



Service Habit 1

CHOOSE TO SERVE

My favourite '90s movie is the Hollywood hit *Sliding Doors*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow as the lead character, Helen. The movie shows Helen living two parallel lives after a pivotal moment that changes everything.

One day, Helen gets sacked from her public relations job, leaves the office early and upset, and runs to catch the train. In this moment, she either makes the train or the door slides shut on her, leaving her standing on the empty platform. The two realities move forward: one sees Helen's life in a happy state and the other has her struggling through her days. (I won't tell you why; you'll have to watch the movie!) The movie is based on the idea that what seems like an insignificant moment on an ordinary day can set you on a different path.

Service is a lot like how this movie plays out. It all revolves around one pivotal moment: a person's initial interaction with you. The way you influence and interact with people every day – colleagues, customers, teammates, your boss – will set them on a path to either happiness or misery. No matter how small or insignificant human-to-human interactions may seem, how you treat people in each and every moment lingers for hours, days and weeks. It will be the reason why people come back, why people

are happy to work with you or for you and, in some cases, why people leave you.

Relationships are formed through the many small interactions you have throughout a day. They craft a storyline that has a happy ending – or not. So, paying attention to the ordinary moments is critical to keeping the relationships that are dear to you on the path of happiness.

What may seem like an ordinary interaction to you may be a highlight for someone else. What felt like an insignificant moment for someone else may be a milestone moment for you. You never know what the person on the end of the phone, the other side of the counter or the other side of a meeting table may be going through. Your approach to serving people is a big deal.

When serving others, we must remember that ordinary days and insignificant moments matter most.

In any moment, service is a choice: who you choose to be, how you choose to show up, what you choose to bring to that interaction. The first decision to make on the Service Habits journey is to **choose to serve**. So, what does choosing to serve look like?

99 PER CENT IS NOT 100 PER CENT

One of my meditation teachers says, ‘99 per cent committed is hard; 100 per cent committed is easy.’

What he means is that when you are 100 per cent committed to something, you are ‘all in’, unwavering – you aren’t going to let anything come between you and your commitment. When you decide to be 100 per cent committed to the people you serve, you cut off any alternatives that may get in the way of that commitment. When you’re only 99 per cent committed, by comparison, you’re leaving 1 per cent to chance – a 1 per cent alternative – and this is why 100 per cent is easy: because there are no alternatives.

How would you feel if your partner or best friend came to you one day and said, 'I'm 99 per cent committed to you'? It would seem odd, wouldn't it; and you'd be left wondering, why only 99 per cent? You'd want more.

If you are giving anything less than full commitment in an interaction, it is obvious. I was once in a meeting with a new client – a meeting he had initiated – but his body language and behaviour told me he wasn't 100 per cent committed to the conversation. As soon as we sat down, I felt like he wanted to be someplace else. He was jittery, checking his watch; he didn't seem to be listening, and it felt like he was just going through the motions of the meeting to say that he'd done it. I left our interaction feeling unsure of whether I wanted to do business with him.

You can sense the vibe of someone only 99 per cent committed to you in a service environment. Like when you walk into a retail store or a restaurant just as they are about to close, and the employee greeting you seems almost disappointed you've arrived, because they were ready to go home. Someone who is 100 per cent committed would lean in, welcome you and show you in that moment that you are important to them.

When people give you, as a customer, less than 100 per cent of their commitment, they give you less than 100 per cent attention. You just know they're not fully present with you.

When you only give 99 per cent of your attention in service interactions, that missing 1 per cent can cost you:

- the trust of someone on your team
- a new client relationship
- a customer's sale.

People experience you moment by moment, and the mindset you choose to adopt in each and every moment is what determines your actions and behaviours. That 1 per cent requires you to pay

attention to your small habits and behaviours. Service doesn't have to be big and grandiose to be meaningful, but you need to give 100 per cent of your attention – 99 per cent is not enough.

If someone or something is important enough to us, we'll always find a way to say yes and help them.

Michael Jordan has earned the reputation of being one of the most incredible athletes on the planet. During his glory days, he was known for identifying the small moments and opportunities in a game. He would say, 'Once I made a decision, I never thought about it again.'

High performers of service are 100 per cent in – they don't leave the 1 per cent to chance.

In the words of Derek Sivers, author of *Hell Yeah or No*, keep earning your title, or it will expire.

It requires daily practice to earn a title from your customers in business, such as 'they give great service', 'they are a good brand' or, 'they are my preferred choice'. Each day, when you open your doors, pick up the phone or pen an email, you must keep earning that title, just like Michael Jordan did with his approach to each game. In other words, you have to keep choosing to serve, each and every moment you are serving.

Check yourself now:

- What mindset do you choose in this moment?
- How committed are you to those you serve?
- Do you give people 100 per cent attention when you serve, eliminating any distractions that may get in the way of you listening?
- Do you take that extra phone call at 5 pm when you're due to finish, knowing it's a customer on the end of the line and hoping you can help them?

- Do you greet the last person who walks into your store at the end of the day with the same enthusiasm that you greeted the first person who walked into your store that day?

These are traits of someone who is choosing to serve – is this you?

A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

On any working day, you make conscious and unconscious choices about:

- what task to do next
- what to prioritise
- who to speak with about a problem
- when to speak with others and when to listen
- when to take a break.

When you make conscious choices, they get 100 per cent of your attention. This results in you having a certain aliveness about you – you're attentive, focused and committed to giving what it takes in that moment. As I mentioned earlier, if someone or something is important enough, you will always find a way to say yes or help them.

Unconscious choices, on the other hand, get less than 100 per cent of your attention. You can be easily charmed or distracted by something else, you're not fully present in that moment, and you may not be fully attentive to what you're experiencing. With unconscious choices, it's like you're on autopilot: mindless and certainly not present.

Customers or colleagues you serve, if asked, would probably say that they would appreciate your 100 per cent attention when you're with them. We all want to feel like we're important to others and that when someone is serving us, they are doing so fully and freely, not out of obligation. Fundamentally, we want to be served by people who consciously choose to do so.

You cannot serve and be self-absorbed at the same time.

Think of the moments in your life when someone has been there 100 per cent for you, in complete service to you. They may have helped you with a problem, given you a new perspective or allowed you to learn something new about yourself.

When you treat serving people as a chore, you can get lost and miss out the gifts and benefits that you, as the giver of service, can gain. Think about it:

- *Service not only raises questions, it gives you answers.* In a working environment in which circumstances and product demands are ever changing, information from your service interactions can be your secret weapon for staying innovative and relevant.
- *Service can help you drop your mask, connect with people and serve more from the heart.* When you serve from a place of authenticity, without a façade or mask, it is easier and takes less effort.
- *Service can help you understand people better.* The skills of service are skills for life. Understanding people strengthens leadership and good human-to-human behaviour, and every business that involves relationships needs people who can seek this understanding.
- *Service can still your restless mind.* Paying attention to others will turn down the volume on your self-dialogue. Many people seek, through daily mindfulness and meditation, to free their mind from thoughts of past or future events. When you're stressed and caught up in your thinking mind, one of the quickest ways to get out of your own head is to serve someone else and place your attention on them, in the now.

- *Service can fill you with joy and happiness – satisfaction that you’ve been useful to a fellow human being.* One of the basic needs of any human is self-esteem. There is a value exchange that comes from service besides products and money.

When you get out of your own way and truly step into a moment with someone, and you are there to listen, learn, help and serve, it’s no longer about you. It’s the ultimate gift to a fellow human being, to choose to serve them.

Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran wrote in his poem ‘On Work’, ‘Work is love made visible.’ Our work in service can be part of our calling, part of our search for meaning and for why we exist. And I think in the heart of each of us, there’s a desire to do good things in the world.

If you’re in the service industry, then your mindset is what drives the quality of your performance as a service professional. It all starts with your level of commitment and what you choose to believe in each moment you are serving someone else.

So, do you choose to serve, or does your work feel like an obligation, a chore, or just a series of tasks?

This is the foundational habit for everything that follows. If you haven’t chosen to be of service, it doesn’t matter what other habits follow. Choose to serve, first.

Service Habit 1

CHOOSE TO SERVE

Reflect now

- Are you 100 per cent in for the people you say matter to you?
- How does that commitment transpire when you attend staff meetings, have corridor conversations with colleagues, serve customers and solve their problems?
- Who do you choose to be when you're at work?
 - Someone who leaves a positive impact every time they're with people?
 - Someone known for caring?
 - Someone known for giving people their time and attention?

Embed the habit

Choosing to serve is a daily choice. This is an invitation to bring some self-awareness and, for the next 24 hours, pay attention to what you are choosing in each moment of your day.

For the next 24 hours, choose to serve – wherever you are, whoever you are serving.

Notice what a conscious intention to choose to serve does to your mindset, your mood and the overall interaction between you and the person you are serving.