

Experience This! Show Podcast  
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ExperienceThisShow.com

Official Show Transcript  
Originally Aired: March 3, 2020

## Episode 91: Make Spaces Fun and Familiar to Keep Customers Coming Back for More

- Dan: Welcome to Experience This.
- Joey: Where you'll find inspiring examples of customer experience, great stories of customer service and tips on how to make your customers love you even more.
- Dan: Always upbeat and definitely entertaining, customer attention expert, Joey Coleman.
- Joey: And social media expert, Dan Gingiss serve as your hosts for a weekly dose of positive customer experience. So hold onto your headphones, it's time to Experience This. Get ready for another episode of the Experience This show.
- Dan: Join us as we discuss reinventing the shopping mall experience, the experience of becoming a new manager and how the comforts of home can make strange places feel more familiar.
- Joey: Dreaming, managing and Alexa-ing. Oh my.
- Dan: Is that a word?
- Joey: There are so many great customer experience articles to read, but who has the time? We summarize them and offer clear takeaways you can implement starting tomorrow. Enjoy this segment of CX press where we read the articles so you don't need to. Out of curiosity, Dan, when was the last time you were in a shopping mall?
- Dan: So actually it was on Black Friday, and I was really interested-
- Joey: Well, so a few months ago.
- Dan: Yeah, it was recently and I was really interested to see how the malls were doing, the busiest day of the year. And I have to tell you, I was actually really surprised. It was very, very crowded. There were stores that I never hear about that were mobbed. Like footlocker, was wall-to-wall people, bath and body works was stuffed with people and I was really surprised to be honest.
- Joey: Fair enough. Fair enough. Now granted, that was Black Friday, so it was the biggest shopping day of the year. I don't really go to malls that much anymore, and in fact I

never go on Black Friday for that very reason because it's so crowded. I probably stepped foot in a shopping mall two times a year, maybe three times a year, which is why I was intrigued by an article I came across recently. This article comes from the New York Times and is titled, Welcome to the Era of the Post-Shopping Mall. The article is by Amanda Hess and it describes the opening of American Dream, a 3 million square foot mall that is so ambitious that it transcends the word mall.

Dan: The leadership team at American Dream prefers to call their new development a quote, "Revolutionary, first of its kind community, an unrivaled destination for style and play and an incredible collection of unique experiences". Located in East Rutherford, New Jersey. More than half of American Dream space is not retail stores but rather entertainment venues. I think the article sums it best when noting the psychic center of American social life has shifted from buying things to feeling them.

Joey: And the American dream is all about the feels as the kids say these days. Within the building are several enormous entertainment options including big snow, which is an indoor ski hill filled with 5,000 tons of real snow that falls from the ceiling of a warehouse where the temperature is always 28 degrees. It's the largest indoor ski hill in the Western hemisphere, a live performance theater, a Nickelodeon universe theme park, boasting a roller coaster with the steepest drop in the world at 121.5 degrees, a national hockey league sized ice rink and DreamWorks Waterpark home to the world's biggest wave pool.

Joey: It's overwhelming just listing out the major attractions at American Dream. And for what it's worth, you can see some interesting photographs by Ross Mantle in the article. Seriously, folks, this doesn't look like a mall. It looks like an amusement park that had some stores built in it. Everything that used to be outside is now inside the mall.

Dan: What I found interesting about American Dream is that everyone talks about the death of retail thanks to e-commerce and here we have a group of investors, developers, retail establishments and entertainment properties that are betting big on the idea that people still want to go to the mall. And I think what's smart here is that they're not calling it the mall because I do think that there is-

Joey: There's a stigma.

Dan: ... there's a stigma connotation and this clearly isn't going to the mall. Now I'm assuming there's stores here and you can purchase stuff and probably eat and all that sort of stuff, but I think this is the future because it is entirely experiential. I would guess without knowing the stores that are in there that stores like for example, the Lego store would have a great place in the American dream, because it's a store that you go and experience and have fun at versus a store where you're really just kind of walking through shelves of merchandise.

Joey: Absolutely, absolutely. And in fact, what I think is interesting and why the mall will continue to be a gathering place, at least in American society, is because people are social creatures. They want to have those interactions. They may not want to shop, but they want to be around other people and be entertained. And in fact, the article notes in what I thought was one of the nicest phrases in the article, "The Americans eye for

sociological observation, was forged in the glow of the Orange Julius" and it just took me back. Remember the Orange Julius?

Dan: Yeah. It's owned by Dairy Queen now.

Joey: There you go. Orange Julius was a blast. And I think the folks behind American Dream are indeed betting big. The prior developers spent \$3 billion on the project and then the current team came in and spent another \$2 billion. That's \$5 billion spent on the mall before a dollar has been spent in the mall.

Dan: Yeah, I'd say that's a pretty big bet.

Joey: Absolutely. And I was fascinated by this story. So I did a little research beyond the CX Press article and learned that the developers who own American Dream also own the infamous Mall of America in Minneapolis.

Dan: Is it infamous or famous?

Joey: I think infamous. It's both. Maybe?

Dan: Okay. Again - stigma and connotation.

Joey: They also own the West Edmonton mall, which now means these developers own three of the four largest malls on the continent of North America. But what stood out to me was the difference between these malls in terms of their ratio of retail to entertainment. Those two older malls, the Mall of America and West Edmonton mall have 20% entertainment and 80% retail. American Dream, on the other hand, has 55% entertainment and only 45% retail. So it's truly more entertainment than shopping.

Dan: In fact, the developers turned down retailers that wanted to be in the mall but failed to offer more than a mere retail experience. Now, it's not clear what retail establishments got turned down or how the developers defined beyond a mere retail experience, but it will be interesting to see if shoppers feel the same way. The fact that American Dream is home to IT'SUGAR, the world's largest non-manufacturer candy store will probably help with people feeling hyped about the experience. In fact, the article describes a 60 foot replica of the statue of Liberty constructed from green jellybeans that stands at the entrance to the store.

Dan: She holds a lollipop for a torch and wears a sash that says, "You know you want it," and her feet is written, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning for the sweet life and I will give you IT'SUGAR."

Joey: Okay, that certainly feels American in some regards, not all of which are necessarily positive, but what I think is interesting here is that once again we have an example of a brand that is zigging when everybody else is zagging. The folks at American Dream are saying, look, we think that the human condition is such that people will want to gather, they will want to be entertained and if they opt the opportunity to shop a little on the side, they're happy to do that as well. Everything that is old is being reborn again. Everything that worked well in the past is being repackaged, reformulated, and re-

conceived into something that is more experiential. In fact, I think if we get the chance, we should do a road trip and do an experience live episode...

Dan: Experience This live. Yeah, baby.

Joey: ... from the American Dream.

Dan: Sign me up.

Joey: Sometimes a remarkable experience deserves deeper investigation. We dive into the nitty gritty of customer interactions and dissect how and why they happen. Join us while we're dissecting the experience. We often talk about customer experience and customer service books on this show, but today I want to share a book with our listeners that while not specifically about those topics, I think is a must read for anyone that wants to be a better leader in those areas of business. It's by my great friend Ryan Hawk and it's called Welcome to Management: How to Grow From Top Performer to Excellent Leader. Hawke's book is a fantastic resource to deal with a major problem that we have in business today.

Joey: You see, every year millions of top performers are promoted to management level jobs only to discover that the tactics and techniques and skills that they use to get promoted are not the same tactics, techniques, and skills that will make them effective as managers in their new role. It turns out that what it takes to be great as an individual contributor is not the same as what it takes to be an excellent leader.

Dan: This is so true. And having been in corporate America for more than 20 years, I've seen this time and time again. And it introduces also this paradox because companies have figured out that when they want to hire people managers, they need to look for people with experience managing people. But that begs the question, how do you get experience managing people if you can't be a manager? And so there's this paradox and that's one of the biggest parts of developing in your career is when you're now in charge of other people's careers and there are skills that have absolutely nothing to do with what made you good in your original job. The problem is that most companies don't spend any time training on that or even letting people know what being a manager is going to be like. It's just throw them in, see if they can swim.

Joey: Congratulations. You've been promoted.

Dan: Yeah, and it affects not only that employee, but all the employees, but all the employees that report up to him.

Joey: All the employees. And so then it becomes part of the employee experience, which as we talk about on the show, spills into the customer experience. I have not spent nearly as much time in corporate America as you have Dan, but I had a very similar experience in the sense that I joined a organization as part of the sales team and my boss had been the top salesperson the year before and then had been promoted to manage a team of 10 people. And let's just say he was a much better salesperson than he was a manager. In fact, as the year went on, he started going out on the road into his sales teams territory to close deals and basically take commissions away from us so that he could hit

the team numbers. Needless to say, it was mostly a disaster and over the of the year we went from having 10 people on the team to having two people on the team.

Dan: Whoopsie.

Joey: Whoops. Oh my goodness, what I would have given to be able to put a copy of Welcome to Management in front of that sales manager!

Dan: It really is a great book filled with practical, actionable advice and tools that are designed to make the transition to a new leader, a successful one. What I particularly enjoyed about the book is where the knowledge Hawk shares comes from, but I think it's best to let him explain.

Ryan Hawk: I believe that every person has the ability to lead. It's just a matter of learning how. I wanted to learn directly from the people who fascinated me the most. As fate would have it, the serendipity of a seat assignment for a flight to Lake Tahoe in 2014 set me on the unexpected path of doing just that. As I sat down and stretched by legs in my exit row seat, I found myself next to a friend of Todd Wagner. Todd Wagner founded broadcast.com and eventually sold it to Yahoo for billions. He did this with his partner, future investment shark and Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban. Over the course of this flight out West, I told my new friend about my desire to learn more and to create my own cast of teachers in the form of people who have lived lives of excellent leadership.

Ryan Hawk: By the time we landed, he had agreed to connect me with someone on Todd's team. Soon after I met Todd for dinner, Todd arrived about an hour early at the hotel where we were going to have dinner and I was fortunate to spend this time with the self made billionaire at the bar. He was as kind as he was wise. I was blown away by his intelligence and his humble nature. I peppered him with questions. I wanted to learn about the what, who, why, and how at broadcast.com. I was eager to hear how they looked, the leaders of Yahoo in the eye and said, "Look, you're either going to buy us or you'll have to compete with us. You decide." Todd and Mark concluded their meeting and walked away with \$5.7 billion. It was an incredible story, but I had one regret. I wished I had recorded the conversation I wanted to pass along what I had learned to others.

Ryan Hawk: That dinner gave me a taste of what I could learn if I went directly to the source of the knowledge I so badly wanted to gain. In fact, I started thinking about how to have more conversations like that one and how to share them with others. Through that confluence of events, I decided to create an interview format podcast as my own virtual PhD program and call it The Learning Leader Show.

Dan: On Ryan's podcast, he has interviewed over 300 of the most forward thinking leaders around the world. From celebrated author Jim Collins to baseball, Darryl Strawberry to fortune 50 CEO Carly Fiorina, to coaching legend Jim Tressel, to retired four star general Stanley McChrystal, to podcast cohost Joey Coleman.

Joey: All right. All right. You're too kind to include me on that list, Dan.

Dan: Oh no, no. My pleasure. Seriously, my pleasure. And in fact the way that Hawk builds his knowledge by talking to podcast guests from all walks of life is a nice segue to my favorite passage in the book. It comes very early on where Hawk outlines an important

commonality of those who sustain excellence over an extended period of time. They become learning machines. Here's the quote. "Learning hard things is an active exercise of thought. It is not simply a process of downloading information into our brains. When we have new ideas, perspectives or experiences, our thoughtful contemplation of what they are, why they exist and what to do with them is how learning happens. While it's certainly possible to learn passively, this isn't optimal. Passive learners have a low ceiling on their learning potential, whereas those who approach learning with purpose, focus and effort do far better.

Dan: If thoughtfulness is the instrument of learning. Intentionality is the power. A person as a learning machine, is intentionally and constantly seeking new information with the goal of becoming better. Machines are not organic. They don't spontaneously generate they have to be built. And increasingly in our modern digital age, they also must be programmed. The same is true for a person to become a learning machine, like the interest that accrues over time in the longterm style of investing that Warren Buffet advocates, the benefits of building yourself into an engine of learning compound. It doesn't matter what set of skills and deficiencies you bring to a job, an assignment, or a moment of adversity. What you have at the start won't define how it ends because by being in a constant learning mode, you evolve throughout the process."

Joey: I absolutely love it. I know you've committed to being a learning machine Dan, so I'm not surprised that that was your favorite passage. I've made that same commitment and in fact, I believe that anyone listening to this segment right now is a learning machine. You have a thirst for knowledge. You're listening to a customer experience podcast talk about a leadership book for Pete's sake because you can connect the dots. You're optimistic and we hope we reward that faith that you'll be able to apply the things that you learn in this conversation to your own life, both at work and at home. I love this drive to keep learning. And what I find fascinating about Hawk's book is that time and time again, he shows how the most successful people in business, in sports, in industry, in the military and every other walk of life are committed to constantly learning and improving.

Dan: Yeah, and I think you're right, it's an interesting analogy to this show in that we often tell stories that don't immediately evoke customer experience and yet we try to bring them back to you can apply them to your business. And I think that the best learners learn from other industries, learn from other things that they don't know about. I was always encouraged in high school and college to take liberal arts courses just to expand my knowledge. So I took a history of music course. I took an art history course. No, I've never used those in my career, but they sort of got stored in the back of my head and have helped out at different times in my life. So I do think that if we're open minded to learning about something that is not exactly what we're doing at work every day, we generally can find in our brains a way to apply it to use it in our day to day life. So what Joey was your favorite part of the book?

Joey: Well, to be honest Dan, it's difficult to narrow it down to one. Hawk writes in such an accessible and conversational style that I found myself zipping from chapter to chapter, picking up suggestions and bits of wisdom left and right. But that being said, one of the little nuggets that stood out to me the most was about little nuggets of information or as Hawk calls them the small details of human relations. As he notes in the book, "I found it incredibly useful to tend to the small details of human relations with the teams I've led. I utilize a get to know you document with team members and colleagues to better

understand them as people. This has given me valuable intel so that I can show love to the people who love my team member.

Joey: I built some lasting relationships with those I've worked with by sending their kids a video game from their Amazon wishlist or some cookies along with a note that reads to Sarah and Jeremy. Your mom is absolutely crushing it at work. You should be very proud of her. I know she works hard to support you and your family. As a way of saying thank you, please enjoy these cookies and video game. Too many leaders neglect the tiny but important parts of serving the people on their team. As a manager and leader, it is mission critical to constantly analyze and pay attention to the small details they add up and can be the difference between success and failure. Some small details in your leadership role that matter include the manner in which you greet your team. Smile, ask about each of them personally, be direct, how you start a meeting. Are you boring? Do you have a plan? Is it impactful? The cleanliness of your desk, your process for organization. The list goes on and on. Small details matter."

Joey: Now, I thought this was important and it's not a big leap as little details matter is a fairly common maxim in the world of customer experience. But what I loved about this perspective is how Hawk applied this, not only externally to customers, but internally to your teammates, your employees, your direct reports. Do you spend as much time paying attention to the little details that matter to them as you do to your customers? My gut instinct is that you don't, and so if you're a new manager, transitioning from an individual contributor role to being in charge of a team, if you're an experienced executive who seeks guidance as you continue to navigate rocky terrain or frankly, if you're just an entrepreneur who hopes to improve your team engagement and retention, Ryan Hawk's book, *Welcome to Management: How to Grow From Top Performer to Excellent Leader* needs to be on your bookshelf. Pick up a copy today and I promise that within a few pages you'll already be leading from a better place.

Joey: We love telling stories and sharing key insights you can implement or avoid based on our experiences. Can you believe that this just happened? I had something happen to me at a hotel recently, Dan, that had never happened before.

Dan: Oh boy. Hopefully, I didn't involve-

Joey: No, no, no. Stay calm, stay calm. There's so many places we could go with this. But what happened is that upon checking into my room and starting to get situated, I saw a familiar device sitting on the table next to the sofa. It was an Alexa and next to it was a sign that said, "Hungry, thirsty? Just ask Alexa what's happening at Stoke restaurant and get a quick rundown of today's feature, special events and happenings."

Dan: So of course you tried it out?

Joey: Of course, I did and I even took some video which you can find on our show notes page at [experiencethisshow.com](http://experiencethisshow.com) and I'll play the audio for you now. "Alexa, what's happening at Stoke Restaurant?"

Alexa: Marriott Charlotte can help with that.

Speaker 6: Maybe head outside, the fall is in the air down in Stoke Bar. Come try the apple crisp, fresh apples and cinnamon mixed with Muddy Rivers Spice Carolina Rum, made right here in Charlotte. We look forward to seeing you for happy hour or maybe after dinner. Come see us soon.

Dan: Okay, that's pretty cool. I mean, I'm a big fan of Alexa. I have one in almost every room of my house. I now have one in my car. I like Alexa. She would beat Siri in a wrestling match to the death any day, but I've never experienced it in a hotel.

Joey: I agree. This was the first time that had happened to me and voice assistants like Alexa and Google home and Siri are becoming so prevalent in people's homes that it's not surprising that some hotels are starting to provide voice assistance in their rooms. I guess what's surprising is that given how many nights I spent in hotels during the year, this is the first time I've ever come across something like this and I find it fascinating to think about how do you make a hotel feel like home? In the past, travelers usually wanted a hotel to have a very different feel than their house. Now it seems like most hotels are trying to bring the comforts of home into a hotel setting.

Dan: Yeah, you're right. I mean I've been to hotels that let you choose your pillow from a pillow menu, for example. So you can sleep with something that more closely resembles to the one you use at home. There are hotels that'll loan you work out clothes and shoes so you don't have to bring them with you. I need to find those hotels because I hate bringing all that stuff. And if you visit a hotel frequently enough, you can even leave items behind that they will bring out when you return.

Joey: Well, and it runs both ways as well, right? There are many hotels that let you purchase the amenities you experience at the hotel. As part of their heavenly sleep experience, the Weston allows you to purchase complete bedding sets and even mattresses online for you to use in your own home. Now, not only does this allow them another way to recoup some of their investment in designing and purchasing beds and sheets in bulk, but it creates a scenario where every time someone crawls into their bed at home, they're reminded of their stay at the Weston that led them to purchase this bed or sheets or pillows.

Dan: I don't know if I've ever told you this story Joey, but I fell in love with a hotel in the Hong Kong airport. And airport hotels are not normally known as being stellar.

Joey: Places where you would fall in love with the experience.

Dan: But this is a hotel, it's called Regal and it is actually in the airport, not offsite, it is literally in the airport and it is a beautiful hotel and I slept on the most comfortable pillows I've ever slept on. I happen to know that I was going to be back in Hong Kong in two weeks. So I asked them, "Do you sell your pillows?" And they were like, "Well, of course we do." And I said, "How much are they?" And I was waiting something big. They said they were \$35 a piece, which I thought was pretty nice. So I said, "I'll take four, can you box them up for me?" I show up two weeks later they have shrink wrapped, like in vacuum pack, they vacuum packed the four pillows into a single box, which was light because it's just pillow pillows.

Joey: Its pillows.

Dan: I just checked it with my bags and I still asleep on those pillows at home and I still think of the Regal hotel for exactly that reason.

Joey: Exactly. And so this whole connection between the home experience and those pillows are now in your house and you sleep on those pillows and you think of the hotel, it's back and forth. The Alexa in the room wasn't the only thing that stood out though. And as I arrived I realized that there was a major construction project happening on the street in front of the hotel.

Dan: That can be bad. You spend all day traveling and then you arrive and you find construction or you're trying to work during the day and you hear all the jack hammering going on. So any regular traveler knows that you can expect a lot of noise when construction resumed early in the morning.

Joey: Yes. And it's almost always earlier than I would like to wake up. Now what was interesting is how the hotel handled this. Now let's be clear, folks. The construction on the street in front of the hotel isn't the hotel's fault. The city is making repairs to the street and I presume those repairs needed to be made. I'm sure the hotel isn't happy about the inconvenience that it's causing them or the guests. But that being said, while the construction isn't their fault, it's their problem and what are they going to do to deal with it? And the way they did it I thought was pretty effective. So next to the Alexa in my room was a note and a little package. Now let me share the contents of the note and it will explain to you what the package was in the process.

Joey: The note read, "Welcome to the Charlotte Marriott city center. We're excited to host you at our hotel in the heart of uptown Charlotte. Our city has great energy that we know you'll love, but that comes with some city noise on occasion." And then the notes split into three sections, "Like white noise? Tell your trusted digital butler, Alexa, play white noise. Prefer no noise? Take these NASCAR grade noise reduction earplugs for a ride. Rather, make some noise? Please dial zero and we'll give you some recommendations for how to join the fun around town."

Dan: I love that it's very creative and it addresses the different needs of different customers so it's not a one size fits all and whether you liked white noise or no noise or you want to make some noise, they've got an answer for you. I think that's extremely creative.

Joey: Yeah, I felt the openness to the different types of customers without the presumption that you're going to be one type or another was great. And what I loved about the note was that it was pre-printed and will be valuable to visitors long after the construction outside is completed. In fact, they don't even mention anything about the construction. They also provided the earplugs before being asked. In a keynote speech that I do about the changing face of the customer, I talk about how customers now expect brands to anticipate their needs before they even ask, and this is a great example of how to do that. Finally, they described the earplugs as being NASCAR grade.

Joey: Now, what many of our listeners might not know unless you've stayed at the Charlotte Marriott city center, is that it's only a few blocks away from the NASCAR museum, which incidentally is worth a visit. It's amazing. There's some pictures in the show notes and by tying the earplugs to NASCAR, which is something that visitors like me are very familiar

with since the event I was speaking at was kicking off at the NASCAR museum. It ties everything together to the location of the hotel without being blatantly obvious about it.

Dan: Yeah, I love it because they sound, no pun intended, like pretty cool earplugs. This isn't your garden variety drugstore, 17,000 to a bag earplugs. These are pretty nice earplugs and I think that obviously NASCAR is a brand that is very, very familiar, especially in the south where you were and so good job on that.

Joey: Yeah, and speaking of branding, I think the earplugs were actually the same regular pharmacy earplugs that you could buy, but the way they positioned it before I'd even seen the package, I read the note and it made me feel like those were NASCAR earplugs even they weren't. So what can we learn from my stay at the Charlotte Marriott city center? I think there's a few things. Number one, we should explore ways to make the places your customers interact with you feel more like home. If they're going to come to your office or your store or some other location that you oversee and are responsible for figure out ways to make them feel more familiar to your customers.

Joey: Number two, anticipate what your customers need, but still give them choice. While the hotel realized that earplugs aren't for everyone, I imagine almost all of the guests appreciated the hotel thinking ahead to provide those just in case that was going to impact their ability to sleep, which is a major reason why most people stay at a hotel. And finally, number three, don't be afraid to experiment with creating small moments of delight even if you don't implement major changes across your entire organization. Try some small enhancements. Now, to be honest, I stayed at Marriott brand hotels over 50 nights last year, and yet the Charlotte city center location was the only hotel with an Alexa, and as a result, it's one of the things that stood out the most in my 50 nights with this brand.

Joey: Wow. Thanks for joining us for another episode of Experience This.

Dan: We know there are tons of podcasts to listen to, magazines and books to read, reality TV to watch. We don't take for granted that you've decided to spend some quality time listening to the two of us.

Joey: We hope you enjoyed our discussions, and if you do, we'd love to hear about it. Come on over to [experiencethisshow.com](http://experiencethisshow.com) and let us know what segments you enjoyed, what new segments you'd like to hear. This show is all about experience and we want you to be part of the Experience This Show.

Dan: Thanks again for your time and we'll see you next week for more...

Joey: Experience.

Dan: This.