

THE AUTHENTIC LEADER AND THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY: CREATING A SPACE FOR GREATNESS

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

Being committed to building organizational cultures that attract and keep great people, we have recently become fascinated by a concept known as the “*Experience Economy*.” This was first described in a book written in 1999 by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, titled *The Experience Economy*. In it they describe the emerging economy following the agrarian economy, the industrial economy and the most recent service economy. This economy is about responding to the evolving human awareness and expectation of the yearning for *experience*. Businesses, to thrive today, must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, they contend, and that memory itself becomes the product — the “experience.” Running an organization today in this experience economy is like running theatre, where goods and services are merely the props to create an inspiring experience, a means to a much more important higher end. Smart organizations, such as Disney for example, understand that they are not selling rides, souvenirs, or Mickey Mouse tee shirts. What they are really selling is the *experience* of spending time in the “happiest place on earth.” At Disney, they have only one goal: That when you leave the park, your first thought will be, “When can we come back again for more of this?”

Although the concept of the experience economy was born in the business field, it has crossed its frontiers to urban planners, tourism and other fields, such as education and health care. Organizations that understand this emerging human need, respond to it by assessing carefully, on an ongoing basis, what the *experience* is of their customers and clients when they do business with them. Whether you run a dental clinic, a law firm, a financial services company, a university, or a furniture store, if you want to attract and retain customers, you better understand very clearly what kind of *experience* you want customers to have when they are with you, and then align your systems, process, and people to make that happen.

It is our notion that if experience is what determines *customer* attraction and retention then it is experience that also determines *employee* attraction and retention. After all, people are people. Below are four strategies for creating an experience with your staff that will inspire them to come back for more. While these strategies are intended to be read through the lenses of positional leaders building a productive, sustainable culture, any employee can find value in these strategies if you are committed to creating a productive, sustainable workplace for yourself and for those you serve.

1. Be authentic. Every day you come to work, you bring your body with you. But do you bring all of who you are: Your passion, your unique gifts, your highest aspirations, your creativity? Authenticity, the focus of our work, is about creating cultures where people can be who they are, where they don't have to check who they are at the door. There is nothing that inspires people more than being around someone who is real. Authenticity breeds authenticity — a commitment to bring who you are to what you do, in the service of others.

- 2. Clarify your desired experience.** Spend time getting clear about just exactly what kind of experience you want those you serve to have when they come into your organization. As you look at your organization through the lens of the customer, be sure, also, to look at your culture through the lens of the employee. Ask yourself, “What is the higher purpose that we are ultimately about in this organization?” Listen carefully to all of your stakeholders to gain an understanding of just what kind of experience you are going to need to create in this organization, department, or work group, to attract and keep the kind of employees you are going to need, now and in the future.
- 3. Share your vision.** Let people in on what you are passionately committed to create. Tell people what kind of experience you want them to have. For example, “I want you to feel deeply engaged in a personal and memorable way here, and for you to feel a personal connection to what you are doing.” Or, “I want you to look forward to coming to work here, to be excited about this place.” Or, “I want you to feel trusted and free to be yourself in this organization.” Or, “I want you to experience ‘deep satisfaction’ as you serve both yourself and others here.” Or, “If we want our customers to feel welcome, and ‘at home’ here, we want every employee to feel the same way.” Although you expect that people will take accountability for creating these kinds of experiences for themselves, make it clear that you, as a boss, are accountable for creating an environment that creates that experience for your employees.
- 4. Monitor continually.** Hold yourself accountable, as a leader, for ensuring that your staff is having that experience. Your success is measured, to a large degree, through conversations. Ask your staff regularly, “What is your *experience* of working here? Is it congruent with what we are expecting you to create for the people you serve? What can I do as a leader to enable you to have this kind of experience more often?”

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. He is the co-founder of the Newport Institute for Authentic Living whose focus is to build authentic organizational cultures that attract and retain great people. David is the best selling author of five books. His most recent book is *Bridges Of Trust: Making Accountability Authentic*. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

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