the various practices into seven simple habits that, when put together and applied consistently on a daily basis, create a powerful bond of purpose for each frontline employee that is reinforced by feedback, recognition, coaching and empowerment.

This book is designed as a practical guide for any business that wants to apply the seven habits in their organization and consistently deliver a winning customer experience.



The Seven Habits



1. Set Your Service Standard 2



2. Do One Thing Better 4



3. Get Feedback to the Frontline 6



4. Recognize Achievement 8



5. Coach for Small Improvements 10



6. Connect the Frontline to the Bottom Line 12



7. Un-mute the Frontline 14



1. Set Your Service Standard

Put simply, a great customer experience is one that matches the customer's expectation.

Your service promise tells customers what they can expect but, more importantly, it tells your frontline workers precisely what an awesome experience should look like. An experience so good that people will come back for more, and tell others about it.

So, why is it important? Research by Gallup found that only 26% of U.S. employees feel their organization consistently delivers on the promises they make to customers. Yes, it's shockingly low, but perhaps not so surprising because Gallup also found that only half of all employees actually know what's expected of them at work.

When you get your customer promise out of your head and up on the wall, everybody is on the same page (well, the same wall) because it's there, and anyone can point to it, at any time.

There's a big difference between an advertisement you ran one time on YouTube and putting your promise where everyone can see it. It's like wearing a ring in a marriage. It says, "I made a promise and you can trust me to keep it."

Your frontline will no longer wonder what's expected of them. They'll know, because you told them. And everyone else.

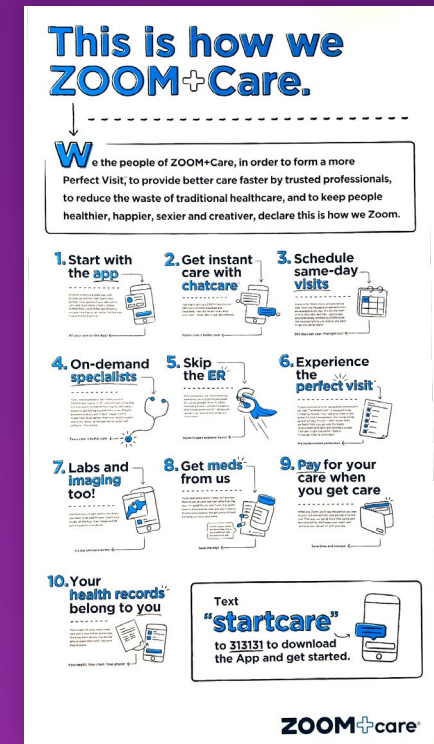
“Only about half of all employees know what's expected of them at work.”

— Gallup

EXAMPLE



Zoom+Care operates over 50 urgent care medical centers across Oregon and Washington with a mission to reduce the waste of traditional healthcare and to keep people healthier, happier, sexier and more creative. Zoom+Care promises “twice the health, at half the price, with ten times the delight,” and they back this up with 10 service standards, which are printed on the wall of every clinic (you can’t miss it). It’s a unique, holistic experience that starts with a mobile app for booking appointments, and includes an online chat with doctors and a “Perfect Visit” experience that ensures appointments are always on time.



Do

- ✿ Include what your customers naturally expect
- ✿ Emphasize the 'extras' that make your brand special
- ✿ Promote it proudly where customers and frontline staff will see it

Don't

- ✿ Make it too long – your team should be able to memorize it
- ✿ Use complex business jargon. Write your standards in language your customers would understand and appreciate



2. Do One Thing Better

An open secret known by all of humanity for thousands of years is that there is tremendous power in achieving small successes every day.

There are two major factors at play here. First, it feels good. When you achieve something, your body releases dopamine into your system, which rewards achievement and encourages more. Second, small improvements produce a huge compounding effect over time.

This is how we start the motion of delivering on your customer promise.

Encourage your frontline teams to start each day with a ritual of setting a single, achievable goal for that day based on the service standard defined in Habit #1. Over time, each small goal (like being on time for every appointment) will become a habit, and that employee can move on to achieving another goal, all the while improving your customers' experience with your brand.

Try to set goals as a group if you can ("huddle" is the trending term here). This can also work in an individual setting, as part of a daily check-in process. For long term success, set goals before every shift and make it fun

“In the beginning, there is basically no difference between making a choice that is 1 percent better or 1 percent worse. But as time goes on, these small improvements or declines compound and you suddenly find a very big gap between people who make slightly better decisions on a daily basis and those who don’t.”

— James Clear, author of Atomic Habits

EXAMPLE



THE RITZ-CARLTON

The Ritz-Carlton is well known for being the gold standard in hotel experience with the promise of being “a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission.” This promise has been translated into 12 service values, which are printed on cards. Every day, employees in locations worldwide discuss one of those values at a team meeting. The team members talk about the service value, offer examples of how they have seen it behaved or have behaved it themselves, and strategize ways to operationalize the behavior even more. When the 12th service value is discussed, they go back to the first one. That way, everything The Ritz-Carlton stands for is thoroughly discussed and promoted.



Do

- ✿ Link a daily goal to your service standards
- ✿ Empower your staff to set their own goal
- ✿ Make it achievable. “Get better at XXX” is just fine
- ✿ Build this habit into every start of day routine

Don't

- ✿ Set multiple goals
- ✿ Create “stretch” goals that may be difficult to achieve
- ✿ Be too prescriptive



3. Get Feedback to the Frontline

Imagine you're an elite professional tennis player and the umpire doesn't make a single call all game. When it's over, they tell you, "You lost." You ask, "What? How?" The umpire tells you that your opponent had fewer faults. It's impossible to improve your game without instant feedback, right? It's the only way people can correct or concentrate on what's working, immediately.

For frontline staff, it's exactly the same. They deserve (yes, deserve – it's a basic human right) to get feedback from the customers they serve, delivered fresh (same day is best), in a format that's easy to digest and act upon immediately.

Give your frontline employees the best chance to win by providing them with clear and instant feedback from customers.



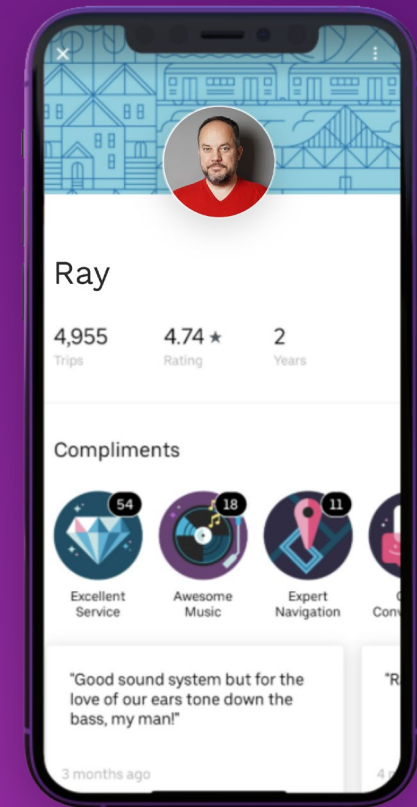
“Customer feedback is like business oxygen.”

— Des Traynor, Intercom

EXAMPLE

Uber

Uber has four million drivers globally, each charged with maintaining the Uber promise of “making real life easier to navigate for everyone.” Technology plays a critical role in ensuring that each driver gets specific customer feedback to help them improve and maintain their standards. At a glance of the Uber app, drivers can see their current 5-star rating, what passengers most appreciate about travelling with them (cool car, good music, etc.) and what they need to work on based on low scores.



Do

- ✿ Collect customer feedback from every customer directly after a “moment of truth”
- ✿ Segment the feedback by region, ideally down to the frontline staff level
- ✿ Send feedback to frontline staff in real time, integrated into the application they use each day
- ✿ Gamify the data so it can be understood at a glance

Don't

- ✿ Send long surveys that customers won't answer. The best practice is three questions: a rating, topic and verbatim text response
- ✿ Share overall company themes with frontline staff – give them the feedback that's most relevant to their business area



4. Recognize Achievement

If you've followed the seven habits to this point, your frontline teams should understand the service promise, be focused on improving delivery each day and getting daily customer feedback that tells them whether they're hitting the mark or not.

The next step is recognizing staff for hitting that mark. The core principle here is catching people doing things right.

Ever since we were in kindergarten and got gold stars for doing well, we've known that human behavior is best motivated by positive feedback.

It turns out that there's a whole field of research ("positive psychology") that supports the idea. Recognition for good work releases dopamine in the brain, which creates feelings of pride and pleasure. Better yet, that dopamine hit cements the knowledge that more of that behavior will create more praise, which motivates people to continue to achieve. However, if recognition is not regular, research shows that the effect wears off within a week, so frequency is important.

Customer feedback presents an efficient and repeatable

way to ensure that frontline staff hear a regular 'heartbeat' of appreciation for a job well done. At a company level, managers can monitor trends and themes and provide occasional praise where improvements have been made or goals have been achieved.

Making your employees feel valued can be extremely simple, like this: "Thank you. You're awesome. We can't possibly do this without you."

It works for us.

“People who feel good about themselves produce good results, and people who produce good results feel good about themselves.”

— Ken Blanchard

EXAMPLE

Uber

Uber takes customer feedback a step further by granting “Uber Pro Gold/Platinum/Diamond” status to drivers that meet service targets and volumes. These confer certain privileges and rewards. They also operate a quarterly red carpet event for drivers who are publicly awarded for “above and beyond” expectations.

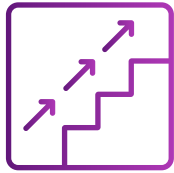


Do

- ✿ Automate customer feedback for frequency, and start with the positive feedback
- ✿ Keep manager feedback genuine and thoughtful
- ✿ Make a public example of high achievers

Don't

- ✿ Wait for the annual performance review – feedback needs to be regular!
- ✿ Give unwarranted praise. This is likely to breed cynicism



5. Coach for Small Improvements

The great Stoic philosopher Seneca said, “Don’t underestimate the value of a moderate effort consistently applied.”

Don’t misunderstand us - we’re not telling you a moderate effort is good enough.

What we’re saying is that when you focus on improving one thing every day, over time you build mastery which the customer will appreciate as will the leaders in your business.

Like the coach of a sports team who aims to continually improve each player, the key is delivering coaching in small, actionable doses that are specific to each person. Again, customer feedback is the key to unlocking the specific issue for each individual by highlighting the most common theme that customers point out when they leave a low rating in their feedback. This theme can naturally flow into the daily goal in Habit #2.



“Everyone needs a coach. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a basketball player, a tennis player, a gymnast, or a bridge player.”

— Bill Gates

EXAMPLE



Shine is a large residential window cleaning and holiday lighting franchise. In measuring Net Promoter Score across their franchise locations, they noticed certain locations that significantly outperformed the average and, as a result, enjoyed higher rates of repeat purchase and referrals. Shine identified a practice unique to the high-performing locations: they conducted a walk-around visual inspection with the homeowner after each service, which provided an opportunity to catch any issues and ensure expectations were met. This practice was rolled out to all locations and became part of the standard operating procedure for frontline coaching.



Do

- ✿ Personalize coaching based on the area each individual can improve most
- ✿ Leverage technology – a daily personalized coaching conversation is kind of impossible
- ✿ Use lessons or practices from high performers in your coaching

Don't

- ✿ Double dose topics to work on. Stick to one topic until the desired behavior is achieved
- ✿ Wait for periodic performance reviews– provide feedback daily



6. Connect the Frontline to the Bottom Line

If you're doing a good job on habits one through five, you should be seeing healthy improvement on your key business metric. These might be things like daily sales volumes, repeat purchase rates, referrals or average order size.

Your frontline staff deserve to feel pretty chuffed about these results.

So, do you think should show them?

It's a critical step that many businesses forget to take. Let your teams know about the critical metric you track each day. Tell them the target so they know what winning looks like.

Now they have a line of sight between their role and the overall "team score" that their day-to-day habits contribute to.

That's an achievement they can celebrate together, every day.



“The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined efforts of each individual.”

— Vince Lombardi

EXAMPLE

STARBUCKS®

In Starbucks, each store measures daily sales revenue which is shared with every partner (employee) working in the store that day. This gives them a direct line of sight between their role delivering customer experience (one cup at a time) and the ultimate business outcome it contributes to.

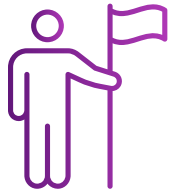


Do

- ✿ Share performance results daily, with every staff member
- ✿ Where possible, show frontline teams how their contribution directly impacts the bottom line
- ✿ Celebrate performance and achievements as a team

Don't

- ✿ Use multiple metrics. Standardize one measure everyone can understand



7. Un-mute the Frontline

Do you know the phrase, “Nobody knows everything, but everyone knows something”?

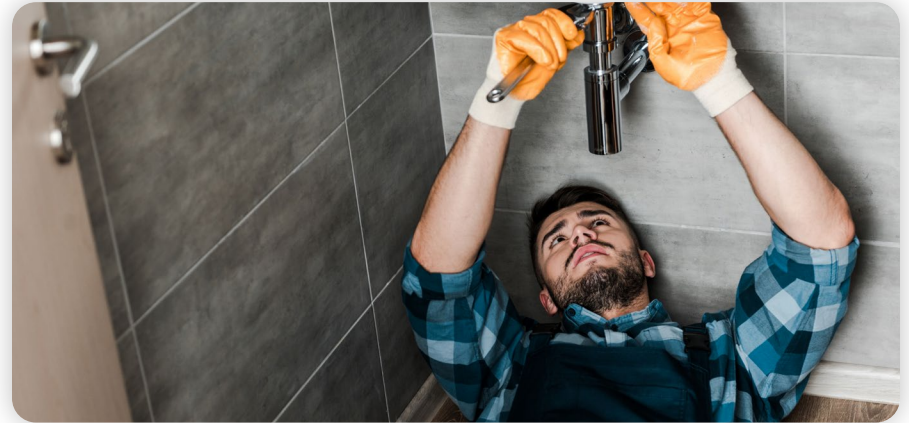
It’s a nice way of saying that chances are, someone on the frontline has the perfect solution to that customer problem you’ve been whiteboarding alone in the boardroom all afternoon.

It makes sense, right? They’re the closest to the customer. They hear the feedback every day about that frustrating issue. Your frontline team member can see the answer but may not have the authority or the means to make things right.

So, what should you do? Simple: Listen to your frontline.

Listen to their ideas, their concerns and what’s going on in their personal lives...every day.

If we can support our frontline teams, they’ll support our customers, and everybody wins.



“Treat employees like they make a difference and they will.”

— Jim Goodnight, CEO, SAS

EXAMPLE



New Seasons (“The Friendliest Store in Town”) is a chain of neighborhood supermarkets with stores in Oregon and California. One of their service standards (printed proudly on the wall behind the checkouts) is “Want a taste? Just ask us and we’ll open it.” If, for example, you were curious to try some oysters, the person behind the seafood counter will break the seal on a container and serve you some to try with no obligation. If you don’t like them, the product can’t be sold, so the staff member can share feedback about a product that may not be up to scratch and the buyer can make a call on whether to continue buying that brand.



Do

- ✿ Create a means for frontline employees to share issues and ideas with leadership
- ✿ Keep a pulse on staff issues with super-lightweight daily employee feedback
- ✿ Trust staff to make things right for customers
- ✿ Visibly acknowledge and address ideas and issues from the frontline

Don't

- ✿ Wait until the end of the quarter/year to get employee feedback
- ✿ Require every customer issue to be escalated to management for feedback

Ready to implement the seven habits?

If you feel inspired by these seven empowering habits but aren't sure how to implement them across your team, you're not alone.

We know firsthand how difficult it can be to find the time and resources to share instant customer feedback with frontline employees and coach them towards creating memorable customer experiences.

That's why we created Frontline, the ultimate coaching platform for frontline workers.

Frontline is a mobile platform that allows frontline workers to see customer feedback in real time, and helps you coach, motivate and empower your frontline workers remotely.

Frontline provides benefits like:

1. Personalized coaching for every employee
2. Instant access to customer feedback
3. Easy communication across teams

Whenever you're ready to learn more about how Frontline & other AskNicely products can help, we're here. And in the meantime...



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