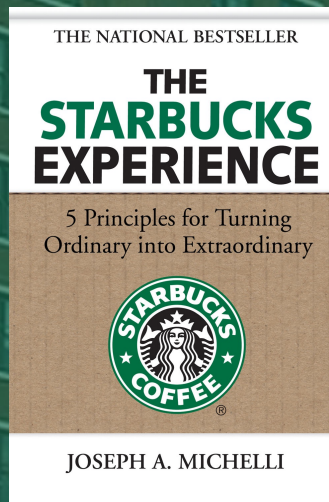


LEADERSHIP TIPS

THE STARBUCKS EXPERIENCE

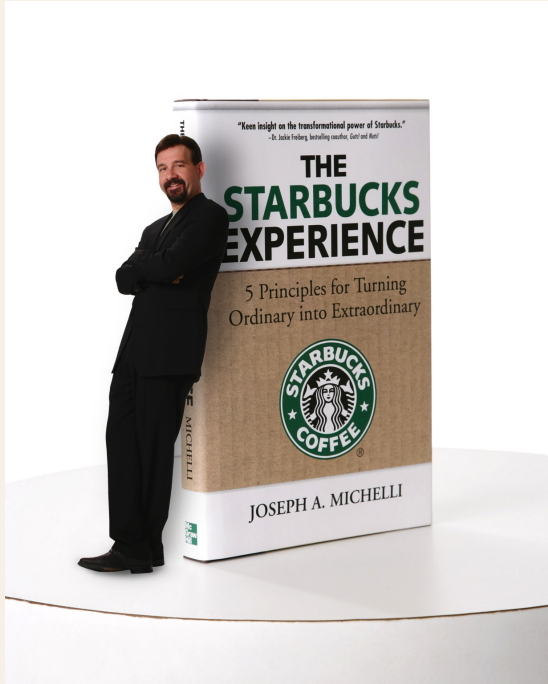
*Leadership Lessons for Creating
Extraordinary Human Experiences*



5 PRINCIPLES • HUMAN CONNECTION • EXPERIENCE

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NEARLY TWO DECADES LATER

How do we grow without losing the soul of what made us great?

When I first wrote *The Starbucks Experience*, I set out to capture what made a single coffeehouse in Seattle grow into one of the most recognized brands in the world. The five principles I identified — Make It Your Own, Everything Matters, Surprise and Delight, Embrace Resistance, and Leave Your Mark — were drawn from hundreds of hours inside Starbucks stores, roasting plants, and leadership offices.

The leadership tips in this eBook were first shared shortly after that book was published. They were designed to help business leaders translate the Starbucks story into practical action for their own organizations. I am pleased to report that the principles hold up remarkably well.

What has changed, of course, is the world around them. Starbucks itself has navigated extraordinary challenges and opportunities — from digital transformation and the mobile order revolution to global expansion and renewed conversations about what community and human connection truly mean in a technology-driven era.

The core tension this eBook explores — between operational efficiency and human experience — is more relevant today than ever. As artificial intelligence reshapes how businesses serve customers, the question Howard Schultz wrestled with inside Starbucks has become a universal leadership challenge: How do we grow without losing the soul of what made us great?

“The core tension is between operational efficiency and human experience.”

— Joseph Michelli

A coffeehouse lesson for an AI-powered age

Starbucks became a business case because leaders understood that product, place, people, ritual, and community all shape customer memory. The lessons endure because they are not merely about coffee. They are about the discipline required to scale a human experience without diminishing its soul.

THEN

A single coffeehouse grew through disciplined experience design, operational detail, and a differentiated sense of place.

NOW

Mobile ordering, AI, digital expectations, and labor-market complexity challenge leaders to preserve connection while improving speed.

ALWAYS

Customers still want to feel recognized, respected, welcomed, and cared for by people and systems that work together.

“Turning ordinary customer interactions into extraordinary experiences is not a strategy. It is a commitment.”

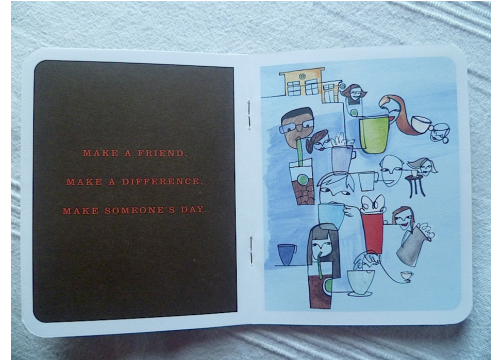
OWNERSHIP BEFORE SCRIPTING

Make It Your Own

As a business leader you know the conflict. On the one hand, you want consistency across your business. On the other, you want employees to engage in their jobs, bringing their own uniqueness and creativity. Starbucks leadership mastered a way to do both.

Leadership encouraged partners to “make Starbucks their own,” while providing exacting standards on operational issues. One way they did this was through a small pamphlet called The Green Apron Book. This pocket-sized guide highlighted ways partners could merge customer service objectives with their own skills and personality through five ways of being.

Notice the phrase “ways of being,” not “ways of doing.” When people merely do customer service, they often execute scripts. Starbucks asked a deeper question: Who do we want our people to be? A welcoming greeting, for example, was not reduced to a single mandated sentence. It was a way of showing up.



BE WELCOMING

BE GENUINE

BE CONSIDERATE

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE

BE INVOLVED

Put the Principle to Work

Use this page to translate the idea into specific behaviors, decisions, and operational improvements.

1. What variation on The Green Apron Book would help your people own the experience?

2. What are the five most important characteristics you want your people to embody?

3. Where do you need operational standards and where do you need personal expression?

90-day action: What one visible change will prove this principle matters?

THE 7-CENT VALVE

Everything Matters

Starbucks is what it is today largely thanks to a 7-cent valve. The next time you see a bag of roasted coffee beans, look for a small plastic disc near the logo. This one-way degassing valve allowed Starbucks to extend the freshness shelf life of roasted coffee from at most seven days to more than six weeks, transforming a single-city phenomenon into a global brand.

It is interesting how often we want to take a shortcut when delivering service, and how rarely we feel comfortable receiving one. Rich Soderberg, Starbucks Senior VP of Manufacturing, told me the journey from seven days of freshness took many years and required severing relationships with suppliers who could not innovate at the standard Starbucks demanded.

Every detail was treated as if it mattered, because it did.

7¢ VALVE

A tiny innovation helped extend freshness and enabled global growth. Small details can create massive strategic leverage.

Put the Principle to Work

Use this page to translate the idea into specific behaviors, decisions, and operational improvements.

1. What small improvement could create disproportionate value?

2. Where are you hoping customers will not notice a corner you have cut?

3. What is your organization's version of the 7-cent valve?

90-day action: What one visible change will prove this principle matters?

SIGNATURE MOMENTS THAT PEOPLE REMEMBER

Surprise and Delight

People buy Cracker Jack for the delight of the caramelized popcorn. They buy more of it for the surprise of the prize. In 1912, adding the phrase “A Prize in Every Box” transformed an already-beloved product into a cultural institution. The same dynamic plays out in every business every day.

Surprise without delight does not make for a successful business. Delight without an occasional surprise may create familiarity, and it can also become too predictable. The Starbucks principle asks leaders to distinguish between what must be consistent and what can be unexpected.

The surprise does not need to be large or costly. It needs only to be genuine, well-timed, and connected to the customer's experience.

“Small surprises create lasting memories when they are grounded in reliable delight.”

Put the Principle to Work

Use this page to translate the idea into specific behaviors, decisions, and operational improvements.

1. What elements of your experience must be reliably consistent?

2. What low-cost extras could occasionally refresh the experience?

3. Which small gesture would make customers feel seen, valued, and cared for?

90-day action: What one visible change will prove this principle matters?

QUALITY AT EVERY TOUCHPOINT

Embrace Resistance

They could save a lot of money if only Starbucks would use single-ply toilet paper. But single-ply toilet paper is not consistent with the Starbucks experience. That decision, to maintain two-ply despite the cost, was not trivial. It reflected a foundational commitment: it takes satisfaction at all touchpoints.

Leaders can develop the delusion that their company can cut corners and no one will notice. Long-term success requires integrity, transparency, and the recognition that every cost-cutting measure carries a risk that customers will feel.

Quality is revealed in the moments leaders are tempted to overlook.

“Quality is revealed at every touchpoint, especially the ones leaders are tempted to overlook.”

Put the Principle to Work

Use this page to translate the idea into specific behaviors, decisions, and operational improvements.

1. Where have you attempted to cut corners?

2. Have you objectively assessed the impact of those changes?

3. Which hidden touchpoint may be shaping customer trust more than you realize?

90-day action: What one visible change will prove this principle matters?

COMMUNITY AS A BUSINESS PRACTICE

Leave Your Mark

Starbucks leadership understood that people spend an enormous portion of their lives at work. The question is how leaders help people feel a greater sense of significance. At Starbucks, part of the answer was found in organizational philanthropy, socially responsible business practices, and encouraged volunteerism.

The Make Your Mark program committed Starbucks funds as a salary match when a partner volunteered at an approved community agency. Partners were not paid for volunteering, that would undermine its spirit, but Starbucks amplified the investment they chose to make.

Sandra Taylor, Starbucks Senior VP of Corporate Social Responsibility, shared an example from Darjeeling, India, where Starbucks partnered with MercyCorps to support 24 villages through water, sanitation, and vocational training projects. A young man asked, “Why would a coffee company care about us?” Her answer was simple: “Why wouldn’t we? They are part of our community.”

“Purpose grows when people can see the good their work makes possible.”

Put the Principle to Work

Use this page to translate the idea into specific behaviors, decisions, and operational improvements.

1. How large is the community your organization chooses to serve?

2. What genuine act of service could your team participate in this quarter?

3. How can your organization multiply individual generosity?

90-day action: What one visible change will prove this principle matters?



A CASE STUDY IN LEADERSHIP HONESTY

The Memo

The leadership question is not whether growth creates trade-offs. It is whether leaders have the honesty and courage to name them before the soul of the experience is lost.

Efficiency versus Experience

Howard Schultz once sent an internal email to his senior leadership team warning that the Starbucks experience was being watered down through a pattern of well-intentioned but ultimately damaging business decisions. The memo was never meant to be public, but it became one of the most discussed documents in modern business leadership.

Schultz argued that decisions made to support rapid growth, from automatic espresso machines to flavor-locked packaging to streamlined store design, had individually seemed right at the time, but collectively had stripped Starbucks of its romance, aroma, and soul.

What strikes me most is not the specific decisions Schultz criticized. It is the clarity with which he named the underlying tension: efficiency versus experience. That tension does not resolve itself. It requires ongoing, deliberate leadership attention.

THE TENSION

EFFICIENCY

EXPERIENCE

“How do we keep the river recognizable in the face of its changing flow?”

— Joseph Michelli



A Bold Cup of Leadership

Starbucks leadership did something virtually unheard of in modern American business: they shut down all U.S. stores for three and a half hours to retrain their people on coffee and the coffeehouse experience.

No income. No exceptions. Just a massive company attempting to operate as if it were a small one. Staff were retrained on the look, smell, and sound involved in making a perfect espresso shot. The concept of producing an uplifting moment while serving coffee was reemphasized through the five core ways of being: Be Welcoming. Be Involved. Be Genuine. Be Knowledgeable. Be Considerate.

Critics called it a publicity stunt. I called it a leadership act of rare conviction. Whether or not it worked in the long term is less important than the signal it sent: experience is not a marketing campaign. It is an operational commitment.

“Experience is not a marketing campaign. It is an operational commitment.”

From inspiration to action

Choose one action from each principle. Keep the changes visible, measurable, and connected to the daily behaviors that shape customer memory.

Principle	One action we will take	Owner	By when
Make It Your Own	_____	_____	_____
Everything Matters	_____	_____	_____
Surprise and Delight	_____	_____	_____
Embrace Resistance	_____	_____	_____
Leave Your Mark	_____	_____	_____

Alphabetical by Author

Turning Ordinary Into Extraordinary

This eBook is a companion to *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary*, and its follow-up, *Leading the Starbucks Way*. Both are available wherever books are sold.

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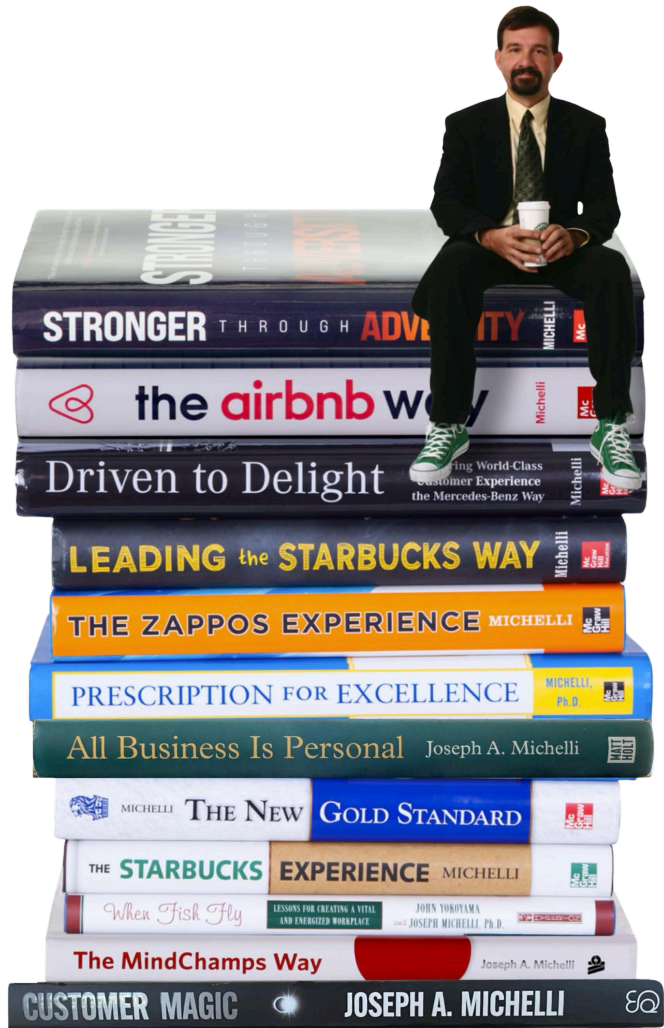
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Continue the Journey

All books available on Amazon and wherever business books are sold.

- The Starbucks Experience
- Leading the Starbucks Way
- The New Gold Standard
- Driven to Delight
- The Airbnb Way
- The Zappos Experience
- Prescription for Excellence
- Stronger Through Adversity
- When Fish Fly
- All Business Is Personal
- Customer Magic
- The MindChamps Way



Ready to go deeper?

These insights are the starting point. Joseph's keynotes and training programs translate each principle into practical tools, facilitated conversations, and implementation roadmaps your team can act on immediately.

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