

CHRIS EKPEKUREDE



TAKE YOUR SERVICE TO MAXIMUM

DEVELOPING MINDSETS THAT BOOST
PERSONAL AND CORPORATE PRODUCTIVITY

Take Your Service to Maximum

*Developing Mindsets That Boost
Personal and Corporate Productivity*

Chris Ekpekurede



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

Copyright 2013

All rights reserved — Chris Ekpekurede

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507

Houston, TX 77065

www.sbpra.com

ISBN: 978-1-62857-787-7

Typography and page composition by J. K. Eckert & Company

*Dedicated to my wife, Esther,
and all the men and women who,
without formal training in their lines of business,
ventured boldly into the service arena and made a mark.*

*I give kudos to them all for trying.
Their collective adventure has given us a lot of food
for thought on how service should be provided.*

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
Chapter 1—Make No Room for Errors	1
Chapter 2—Grow Your Brand. Guard Your Brand.....	15
Chapter 3—Recovering from Service Failure	33
Chapter 4—Service, Before Reward.....	51
Chapter 5—Deliver to Agreed Terms.....	65
Chapter 6—Get Feedback	83
Chapter 7—Work Your Business Ethics	93
Chapter 8—Get Your Packaging Right	103
Chapter 9—Managing Success	113
Chapter 10—Message Delivery	129

Acknowledgments

Knowledge is power. According to the Bible, people are destroyed for the lack of it (Hosea 4:6). You can only know as much as you learn, and you can only learn as much as you are taught. The people and institutions that pass through our lives leave with us vital knowledge and experiences that live with us for the rest of our lives. Those experiences shape our beliefs and values, and help us chart our individual courses as service providers. God has placed us all on the earth as service providers.

I acknowledge the lessons I have learnt from the following organizations in the course of my career. My involvement in their operations taught me vital lessons on how service should and should not be provided: Nigerian Dredging and Marine Limited, The Shell Petroleum Development Company, Rukoma Rentals, The Word of Life Bible Church, Rainbow Christian Assembly and the Living Faith Church (Winners), all of Nigeria. I thank them all for being a part of my life.

Many thanks also to the Lord God almighty, the Supreme inspirer. He wakes me up at night with special insights, and makes me write them down. With the passage of time, I find that I have written enough to make a book. Thank you Father!

Finally, let me express many thanks to all my readers out there who make my writing worth the effort.

God bless you all!

Introduction

“I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

—Albert Schweitzer

What is the motivation for what you do? Is it to earn a living or is it a pastime? Whatever your motivation, you should be fulfilled doing it; otherwise it is not worth the effort and time. Fulfilment should be the ultimate force that drives every human endeavour. When you receive a constant stream of fulfilment, what you do becomes a calling. A calling draws heavily on your passion to make an impact, not just on self but, more importantly, on others.

When you are driven by a desire to impact others positively with what you do, you are going after God's heart. The pursuit of God's heart should be the primary reason you are alive, and no where should it show better than the way in which you do what you do. That is because what you do is not half as important as why and how you do it.

Excellence is shown by doing everything in a great way, even little things. Therefore upgrade your motivation into your calling.

You are designed by God to hit a target called 'best.' Aim for the bull's eye all the time. You achieve maximum productivity when you are putting

your best in whatever you do. If you have not done your best in every one of your endeavours, you are unnecessarily underperforming at your latent potential. Why would you do a thing if you do not intend to give it your best? That does not make sense, does it?

Underperforming to capacity is so common among humans that God must wonder constantly what the matter with us is. We are so incredibly endowed!

WHAT IS SERVICE?

By my own definition, anything done by a person in response to the expectation or yearning of another person is a service. A service meets a need. Service is about knowing the needs of your customers and taking care of them. I want you to reflect on this question: Is there anything that someone expects of you at this point in time, whether formal or informal? If your answer is yes, what you do in response is a service. And that service could be good or bad. If you fully meet that person's expectation, then you have provided a good service. If you do not, you have provided a bad service.

A good service lifts burdens and takes away someone's anxiety. That is what customers pay for; to be free of stress. Your service should remove and not add to your customers' stress. Your service should relieve someone's pressure. In this context, your service could be in an office setting as an employee, or in a business setting as a representative of a group. Your service could also be a commitment to a friend or relation. The context has a very wide application.

WHY THIS BOOK?

This book is intended to help you discover your endowments and help you hit best in whatever you do. It is designed to help you build on your

ability to be more productive and thereby maximise whatever service you provide. Humanity is suffering from the unfulfilled promises of men, from breaches of written and social contracts, and from the subversion of the common good by greed and selfishness. Humanity has come under the debilitating weight of shoddy services by ill prepared and, sometimes, unscrupulous and conscienceless service providers.

The book seeks to awaken the consciences of men and draw attention to the virtues of service and performance faithfulness. It seeks to make a better servant of each of us so that, ultimately, God can make good leaders of us. As Jesus once said, he who seeks to be leader must be a servant of all.

The mindsets and principles advocated in this book are designed to achieve this by providing platforms for boosting the productivity of each one of us in whatever we do. You may already be familiar with some of these mindsets, but I can assure you that you will find something refreshing reading this book.

This book should not be read and left on your shelf. It should be read and passed on to the next person. And it should not just be read, it should serve as a reference manual.

THE PREMIUM FOR UNDERPERFORMANCE

We pay a very costly price each time we perform below our endowed capacities, and because no one is calculating the cost, the wastage continues daily in the way we deliver our services. All around us, service depreciation and bastardization smells like a rotting sore. When we do not give our best:

- We waste precious time and energy; two resources we do not contribute to creating. Both are extremely expendable.
- We promote mediocrity.

- We short-circuit our destiny and purpose. We will not achieve purpose until we give our best shot to what we do. Anything short of that is disaster waiting to happen.
- Our performance tends towards ordinary. You will not be different from other casual performers. Your craving to be noticed will be an utterly misplaced one.
- We discredit the Creator who invested His virtue in us and bids us to be perfect as He, our Father, is perfect.

These shortcomings depress performance. If you can afford any of the above infractions, then you need to have your focus and values critically reviewed.

FOR WHOM IS THIS BOOK WRITTEN?

So who should read this book?

- Everyone who is engaged in anything they consider important should read this book, especially if that activity provides any type of service to another person. When you critically look at the gamut of human activities, there is hardly any that doesn't fit this description. The exemption would be an activity that doesn't impact humans in any way. Can you think of any?
- Everyone who has a craving for acceptance and recognition should read this book, everyone who wants to grow their self confidence.
- Everyone who says, "I don't want to be like others. I want to be different in a positive way." Someone has said if you do not strive to be different, you cannot make a difference.
- They should read this book who want to leave behind a legacy and footprints in the sands of time; people who want to etch their names in the

memories of men, and who want to immortalise their ideals, long after they are dead and gone.

- Everyone who labours daily for a living and wants to maximise his or her output should read this book; from the small time bean cake seller at the street corner, to the top executive who sits on the hierarchy of a blue-chip company.
- You should read this book if you sincerely desire commendations for your contribution to the welfare of humanity.
- This book is for every organization or company that desires to upgrade the way its staff do their work.
- This book is for everyone who is alive and thinks he or she has a contribution to make; everyone who is tired of just profiting and wishes to genuinely serve through what they do; everyone who wants to now make a name, not profit, even though, in the long run, making a name is inherently profiting.
- This book should be read by everyone who aspires to live a happy and fulfilling life.

WHAT QUALIFIES ME TO WRITE THIS BOOK?

I will answer this question in one word; experience. In more than thirty years in paid secular work, and more than twenty years of volunteer Christian work, I filled roles in which I had to meet the yearnings and aspirations of customers of diverse races, cultures and social strata. I know how it feels to be called at bedtime by a frustrated customer whose house is flooded by failed plumbing. I know what it feels like to provide service that draws commendation from one customer and condemnation from another.

People are so different in unique ways! That is the way God made us and we must appreciate this fact in dealing with each other.

I know how it feels to do a near thankless job for five years. I know how it feels to stay in a role that many others shirk away from. I know how it feels to walk a long and lonely service path with everyone thinking you are crazy for trying. But I also know what it feels like when a satisfied customer sends an early morning mail to say, “thank you for that service, keep it up.”

I have served in a role in which I had to daily deal with more than thirty customer requests for multi-discipline house maintenance work, with customers breathing down my neck. It was like operating in a war zone where I was constantly face to face with the enemy. It was a great challenge trying to make a friend of each of those complaining customers, yet so fulfilling in the end. My best times have been those during which I have served people so passionately.

Yes, I feel eminently qualified to write this book. I have a better feeling yet; the feeling to share my experience and knowledge and those of others that I know intimately.

GOLD NUGGETS

1. *What you do is not half as important as why and how you do it.*
2. *You are designed by God to hit a target called ‘best.’*
3. *Underperforming to capacity is so common among humans that God must wonder constantly what the matter with us is.*
4. *Anything done by a person in response to the expectation or yearning of another person is a service.*
5. *All around us, service depreciation and bastardization smells like a rotting sore.*
6. *This book seeks to awaken the consciences of men and draw attention to the virtues of service and performance faithfulness.*

7. *I know what it feels like to provide service that draws commendation from one customer and condemnation from another.*
8. *My best times have been those during which I have served people so passionately.*

1

Make No Room for Errors

“We make no room for errors.”

—The American Secret Service

I was listening to a documentary on the activities of the American Secret Service on the National Geographic Channel when an official of the service made this stunning statement. My attention was immediately arrested.

With over six thousand staff recruited into the Service, an overarching investigative duty and a protective responsibility over numerous American and visiting foreign leaders, I found this commitment by the Secret Service quite profound. I said to myself, if every service provider would make this statement its mission, how wonderfully different the world would be.

Of course, the American Secret Service lives by its creed and is highly reputed. The point they make by their commitment is that it is possible to provide service to this level of excellence. At least, they shoot for it.

BE PERFECT

Man by nature is error prone, but the degree of perfection in service varies from person to person, organization to organization, and from nation to nation. I can sense the service delivery culture of a nation by what I see as

soon as I arrive at their international airport. Similarly, when I step into a private home, I can sense the service mentality of the home owners. How you conduct your private affairs, for me, is one of the best projections of who you are as a nation or an individual. You cannot give what you do not have. To attempt to do so is hypocritical. A person who projects a poorly managed personal life cannot provide a high quality service to others.

What underpins quality service performance is a commitment to excellence and the discipline to maintain a sustained performance. Quality service provision is a way of life. It can be learned and practiced through a process that reduces errors to the barest minimum. Make no mistake about it; it is also hard work.

Anyone who provides a service must make a commitment to reduce errors if they want to go far, because someone must pay for every error that is made and, in many cases, the one who made the error pays. It is one of the tragedies of life that some people have to pay for the errors of others. Who wants to pay for another person's error? An error prone delivery is far from providing maximum service to anyone. And to make someone else pay for your error is offensive.

REDUCING ERRORS

One way to reduce errors is to learn from the mistakes of others. Errors, whether made by you or others, can be turned to good effect if you learn from them. The only value in a mistake is the lesson it provides. One of my colleagues used to say that there are so many errors to make in a man's life that he cannot afford to repeat the mistakes that others have made. That was his own way of conditioning his mind to learn from the errors of others.

A company that I once worked for instituted a *Learning from Incidents* programme that committed a whole team to collating and disseminating lessons learnt from incidents (within and outside the company) to every department and active site. The sole aim was to prevent similar incidents from occurring in its own operations.

At first it seemed that setting up an entire team just for this purpose was an unnecessary addition to the operating cost of the company, but the longer term benefit in the reduction of incidents became apparent, and made the programme worth the investment.

Following the disastrous 2010 oil spillage in the Gulf of Mexico which sent British Petroleum's share price plummeting, other major petroleum companies around the world took a deep interest in that incident and began to tighten their spill emergency response procedures. BP eventually lost its prime position on the performance charts to its competitors.

It is only a naive business enterprise that repeats the mistakes of its competitors. You can beat your competitors by avoiding their errors. Every sensible service provider must identify their competitors, learn their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate the learning into their own processes and systems for quality improvement.

Any service provider that is not on a continuous improvement programme is moribund. It is headed for extinction. Service competition is getting stiffer and stiffer by the day, and only those who administer a generous doze of error-free injections into their operations can survive the competition. The competition field is a cruel turf. It has no sympathy for mistake makers.

Why is it that many organizations and companies that once controlled the commanding heights of public patronage faded away? The competition caught up with them while they revelled at the plateau of their successes. To

borrow Martin Luther King's cliché, if you are not flying, run. If you are not running, walk. If you are not walking, crawl. Do something; do not stand still. Says the Bible in 1 Corinthians 10:12:

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”

The biggest risk you run when you are at the top is that of falling. You are in a constant battle with gravity, as it were. The competition is like gravity; it constantly acts to pull you down. Nevertheless, there are ways to beat performance gravity when you are up there, and some of them are enumerated in this book. You must be absolutely clear in your mind that you are making no room for avoidable errors and, as I have said before, that takes some doing, but you can. You must shoot for perfection in what you do. Indeed, God expects that of us, which is why He says to us in the Bible at Matthew 5:48:

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”

I have heard it said that perfection is not a requirement for success because it is utopian, a waste of resources, and an unachievable dream. But, as you can see, this position is actually contrary to God's expectation of us. Why would He ask us to strive for perfection if it is unachievable? You must condition your mind to accept what God says about you.

Indeed, passion for perfection is a necessary ingredient for increasing productivity. The drive for perfection should be the craving of each one of us. That is because, in the general context of providing service, it is difficult to imagine that there is anyone who is not a service provider, one way or the other.

When people are wallowing in mediocrity, they see perfection as a far-fetched proposition. We need to develop a new and better perspective of perfection in order for us to appreciate the need to strive for it at all times.

What then is perfection? The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines perfection as follows:

“having everything that is necessary; complete and not damaged; the best of its kind.”

In other words, when God says for us to be perfect, He is not expecting us to make no mistakes whatsoever. He is rather expecting us to shoot for our best. You can attain the best in any endeavour if you try and give it the right focus and commitment. The problem many of us have is in not trying. Making no room for errors, therefore, does not necessarily mean not falling into error. It means recovering from error all the time. It means reducing the frequency of errors. It also means putting systems in place to reduce the impact of errors when they occur.

“Having everything that is *necessary*” means that perfection does not require 100% correctness all the time; only the necessary inputs are required to be perfect, not every damn thing! It is rooting for a 100% performance all the time that is utopian and unattainable. Most successes can be sprung at 80% efficiency. The remaining 20% may be appropriated, but at a considerably higher and unnecessary cost to the main objective.

Majority of people cannot stand those who project that they commit no errors. In fact, showing and sharing your weakness as a leader can draw considerable empathy and galvanize your followers behind you. Committing an error is totally different from making room for it. When you make room for an error, you are allowing it to fester unchecked.

High performance sometimes overshadows errors. Therefore if you want to reach the clouds, set your target on the sun. Learn to set for yourself stretched targets so that you can put to use your dormant potential. You can do or become far more than you think of yourself. You only need to be primed for

that kind of performance and, sometimes, that comes from associating with people that motivate you and draw out your strengths.

THE SERVICE PROVIDER AS A SERVANT

Errors in the course of providing a service will be placed in their proper perspective if we appreciate who we are as service providers. In a classic sense, a service provider is a servant, not a master. A servant does not satisfy his or her own desires, but those of the hirer. The mark of a good service is that it meets expectation. The quality of any society is the sum total of the services provided therein. That is how nations differ one from the other.

The Nigerian society where I come from is a comedy of errors that is rooted in poor services. In virtually every facet of that society, a culture of poor service is prevalent. It is so infectious that the same people who are compliant in other law abiding countries become immediately non-compliant when they set foot on Nigerian shores. As it were, they get sucked into the prevalent spirit of non-compliance.

When shame and remorse should attend a poor service, an arrogant non-chalance is exhibited. Service providers see themselves as masters doing you a favour, not servants promoting the virtues of service. That is why productivity per capita is very low. The master mentality is insensitive to errors and the needs of others. In fact, it rides roughshod over them.

SUPERVISION: A POWERFUL ERROR MITIGATING TOOL

Apart from learning from the mistakes of others, another powerful tool for mitigating errors is supervision. Someone put it succinctly; *you must inspect what you expect*. Never leave your staff or charges to do what they like. Never expect them to do what you expect, even under strict instructions. Insist that

they perform, and the tool to deploy is supervision. When workers know that someone will come to check on their performance, they tend to sit up. They cut corners and deliver poor work when left alone.

Experience has taught me that the cost of supervision is far less than the cost of errors. Correcting errors wastes time and money, and is often very frustrating. It is more rewarding to avoid all these by ensuring adequate supervision in the first place. Even the best worker needs a certain amount of supervision.

Sometime ago, I was reading an article on the research findings of an indigenuous market research group, *Market Plus Products Services*. The research found that in the year 2011, 85% of products manufactured in Nigeria were substandard, compared to similar products in neighbouring countries, including Ghana and Senegal. This was so, even though the manufacturers were Nigerian companies based in Nigeria. What had gone wrong? Poor supervision and oversight by the Standards Organization of Nigeria were responsible.

While the Nigerian manufacturers felt compelled to deliver the right products to Ghana and Senegal because of the tighter scrutiny of their quality assurance officials, the same companies passed into the Nigerian market inferior products by taking advantage of the loose, compromising supervision and corruption of the Nigerian quality officials. Indeed, a friend confided to me that she takes advantage of her visits to Ghana to buy baby foods and bring them to Nigeria because of their better quality.

Poor supervision has made Nigeria a dumping ground for all manner of products. The lax supervision is so entrenched that Nigerian importers go to places like China and Taiwan to procure goods bound for Nigeria that are manufactured to negotiated and lowered standards.

Comparatively, the activities of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) buttress what can be achieved when diligent supervision is deployed. The agency has, to a large extent, sanitized the Nigerian drug market through its very strict supervisory role in the regulation of the manufacture, importation and distribution of drugs in Nigeria. That is far more than can be said of the Standards Organization of Nigeria. It is gratifying that the NAFDAC is turning its searchlight on food products as well.

It costs money to hire and train supervisors, but the rewards ultimately more than pay off the cost of hiring them. While I recommend that you, the chief executive, personally walk your business and production patch from time to time to check on what your staff are doing, you must understand that the enormity of the task means you cannot do the supervision all by yourself. You need a compact and well resourced organization that drives supervision. Your human resources are your most valuable resources. Compromising in this area to reduce overhead and salary costs will ultimately affect production and hurt the organization.

Delegation is a way of sharing the supervision responsibility, but it requires a pragmatic approach. Delegation of duty places on the delegator a responsibility to check and supervise. Effective leaders know how to delegate authority without losing product or service value, and that means you must remain involved yourself. When the chief executive walks the patch, it puts other supervisors on their toes. Delegation must be carefully handled so as not to turn it into abdication of responsibility. You should delegate authority, not responsibility. Ultimately, as the chief executive, the buck stops at your table. You are responsible for the quality of service your organization provides.

To delegate effectively, you must train helpers to fulfil your role. Experts recommend the following four step approach involving the delegator and the delegate:

1. *Watch me do it.*
2. *Let us do it together.*
3. *You do it while I watch.*
4. *Great! You take charge while I do something else.*

The issue of supervision is so important that in one of my previous employments, managers and leaders were required to include in their tasks and targets a day during the week on which they were all required to leave their desks and walk about the production fields to improve the quality of coal face work and boost workers' morale. Too many managers are glued to their desks and imprisoned in their cosy offices, while things are going wrong on the production fields. How can the workers know the big boss if he doesn't visit them?

Instead of holding coal face workers responsible, leaders must hold their own direct reports accountable for the failures that they observe during their routine 'walk-about.' When that is done, it firmly establishes supervision as a universal function of every role.

For supervision to be properly entrenched as an error mitigating and production boosting tool, there must be a clear understanding across the work force that most failures are supervisory failures. It must be understood that supervision is not necessarily a responsibility assigned to one person, but a responsibility embedded in every role, even when there is one individual that bears the title supervisor.

When the leader holds the lower level of workers directly responsible for their performance lapses, the leader is unwittingly absolving their supervisors of their own responsibility to ensure that there are no avoidable failures and supervision gaps. Hold supervisors accountable for the failure of their workers. They in turn will hold their direct reports to account for their own failures, and so on and so forth down the chain of authority. That is how to entrench a culture of performance in an organization.

A very good way to achieve this is for you the leader to take your direct report with you during some of your routine walk-about. This puts them immediately on the spot to explain any lapses you observe during your inspection. It is also a very powerful way to train and mentor your direct reports.

Although there must be room for the sanctioning of gross misconduct and serial offenders, generally, the leader, when he or she observes lapses, should correct to teach, not necessarily to rebuke. The reason is that there is a strange phenomenon that creeps into the supervision chain and gradually tends to weaken it.

A supervisor or team leader tends to gradually get sucked into the routine activities of the team to the extent that he or she becomes less of a supervisor and more of a team mate. The supervisor becomes like *one of them*. This natural induction tends to blunt the ability of the supervisor to notice errors. It takes the senior leader's intervention during the walk-about to bring the supervisor back to reality. The supervisor's attention is drawn to obvious errors that he or she had failed to observe and this jerks their error sensors back to life. That is what the managerial walk-about does. It is sometimes called the power of fresh eyes.

Another point about the managerial walk-about; they must be scheduled to make the visits of the leader difficult to predict by the work force. I used to have a secondary school principal who sometimes visited the hostels at night to check on students. Because students knew that he could appear like a ghost anytime, they kept themselves in check. He was a disciplinarian par excellence.

Predictable managerial visits create a window dressing culture and lead to error cover up. I had once been on a managerial walk-about that led to a total shut down of site activities because the workers knew I was coming. They spent their time preparing for my visit as if it was the head of state visiting. In the end it was difficult for me to judge their work culture. Bear this in mind; workers will create a make-belief if you leave room for it. No matter how huge the activity is, do not make your visit that of an entourage, if you can help it. Entourages are highly distractive. They turn an innocuous site visit into an unwieldy ceremony.

Remember, whatever your product or service line, supervision is a tool you must deploy to boost quality and productivity and cut out damaging and costly errors. However simple a task may be, there would always be a noticeable difference in outcome when it is executed under good supervision. Supervision is a firm rung when climbing the ladder to a maximised service.

MARKET INTELLIGENCE

In a competitive environment, another way to reduce making mistakes and standing up to the competition is to find out how your competitors are doing, and if they are doing well how they are achieving that. You do not have to reinvent the wheel to use it. If there is a way of achieving an objective without errors, you want to discover it. The best way to overcome an error is not to

make it in the first place. Getting information about the competition is called market intelligence.

Your competitors will generally not give away their competition secrets any more than you will do yours. Established service providers have a market intelligence department that provides intelligence about the competition to spruce up their own performance. This of course must be done within the ambit of the law, to avoid breaching competition laws. Legal opinion is required as to how to obtain information about your competitors, but know that many organizations have useful information on their operations in the public domain that competitors have access to.

One of the best ways to learn about the performance of your competitor is to use their goods or services at some point, just for the purpose of learning a thing or two about their strategy, and feeling firsthand the quality of their service. You can only keep abreast with what you show active interest in.

GOLD NUGGETS

- 1. If you are not flying, run. If you are not running, walk. If you are not walking, crawl. Do something; do not stand still.*
- 2. Most successes can be sprung at 80% efficiency. The remaining 20% may be appropriated, but at a considerably higher and unnecessary cost to the main objective.*
- 3. The quality of any society is the sum total of the services provided therein.*
- 4. You delegate authority, not responsibility.*
- 5. Supervision is not necessarily a responsibility assigned to one person, but a responsibility embedded in every role, even when there is one individual that bears the title supervisor.*

6. *However simple a task may be, there would always be a noticeable difference in outcome when it is executed under good supervision.*
7. *Established service providers have a market intelligence department that provides intelligence about the competition to spruce up their own performance.*

Buy the B&N e-Pub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/take-your-service-to-maximum-chris-ekpekurede/1115564276>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/Take-Your-Service-Maximum-Productivity-ebook/dp/B00H7O660K/>