Psychologist Adam Smith in his book *Powers of Mind* uses a story as a clever metaphor to illustrate the way socialization encodes us to see (and not see) certain things as we mature. He quotes philosopher Aldous Huxley who described the mind as a reducing valve, filtering out certain realities in order to prevent us from being overwhelmed with too much data. Smith’s story goes like this:

A small child turns to his mother and exclaims, “Look, mommy, it’s a purple cow!” His wise mother gently tells the child there is no such thing as a purple cow. On another sighting the child makes a similar excited report only to receive a similar rational correction. Soon the boy quits reporting purple cows, and ultimately quits seeing purple cows at all. One might surmise the same would be true for fairies, leprechauns, gnomes, goblins, and ghosts. They might be there, but it is a reality we have all agreed we cannot see.

It is this “maybe there is another world we don’t see” sentiment that forms the basis of all fairyland stories. Somewhere deep in us all is the hope that there might be more than our too often plain vanilla world. When that hope is combined with trust (or faith in the religious sense) it can sometimes transport us to a magical world. Once there, we witness and experience enchantment. And, upon return to our everyday life, we are forever changed by our captivating trip. Once Wendy Darling and her brothers, John and Michael, returned with Peter Pan after visiting Neverland, the three would never be the same again. The same was true for Alice and Cinderella and Thumbelina.

Customers today long for a service experience that is more than normal. Case in point, when a large brokerage firm decided to have fun with their push button phone system by adding “punch 8 if you want to hear a duck quack,” they were overwhelmed when over a million people called each week just to hear the duck. It clearly revealed customers hungry for service with charm. Research shows that almost half of all customers today believe most organizations are clueless about what their customers actually experience when getting service. Customers’ assessment of modern-day service is at an all-time low in part because expectations have been driven higher by such service greats as Zappos, Disney World, USAA, and Starbucks.

This era of service mediocrity provides a rare opportunity to elevate your customers’ trust enough to invite them to sample your service magic. Since customers have been socialized to be skeptical (no such thing as a purple cow), it starts by attracting them with an authentic outreach. Look for ways to summon them into your magical world by personalizing the way you telegraph that your service will now be different. Make it super easy for prospective customers to locate you and reach you and test drive your unique brand of service. From proactive welcoming to user-friendly websites to every point of contact painted the color “host,” make every encounter inviting for customers.

Once customers enter your service fairyland, it must be an enchanting experience down to the tiniest detail. Consider your new mission to change your customers’ lives, not just meet their needs. Be the service provider that requires the least effort, the one that is tailored to their requirements and supplies the experience that totally surprises them. As one top service provider said, “We want our service to be so great, we make every other service encounter seem bland by comparison.”

Don’t settle for “really good;” go for “extraordinary.” Forget striving to be better than others, you want to be like nothing your customers have ever experienced. Walt Disney did not set out to offer the best county fair or circus around; he strove to create the most wonderful place on earth! Horst Schulze did not seek to create a nice luxury hotel when he founded the Ritz-Carlton; he wanted to completely reinvent upscale lodging.

Enchanting service creates awe and mystery. The brass railing at the Desert Falls Country Club in Palm Desert, California, is polished in the middle of the night so guests never see it being cleaned. Las Brisas, a hotel on the edge
of Acapulco, cuts the grass after hours with manual clippers and engine-free push mowers so guests never hear the unpleasant sounds of maintenance underway. How can you make all service upkeep or non-magical parts of service completely invisible to those you serve?

Enchanting service strives to happen at just the right time. It is never late or early. And, it is in sync with other time-bounded events that surround the experience. Wait time is carefully managed to ensure customers do not experience it as a wait. Nikolai’s Roof, an upscale restaurant in Atlanta, presents guests with the chef’s special appetizer and later with a taste of the chef’s preferred vodka, all complimentary fillers to help patrons remain enchanted as their meal is prepared. How can you remain so attentive to your customers and their requirements that your service occurs at the precise time desired?

Enchanting service elevates the ideal virtues and spirit in customers. It typically causes customers to feel they received an experience better than the context required, sometimes better than they thought they deserved. It is the financial consultant sending papers by courier when regular mail would be adequate. It is Sewell Cadillac in Dallas ensuring that service bay floors are clean enough for a healthy picnic. Going the extra mile is what good service providers do. To paraphrase the manager of a five-star restaurant in San Diego, enchanting service providers go a mile and a half without bragging, complaining, or sweating!

Enchanting service seeks to create a unique sensory experience. Flowers throughout the Hyatt at Gainey Ranch in Scottsdale don’t all look like they came from the nursery; some look like they came from the jungle. A fruit plate at the Hotel Bel-Air in LA might contain passion fruit, unique figs, or slices of kumquat. How can you bring a special sensory component to your customer service? It can be as simple as a two-handed handshake, required forms signed with a colorful, feather-adorned pen, a simple personalized gesture, or background music uniquely suited to your customers’ tastes … not yours.

Before you go break the bank, thinking enchantment requires big bucks, consider this: what made Tinker Bell so adorable was not her pixie dust, it was her special innocence. Enchanting service must be laced with sincerity and innocence for it to be viewed as magical, not a ploy or scam. Remember: enchantment is in the eye of the beholder — your customer! Help your customer believe in magical service again! Take them to your enchanting service fairyland and give them a bedtime service story they will be eager to share with their friends! Who knows? They might even start seeing purple cows again!

About the Author: Chip R. Bell is a customer loyalty consultant and the author of several best-selling books on customer loyalty. His newest book (with John R. Patterson) is the international best-selling Wired and Dangerous: How Your Customers Have Changed and What to do about it. He can be reached at www.chipbell.com.