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–**Seth Godin**, Author, *Poke the Box*

THE  
**AMAZEMENT**  
REVOLUTION



Seven Customer Service Strategies to Create  
an Amazing Customer (and Employee) Experience

**SHEP HYKEN**

*Wall Street Journal* Bestselling author of *The Cult of the Customer*

# THE AMAZEMENT REVOLUTION

Dear Friend,

I am so excited to give you this sneak preview of my newest book. Even though this is just a little more than 20% of the book, I think you will agree that this "preview" could almost be a book by itself. If you like this, then you will love the receiving the book. When you pre-order you will receive many valuable bonuses including:

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Always be Amazing!



Shep Hyken  
Chief Amazement Officer  
Shepard Presentations, LLC

P.S. Order today at [www.AmazementRevolution.com](http://www.AmazementRevolution.com). Thank you!

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** When I use the word “customer” in this book, please understand that I mean the whole range of people who do business with, and rely on, your organization. This could be someone you are presently calling a customer, client, patient, guest, member, etc. As we go through the book, you will see the phrase “customer” used most frequently to describe the members of this group. This is just a “catch all” term to describe someone you do business with. Whatever the label, I’m always talking about the same group of people.



# CHAPTER THREE

## THE MASTER CLASS: AMERICAN EXPRESS

In the chapters that follow, I spotlight each of the seven Amazement Strategies and offer operating examples and Amazement Revolution Takeaways (ARTs) from real-world organizations. To start, I want to give you a detailed “master class” in amazement by profiling, in depth, one world-class service organization that has led the way for the rest of us by implementing *all seven* of the Amazement Strategies throughout the enterprise and living them as operating principles on a daily basis. That organization is the diversified global financial services company American Express.

**Amazement Revolutionary:** American Express Company

**Enterprise Focus:** Financial services

**Headquarters Location:** New York, NY

**Website:** [www.americanexpress.com](http://www.americanexpress.com)

**What You Need to Know:** Founded in 1850, today American Express has over 58,000 employees. Famous for its credit card,

charge card, and traveler's cheque businesses, American Express cards deliver 24% of the total dollar volume of credit card transactions in the United States. *BusinessWeek* ranks American Express as the twenty-second most valuable brand in the world; *Fortune* lists American Express as one of the top thirty most admired companies in the world; and as of this writing, J.D. Power and Associates has ranked the company as highest in customer satisfaction among credit card issuers for four consecutive years.

The selection of American Express as a primary role model is based on this organization's demonstrated record of service excellence (which has been verified by *BusinessWeek*, J.D. Power and Associates, and many other sources in recent years) and my own extensive research into the company's mission, culture, and operating principles. Once I had formalized the seven Amazement Strategies, my team and I did a great deal of research and undertook a series of detailed discussions with many key people within the company. After looking at hundreds of other businesses, our conclusion was that this organization is truly among the elite Amazement Revolutionaries. Very few established companies have completely internalized all seven of the basic Amazement Strategies we identified. American Express is definitely one of those companies!

What struck me was not merely the commitment of senior executives to raise American Express's game to a higher level, but the sheer speed with which a Fortune 500 company was able to mobilize and make the internal changes necessary to sustain and support an ongoing Amazement Revolution. As you will learn, the new internal initiatives that drove this revolution began only about five years ago.

Given the short timeline and high level of achievement, I believe American Express has successfully launched one of the most remarkable internal-service culture revolutions in the history of American business. As Jim Bush, the company's executive vice president of world service, is quick to point out, the changes that have played out in recent years are completely consis-

tent with the company's 160-year legacy of service and innovation.<sup>1</sup>

As we spoke during our interview, I often got the feeling he and his team had been implementing precisely the same system I had been developing and refining over twenty-five years of work in the field of customer service! They had not been using my notes, of course, but rather implementing the same timeless strategies shared by all truly great service organizations. The core strategies go by many names. It's not what you call them that really matters, but whether you put them into practice.

Let's look at the seven Amazement Strategies now. You will notice that many of them, when followed to their logical conclusions, connect to and dovetail with other strategies on the list. Whatever names *you* give these ideas, you will find that they form an interlocking, self-sustaining set of core principles that are both easy to remember and easy to return to, day after day.

## AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #1: PROVIDE MEMBERSHIP

### Close-up on Membership

Shift your mindset to treat the people you serve more like *members* rather than *customers*. What would you do differently?

American Express doesn't have customers or users or clients. American Express has *members*. Every single holder of an American Express card is a "cardmember." Many of those members can quickly tell you, without even looking at the date on their card, exactly how long they've *been* a member. And the entire organization is oriented toward communicating with, engaging, and serving those members.

The specific concept of membership began in 1963, when American Express first began embossing those "member since" dates on their charge cards. The larger idea of defining a premium level of experience, one reserved exclusively for people who choose to work with American Express, really does have its roots in a premium-service ethic. "We're here to help," Bush told me. "That goes back to the start." That ethic has been

part of the organization's legacy, and its chief competitive advantage, since the company's founding in 1850.

The American Express Company began life as an elite express shipping service. Back then, its role and mission was to “Forward Merchandise and Money, Collectibles with Goods, Notes, and Drafts, throughout the State of New-York, the Canadas, and all the Western States and Territories...Each Express in charge of a Special Messenger.”<sup>2</sup> The service-driven company prospered—and innovated. In the 1880s it offered its mobile, worldly, generally upscale clients a revolutionary new solution to the frustrating personal challenge of not being able to make purchases easily while overseas: the traveler's cheque. The rest, as they say, is history.

In recent years, CEO Kenneth Chenault has reinvigorated the brand by inspiring a new generation of true believers to live up to American Express's lofty history—and its tradition of high service standards. Bush is one of those true believers. He proved that much during our conversation by returning over and over again to three critical themes that support the central service concept of membership as it is lived out every day at American Express.

### Don't Think of Them as Customers—Think of Them as Members

“By putting that ‘member since’ date on our cards,” Bush told me, “we create membership, and membership is something that our cardmembers treat as a badge of honor. It's not elitist. It's inclusive. It means they are appreciated, that they have the right, and expect, to be served in a premium fashion. As long as we *treat* them like members in high regard, we believe cardmembers will maintain their relationship with American Express. Our job is to continue to service the needs of all our customers who rely on us as a premium service experience organization.

“In fact,” he continued, “we don't really think of ourselves as a credit card company at all. We actually view ourselves as a premium service company. We are really in the services business. We happen to facilitate payments. But it's the experience around those payments that makes what we do unique and special for our cardmembers.”

*What would happen if you stopped thinking of the people who do business with you as “customers” and started thinking of them—or even referring to them—as special individuals who occupied a special category? What would you do differently?*

### Offer Members Exclusive Amenities

A central part of the membership experience at American Express is being offered amenities that nonmembers don't have access to. “With the goal of membership in mind,” Bush explained, “we offer the finest, most powerful rewards program in the world, with a host of rewards that emphasize the importance of membership.”

Those rewards include access to fine dining through some of the company's premium card offerings, the ability to get tickets for exclusive theater engagements, and access to airport clubs for frequent travelers. Hundreds of other such amenities are tangible benefits of membership. And the sheer range of benefits American Express offers day after day, around the world has been impossible for other players in the credit card industry to duplicate. The right amenities can take the membership experience to another level, one that makes your enterprise unique.

*What amenities could you offer people that are exclusive to working with you or would be difficult find to elsewhere?*

### Invest in the Membership Experience

Jim Bush repeatedly emphasized one point during our interview: American Express sees delivering premium service to its cardmembers not as an expense but as a critical strategic asset, one that pays back handsomely in both the immediate future and the long run. Accordingly, the company welcomes opportunities to invest in improvements in the quality of its membership experience.

“Service is the most powerful competitive advantage we have,” Bush told me. “Service is not a cost, it is an investment. It's a growth engine

for our company. Service is one of our most powerful channels of growth opportunity. Service is value creation. Service is using human interaction to enable mutual benefit, and not only are we willing to make that investment, we are really proud of our investments in service. In an age when service is perhaps at its lowest ebb, when there's basically a vacuum, regardless of where you go in the world, we're proud of the role we can play to fill that void. From our perspective, there's no time better than the present to capitalize on our greatest asset—by investing in the level of service that supports the experience we deliver.”

No, this isn't just talk. When it comes to investing in the membership experience, Bush and his leadership team have been instrumental in making absolutely sure that American Express puts its money where its mouth is. As you will see when we examine the next Amazement Strategy, FUN, Bush and his team engineered a complete overhaul of the enterprise's training, recruitment, and customer service functions to lead an internal Amazement Revolution that has paid handsome dividends in the marketplace.

***How can you invest in and improve your organization's membership experience?***

- ! **ART #1:** Start thinking of your customers as members of a special group; consider a change in the labels you use to describe them, both internally and externally.
  
- ! **ART #2:** Brainstorm ways to deliver amenities that will take the customer experience to another level.
  
- ! **ART #3:** Invest in creating the membership experience.

## AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #2: HAVE SERIOUS FUN

### Close-up on FUN

Real FUN in the workplace is determined, not by how many belly laughs your enterprise generates, but by the level of *fulfillment* it generates in the workforce, the *uniqueness* it respects in each employee, and the sense of anticipation it creates for the *next* challenge on the horizon.

Leaders at many organizations—indeed, leaders at most organizations—pay lip service to the principle that customers “come first,” are the “reason we’re here,” and so forth. Then those very same leaders continue an old habit: ignoring the real-world, day-in/day-out workplace experience of the employees who are supposed to deliver all that great service. It doesn’t add up.

American Express’s stated goal is to become the world’s most respected service brand—and Bush and his management team knew that the company’s legacy of service-driven innovation demanded a different approach. They knew that any successful revolution always begins from the inside.

Bush and his team launched that revolution using a strategic weapon I call Serious FUN. That’s my terminology, not Bush’s, but he and I are in complete agreement about the importance of the three elements I use to define workplace FUN: personal *fulfillment* in the job; a working environment that respects each employee’s *uniqueness*; and a sense of escalating challenge that always leaves people looking forward to the *next* challenge, whether that means the next project, the next day at work, or the next rung on the career ladder.

By embracing all three of these values in its call center operations, American Express proves that a corporate giant really can create FUN in the workplace.

As Bush put it, “Sometimes people say, ‘You’ve got to make people happy.’ Well, we do want to stimulate people, but we want to give people the opportunity to be energized, to be engaged, in a way that will make

happiness on their own terms possible. The goal is to not just make people happy as though they were simply being entertained.

“A lot of people are energized by a challenge,” he went on, “which is great. But what we found was, for a while there, we were subsidizing poor performers, and that was as frustrating to the people on the team as anything else. By addressing all of that, we’ve created a highly engaged, very assertive workforce that’s committed to both individual development and to achieving the collective objectives.”

Faced with the task of reinvigorating its call center workforce, American Express used a novel tactic. It actually asked the people who worked in the call centers what was important to them.

“A few years ago,” Bush explained, “we went out and we asked our front-line people questions. We asked: ‘What is important to you to drive an experience that would get our customers to recommend American Express to a friend? What is required for you to be successful, for you to achieve your potential, for you to excel?’ That survey mechanism went out to the front-line leadership, and to the people who were actually working on the front lines. The answers that came back covered five major themes. One answer was people wanted to be compensated fairly. Another was that they wanted to be recognized for the important role they play. A third response was that they wanted a career path and they wanted the opportunity to develop as professionals. Fourth, they wanted flexibility. They felt like they deserved not to be held to a rigid schedule, and they wanted flexible scheduling with their colleagues, so they could swap shifts to meet the ever-changing needs of their family life. And fifth, they wanted the tools necessary to be successful.”

American Express senior management concluded those were all fair things to ask for. They have stayed focused on and continuously invested in those five aspirations, identifying and meeting the needs their front-line people identified.

“As part of the recognition of their concerns,” Bush recalled, “we changed the job title. We said, ‘Let’s stop calling them reps. Let’s stop

calling them agents. Let's call them what they are.' And 'customer care professional' seemed to be more accurate as a title. We validated that through some focus groups with our front-line people. And that change in terminology has worked out very well."

Something else that worked out well involved a substantial financial investment: a complete overhaul of the call center priorities, from recruiting to training to compensation, in keeping with the request for better workplace tools and rewards. Bush made sure those changes happened.

To understand the Amazement Revolution that took place in his corner of American Express, you have to understand how impersonal and demotivating most call centers are for the people who work in them. Most call centers hire people with call center experience. These people are given metrics, and they are evaluated based on their ability to deliver those metrics. They're supposed to keep coming back to a certain script, or use the customer's name three times within the first sixty seconds, or keep the call under a certain amount of time, or talk to a certain number of people per hour.

Not surprisingly, when applied to a sea of potentially stressful calls with customers, standards like these burn out a lot of call center employees (and let's face it, a lot of customers, too). The turnover rate among employees at these call centers is quite high, often more than 100% annually.

American Express decided to take a different tack—by changing the hiring and recruiting philosophy (see Amazement Strategy #4: Hire Right, on page 35), by de-emphasizing the metrics, by training its people in generally unscripted "soft skills" such as listening and relationship building, and by investing in new technologies that enabled customer care professionals to make better customer-specific product and service recommendations during the calls. Instead of simply trying to shorten call times, the company made the strategic decision to use the calls to improve the quality of person-to-person connection with cardmembers. To do this, the company hired, trained, and motivated its customer care professionals to be better, more autonomous improvisers, a major change in workplace

culture that gave front-line people much more control over the direction of the call.

“Three or four years ago, we spent 70% of our training on what screen to find and button to push,” Bush said. “Now we spend 70% on how to service customers and how to work at a company with a service heritage like American Express. Anyone can learn the screens, but we’re not in the screen business.”

Since Bush and his team made these changes and others, American Express has seen a rise in cardmember awareness of its varied products and service offerings. That improvement has been accompanied by a strong upward trend in customers’ overall satisfaction with the company. At the same time, the company’s call center retention rates have improved. Turnover among these employees is now *below* the industry average!

Bush is certainly happy about these developments, but he doesn’t seem greatly surprised by them. He appears to have virtually limitless faith in the transforming potential of an engaged workforce.

“By understanding that it’s a people business first and foremost,” he told me, “by investing in people, by creating performance management systems around those individuals that care for our customers, by defining what is right from a customer point of view and then rewarding the people who deliver on the outcome, we all learned that it’s amazing what you can accomplish as an organization. As we started to develop a more autonomous and empowered environment, I think all of us felt a sense of release. We in management had not really created anything new, but we had *unleashed* the power of these incredible professionals. Now they’re more than professionals, I think. They now pride themselves in being ambassadors of the American Express Company.”

***How could you make FUN a part of daily working  
life at your organization?***

Purchase the book at [www.AmazementRevolution.com](http://www.AmazementRevolution.com)

- ! **ART #4:** Give your people a greater sense of personal fulfillment by giving them the training and the autonomy they need to solve problems and make good recommendations. Don't try to micromanage their every word and deed.
  
- ! **ART #5:** Respect and embrace the uniqueness of each of your employees.
  
- ! **ART #6:** Issue a professional challenge that inspires team players and makes them look forward to what's next.
  
- ! **ART #7:** Ask your team what should change.
  
- ! **ART #8:** Don't subsidize poor performance.
  
- ! **ART #9:** Throw away the script; give your people more autonomy to identify and solve problems.
  
- ! **ART #10:** Change internal job title terminology.

### **AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #3: CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

#### **Close-up on Partnership**

Deliver a premium level of service that incorporates active problem-solving and inspires customers to count on and return to your organization.

When American Express's customer care professionals not only take care of the initial reason for the call, but also empathetically ask about the cardmember's business, travel, or other issues, they are becoming *prob-*

*lem solvers.* True partnership often begins with this kind of proactive problem solving—which means not merely resolving the existing issue, but looking for other problems to solve in such a way that the customer begins to expect and rely on that level of care. This is partnership; this is where we want the relationship to go. And it begins with being empathetic, emphasizing shared values, and being fully accountable for the situation at hand.

“I think what we have been able to do successfully,” Bush told me, “is use empathy to engage our employees in becoming part of the solution. That’s the first step. They can actively listen, they can understand and empathize with the tone of the cardmember or the merchant or whoever we’re talking with and attempting to serve; and through that assessment, they can determine then how the dialogue should go, listening for what’s most important to the customer, and then engaging the customer through that. Even a simple apology early on can get us to a position where we can resolve the issue—and then we build from there. Once we’ve resolved the initial issue, then we start to look for opportunities to serve our customers beyond that interaction, opportunities that may help us to deepen the relationship.

“We are always building upon a solution—by reinforcing value opportunities and by creating incremental value. We try to do that with every interaction we have. And we have hundreds of millions of interactions every year.”

In other words, once the customer care professional has worked with you to resolve your Moment of Misery, whatever it may be, he or she wants to use the positive emotional momentum of that experience to learn more about you—and find *more* problems to solve on your behalf. This high-level, aspirational partnership standard applies not only to American Express’s relationships with its external customers but also to the company’s relationships with internal customers (i.e., colleagues and coworkers) and, just as critically, with merchants (the vendor base). People within each of these groups have come to expect, not an absence of problems, but a higher level of problem solving from the American Express Company.

*What if you viewed your customers' problems, crises, and Moments of Misery as opportunities to establish higher long-term customer expectations from your organization?*

- ! ART #11: Empathetically solve existing problems. Then proactively look for unanticipated problems to solve.
- ! ART #12: Use crises and Moments of Misery as opportunities to build or expand the partnership.
- ! ART #13: Strive for partner relationships with customers, with your employees, and with your vendors.
- ! ART #14: Wherever possible, identify and emphasize core values you share with your partners.

## AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #4: HIRE RIGHT

### Close-up on Hire Right

Create and implement innovative hiring and retention processes that support your service mission.

American Express took a long, hard look at the way the enterprise was staffing its call centers and decided that the processes it currently had in place simply weren't keeping up with the competition. Contrary to what you might expect, though, its comparisons were not to the obvious competitors—Visa, MasterCard, or Discover Card.

The company chose to benchmark itself against organizations such as the Ritz-Carlton and the legendary Four Seasons hotels! So Bush and his team looked outside their own industry, to global leaders in the service

field, for the hiring and retention processes they needed—and eventually they looked outside of their industry for the people they wanted to hire, as well.

As Bush put it: “We said, ‘It’s nice being the best in the credit card industry, but with all due respect, the credit card industry as a whole is not really viewed as being all that committed to service.’ So we challenged ourselves: How do you look at other industries to learn from what they do, who they employ, and how they engage? And we made some changes.”

Like other great service organizations I’ve worked with, American Express was willing to take a whole new approach to hiring and retention in order to deliver a better customer experience. Specifically, it was willing to recruit from an industry other than its own—the hospitality industry—and reassign or part ways with people who weren’t predisposed to deliver the empathetic level of service that supported the company’s mission.

“The fact that somebody has been in a call center,” Bush said, “does not make that individual the perfect match for what we’re trying to accomplish. Why? Because we’re talking about human engagement, and that requires the ability to connect. And hospitality, when you think about engagement, that’s exactly what those enterprises do.”

That’s how American Express began looking to a new profile for its customer-facing talent: direct customer-facing experience in service-driven hotels, restaurants, retail stores, and similar establishments. It began looking for an outgoing, empathetic, problem-solving attitude. Once it had identified the person who could support the organization’s service-first culture, and who brought the right experience and the right outlook on customer care to the workplace day after day, the technical skills could be added to the mix.

There was also a comprehensive overview of the compensation structure, ensuring that one of its key drivers was customer feedback.

*What would happen if you looked in places outside of your industry and identified a new career profile for your customer-facing service professionals?*

- ! **ART #15:** Look outside your industry for good talent.
- ! **ART #16:** Don't be afraid to reassign (or part company with) people who don't belong in customer-facing positions.
- ! **ART #17:** Periodically reevaluate your compensation system. Consider making customer feedback one of the major drivers.

## **AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #5: CREATE A MEMORABLE AFTER-EXPERIENCE**

### **Close-up on After-Experience**

A positive initial customer experience is only the beginning! Make sure your organization gives people the flexibility to deliver a range of powerful, personalized *after-experiences*.

A while back, I called American Express and used their concierge service (a member amenity) to buy tickets for my mom to go to a Broadway show while she was on her vacation in New York City. I happened to mention to Tom, the customer care professional I was talking to, that the tickets were not for me. Tom immediately recommended that we set up the purchase so my mom could pick up the tickets at the ticket office in New York.

A few days later, I got a call back from the ticket merchant, updating me that Tom had alerted them to the fact that my mother would be stopping by the box office to pick up the tickets, and confirming for my convenience that this was the way I wanted the purchase set up!

Like a concierge at a great hotel, Tom had anticipated a potential

problem and followed through. After he had hung up with me, Tom had foreseen that the box office might expect me to be present to pick up the tickets in person, which would have been a problem for my mother. (Typically, the member purchasing the tickets must pick them up and have the proper identification, which includes the same credit card used to charge the tickets and a driver's license or passport.) Tom had contacted the vendor and requested that the vendor circle back with me to confirm that the arrangement he and I had discussed was in place. Rather than hang up with me and move on to the next customer—make that *member*—Tom took an extra step. Tom was looking out for me!

Here's my question: What kind of working culture makes possible that kind of follow-through, that kind of positive after-experience?

The answer is, a working culture that doesn't focus narrowly on "transactions." Even after our call was completed, even after the "transaction" was over, I was still on Tom's radar. The "transaction" was only a small part of a more important relationship. And that is exactly how American Express wanted it.

This kind of person-to-person follow-through—which goes way beyond the now-familiar call from a credit card company to confirm that a big, unusual purchase is actually legitimate—is not simple altruism. It has a profound bottom-line justification, as Bush explains: "Follow-through is part of the larger strategy of relationship care. That's what really drives value for our organization, because it changes customer behavior in a number of positive ways: higher spending, faster payments from cardmembers, and an increasing number of merchants accepting the American Express card. All as a result of that person-to-person engagement with the customer care professional."

*How can your organization use follow-through to create a memorable after-experience?*

- ! **ART #18:** There is no such thing as a transaction. The word transaction implies a clear starting point and an equally clear ending point. In the cult of amazement, however, any transaction is simply an interaction that leads to the next potential Moment of Magic.
  
- ! **ART #19:** Don't pressure employees to close customer interactions before they have a chance to build a relationship with the customer.
  
- ! **ART #20:** There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of ways to effectively follow through. Empower people to find some of them. Recognize and consider rewarding them when they do.

## **AMAZEMENT STRATEGY #6: BUILD COMMUNITY**

### **Close-up on Community**

Support and inspire both the internal and the external community of evangelists.

American Express uses a powerful combination of incentives, emotional connection, and good listening to support two distinctive communities of American Express “evangelists”: the internal community of American Express employees and the external community of cardmembers and merchants. Although these two communities are structurally very different, they are connected, and engaging on a person-to-person basis with members of each group is a central element of the company's mission. Each feels a sense of community and belonging, and a sense of identity, as a result of that engagement.

While we were discussing the loyalty and high retention rates of his community of customer care professionals, Bush shared with me his view

that the larger mission of making American Express the world's most respected service brand has served as a powerful unifying force within the workplace. That mission, he said, had led to an important internal initiative: *to win customers' hearts and minds by delivering extraordinary care at the right margins.*

"These are more than just pithy words on a sheet of paper," Bush insisted. "This goal was internalized by tens of thousands of people who have passionately committed themselves to it. And the passion of our people is truly something remarkable. It's amazing what happens when you enable people to do what they're passionate about, how that translates into reality, both in terms of people's own ability to succeed as professionals and in terms of the experience they commit, as a community, to delivering to our customers."

In other words, the company's internal community of service employees is now mobilized and emotionally engaged around an inspiring service goal—a goal that they feel they own, one that gives them a sense of identity and belonging. Whenever that happens, in my experience, good things tend to follow in the external community of customers. And that is exactly the result that American Express achieved.

As far as that community of customers (make that *members*) is concerned, they too show a sense of belonging and identity, as evidenced by their active evangelism on behalf of the company. Consider the following post from an American Express member's personal blog, and notice how the first story involves a Moment of Misery that the company transformed into a Moment of Magic!

*American Express is a great company. Not only have I been able to decorate my entire dining room using AMEX points, but I have had two recent experiences with AMEX that make me love them even more. A few weeks ago, (a family member's) car broke down at our house. I called the AMEX roadside assistance service, and they dispatched someone to come tow the car. I was still waiting after an hour and a half,*

*so I called AMEX again to follow up. The woman I spoke with was so great—she said that it was unacceptable that I had waited over an hour for the tow truck and that she would send another tow truck to our house as well as follow up with the first guy. I truly felt like a valued customer and loved it!*

*If that weren't enough, I got a call on Friday from AMEX about a suspicious charge on my card. They had been monitoring my account and noticed that someone bought \$488 worth of vitamins from an online vitamin distributor out of New Jersey. They had already suspended payment, and they closed my account in about 30 seconds over the phone. To top it off, I had a new card delivered to my door on Monday. Amazing! I know, I sound like a cheesy ad, but AMEX, you really are the best. I love you!<sup>13</sup>*

Here you see the member evangelizing about American Express—not only to immediate family and friends, but to a potentially global audience. All the advertising in the world could not be more powerful than that! Over the last few years, as I have noted, the company has been recognized for excellence in service by J.D. Power and Associates, *BusinessWeek*, and other institutions. It's worth noting that all of that recognition has been driven by the community of American Express members evangelizing on behalf of the company. The company did not apply for those awards! Central to all of that public recognition has been a service experience that inspires both loyalty and evangelism.

American Express creates and supports this community of evangelists via millions of interactions each year. Members' willingness to recommend American Express to family and friends appears to be driven by three powerful factors:

- A premier service experience
- The belief that American Express is willing and able to resolve problems when they arise

- The perception that the benefits offered by the company are superior to those offered by competitors

A 2010 J.D. Power survey of over 8,000 credit card users resulted in five stars, the best possible rating, for American Express in each of those three categories.<sup>4</sup>

“What more powerful marketing opportunity do you have,” Bush asked, “than when a customer refers you to a friend? That’s the most powerful viral marketing there is.”

*How can you deliver a service experience that creates a sense of belonging and identity?*

- ! **ART #21:** Create goals that inspire and engage your internal evangelists (employees).
- ! **ART #22:** Develop value-added privileges, rewards, and amenities to offer your customers as a way to build community.

## **AMAZEMENT REVOLUTION STRATEGY #7: WALK THE WALK**

### **Close-up on Walk the Walk**

Acknowledge, model, and reward adherence to customer-focused values at all levels of the organization.

I like to describe the walk the walk strategy with the word *congruence*: the customer-focused values you communicate to people should match up with what you actually do. Other words that describe this state of being are *authenticity* and *consistency*, but I prefer congruence because it does a better job of conveying the crucial sense of values matching up, both internally and externally. Congruence means you’re doing something, not

because someone else told you to, but because doing it is what you genuinely believe to be right, and you are therefore willing to be accountable for your actions in all situations.

Congruence in an exchange with another person is an extremely powerful force that can turn around even the most challenging situation. The absence of congruence, on the other hand, signals inconsistency and opportunism and can do long-term damage to almost any relationship.

Congruence is what we all expect of, and sometimes actually get from, the people we rely on in life. Congruence is also a way of doing business. It's what truly great service organizations consistently deliver, whether or not there's a consumer problem to be resolved at any given moment. A lot of people mistakenly believe that the best service organizations have found some magic formula for *eliminating* problems altogether. That's nonsense. What these organizations have found, however, is the formula for *responding* to problems, whenever they arise, with full congruence.

And guess what? It works. The reason it works is that congruence, when combined with genuine empathy, is something consumers absolutely love to experience. They expect it from everyone, at every level of the organization, and when they get it, they look for reasons to stick around. When they don't, they look for reasons to leave. It's that simple.

Congruence is an institutional value first and foremost. Its presence or absence at all levels of the workplace—from the most senior employee to the newest hire—depends on the degree to which it has been modeled and supported by our leaders. The American Express world service leadership team's relentless emphasis on providing premium level service to all those who rely on the company wouldn't mean much if they didn't actually provide premium service to their own team, or if they didn't hold themselves accountable to the standard of actually winning the hearts and minds of cardmembers and merchants. They do.

If you want your employees to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, in their interactions with consumers, you must first walk the walk *in your own interactions with the team*.

I asked Bush how he measured individual and organizational progress toward the goal of “winning the hearts and minds” of consumers. The intensity and animation of his response instantly signaled to me that this was a topic near and dear to him. He offered me the powerful example of changes in the productivity metrics system at American Express, evidence of the service principle I call walk the walk.

“When you look at how we used to measure success historically,” Bush recalled, “what you see is that we had a whole list of metrics that we used to track. We tracked how much time people spent on the phone, of course, but then we also had internal quality monitoring, which was much more subjective. We had checklists to evaluate whether the call was good or not, whether the engagement was good, and so on. The problem was, no two people would necessarily agree on what engagement was or what a good call was. Those metrics had nothing to do with customer feedback. So we said, let’s eliminate that.

“We removed the subjectivity from our call evaluation system,” Bush continued, “which meant we freed up the resources we’d been using to grade the calls. We then invested more heavily in our external surveys of customers, which we had been doing for a long time, but as a result of this decision to change the way we measured the success of a given call, we decided to generate the sample size necessary and the infrastructure necessary to extend the survey results all the way down to an individual customer care professional on the front line. That new measurement process asked one simple question: *Would you recommend American Express to a friend?*”

A side note: This now-famous survey query, which was developed by Fred Reichheld, is sometimes referred to as the Ultimate Question. Whatever you call it, though, the answers it generates tell you exactly how well the individual customer care professional is doing. By extension, that question also tells you exactly how well the *department as a whole* is doing. And that’s not all: It also tells you exactly how well the *manager of the department* is doing! Once the manager publicly accepts accountability for the same standard he or she expects the team to meet, the whole dynamic

of the workplace changes. People have something to model. What was once a *congruence vacuum* becomes a *congruence zone*!

“Now we are all, from me all the way across the world service organization, measured on the voice of the customer,” Bush concluded. “We’ve made sure everyone’s compensation, including mine, incorporates the driver of customer feedback. We apply the same principle up and down the line. That’s a very important overriding objective in terms of driving outcomes.”

Can you see where this is going?

The answer to the question “Would you recommend American Express to a friend?” ultimately tells you exactly how well *Jim Bush and the entire world-service management team* is doing! And don’t think the people working on the front line don’t notice the management team’s willingness to embrace that standard. They do. They know the people they report to don’t just talk the talk...they walk the walk.

***How can you model congruence to the members of your team so they in turn can deliver congruence to your customers?***

- ! **ART #23:** Model congruence with the right customer-focused values at all times.
- ! **ART #24:** Start a congruence movement within your organization. Everyone should walk the walk!
- ! **ART #25:** Identify customer feedback that’s both objective and measurable that everyone in your organization, regardless of rank, can use as a benchmark.
- ! **ART #26:** Consider tying compensation to Fred Reichheld’s Ultimate Question: “On a scale of one to ten, what is the likelihood that you would recommend us to a friend or associate?”

Now that you've seen one company that models all seven of the Amazement Strategies, both internally and externally, you're ready to look at some additional examples of organizations that have built one or more of these seven ideas into their mission. We'll take a look at them next, focusing on one Amazement Strategy at a time.

## **Who is Shep Hyken?**

**(The Official and Somewhat Boring Bio)**



Shep Hyken, CSP, CPAE is the Chief Amazement Officer of Shepard Presentations. As a speaker and author, Shep works with companies and organizations who want to build loyal relationships with their customers and employees. His articles have been read in hundreds of publications, and he is the author of *Moments of Magic®*, *The Loyal Customer* and the Wall Street Journal and USA Today best seller *The Cult of the Customer*. He is also the creator of *The Customer Focus™* program, which helps clients develop a customer service culture and loyalty mindset.

In 1983 Shep founded Shepard Presentations, LLC and since then has worked with hundreds of clients ranging from Fortune 100 size organizations to companies with less than 50 employees. Some of his clients include American Airlines, AAA Anheuser-Busch, AT&T, AETNA, Abbott Laboratories, American Express - and that's just a few of the A's!

Shep Hyken's most requested programs focus on customer service, customer loyalty, internal service, customer relations and the customer experience. He is known for his high-energy presentations, which combine important information with entertainment (humor and magic) to create exciting programs for his audiences.

(CPAE, or the Council of Peers Award for Excellence, is the National Speakers Association's *Speaker Hall of Fame* award for lifetime achievement in the area platform/speaking excellence. CSP is the international designation for *Certified Speaking Professionals* and is awarded to individuals for certain achievements and education in the speaking profession.)

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**Buy the book at <http://www.AmazementRevolution.com>**

## **We hope you enjoyed this sample!**

Thank you for your interest in *The Amazement Revolution*. I hope you enjoyed what you have read. This sample consisted of around 20% of the book. What follows is seven chapters that expand on the seven strategies, with forty-nine role-model companies showing us how they use these strategies to achieve amazing customer service and loyalty.

In addition to the strategy chapters, there is section with Amazement Brainstorm Worksheets. These worksheets will help you implement what you have learned from the book. These can also be downloaded, free of charge, at the Amazement Revolution website.

To order the book, go to the website noted below. When you buy through the website, you will receive a number of extra's that include:

Shep Hyken's 52 Weekly Business Insights

*The Cult of the Customer* Manifesto

Audio interview with Don Hutson on negotiation and sales

Audio interview with Sam Silvestein on accountability

Audio interview with Tony Alessandra on adaptability

Audio interview with Josh Linkner on creativity

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