For my mother,
with whom I took my first steps
in life and in hospitality.

Vincent Vermeulen

★★★★★

Guestology
2.0

The step-by-step business methodology to implement hospitality and customer experience in any organisation

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Introduction

> “ If you have knowledge,
> let others light their candles in it.
>
> MARGARET FULLER
> (1810-1850, Journalist, Critic and Women’s Rights Activist)

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Be really honest with yourself

You already know what great service, warm hospitality or an amazing customer experience is, don’t you? You could define it as soon as you receive bad service, couldn’t you?

The only thing missing in your organisation are perhaps the tools and methods to bring it to the surface of your organisation, however small or large that is.

Do you agree that if you had these techniques that lead to more sales and better customer experience, that you would use them? You are probably saying, “yes”. If not, you wouldn’t have picked up this book.

I have spent my whole life looking for ways to implement amazing customer experience in organisations, and you know what? I finally cracked it! The only thing left for me now, to be 100% sure they work, is to share them with the world.

AND THAT IS WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK…

Best wishes,
Vincent

There is not one company in the world who *wants* to offer a bad experience to a customer

There are only companies that know how to do it, and companies who don't

You have been honest. Now it's my turn.

As a young boy entering the world of hospitality, I quickly found myself in some ugly situations. At least for a 14-year-old. Customers were rude, unfriendly and didn't understand that things could go wrong. Looking back now, I think, why would you be rude to a 14-year-old? Was it because these guests were paying for a service or a product? Perhaps they felt they were entitled to great service? To warm hospitality?

I realised it didn't get any better over the years. On the contrary, it got worse. People became more and more demanding. They had no empathy at all. I was new to this. I didn't have a clue what to say, what to do or how to act when their food was late, their order was wrong or, when I became a butler later on, the car wasn't ready.

I clearly remember one occasion where a groom yelled at me because, in his opinion, lamb had to be cooked the way your leather belt is made. I froze mid-air, didn't know what to say, and ended up giving him a discount that sent my profits down the drain in less than five minutes. Even though the lamb was perfectly cooked. Rosé, as they say, to perfection.

After that incident and a few that followed, I started wondering why I didn't have the skills to cope with what to me were the most horrible moments in my profession. Why wasn't I shown in hospitality school how to handle difficult guests, unrealistic demands, or how to set up a system that would allow me to give your customer an amazing customer experience? Because the system didn't exist. But it does now.

When I look back on my training and education in general, there was no methodical, step-by-step technique to handling the one thing everyone needs every day in every job: dealing with people and their emotions. So I became a student of life, specifically human behaviour. It quickly dawned on me that the techniques I learnt and developed could be applied to every possible situation, both private and professional. After 20 years of trying, failing, testing and succeeding, I now know what works and what doesn't.

To create the future, we sometimes have to look at the past. The influences have changed. There were a lot fewer people on the planet. After the Second World War came the Swinging Sixties, a time when we didn't have to think too much about human emotions in business. The opposite was true. The seventies was the time where individuals became more important, and values started dropping. Think about the barefoot hippies. Less than 50 years later, the world of human emotions is a whole different ball game. Every word, every action you deploy needs to be carefully considered or you can get into serious trouble. An emoji can ruin your life if wrongly interpreted, and most employee evaluations must be conducted with two other people present to ensure neutrality. It has all become much more sensitive.

In my two decades of study, I have become aware that the solution has always been around, for the most part that is.

The six forgotten, time-tested and proven steps to innovative customer experience

STEP 1

the frustration solution

What everybody ought to know about their customer and the questions nobody dares to ask but should

You need to see Guestology 2.0 as a six-step anticipatory system. Not a reactive system to eliminate poor experiences because the damage has already been done. You need to create great CX before going to the customer. Not after. Five of the six steps are preparation, getting your organisation in shape to execute.

The first step to installing Guestology 2.0 in your organisation is about the people you are doing this for. At least I hope that people are the reason. If you are running your company for the sole purpose of financial gain, then this book is not for you. The purpose of any company should be to bring solutions to your customers and your team. You make your customers' lives just a little better every day because of your product or service. You make your teams' lives a little better by providing a warm environment. When you know how to fulfil the needs of your stakeholders, you will have no issue whatsoever fulfilling the needs of the organisation and consequently your own needs, financial and otherwise. So it's about going back to the client.

You can be one of two readers. You might already be running some sort of organisation/company or you might be thinking about starting one. Even more powerful, the governing principles of Guestology 2.0 are not only applicable in the corporate world. A family, a football club, an individual and certainly a household can also thrive with these techniques since the whole concept originated there. It comes from the understanding that high-net-worth households are run by professionals. The butlers, PAs, housekeepers, security staff and the like. They keep the household running based on the six steps of the Guestology 2.0 system.

Enough talk, step one in simple language: ask your stakeholders what is bothering them about your product or service.

> What do you not like when you use our product or service?
>
> What bothers you when you visit our organisation?

It is not just the customer that you need to ask. Your team members and even management are equally important. Recently I also discovered that there might be people who you didn't realise were stakeholders. Working for retirement homes, I learnt there is a fourth stakeholder. There is the management, the team of nurses and the people living in the retirement home, but the family of the resident is equally important and should not be left out. You should also ask *them* what they don't like about the experience.

These targeted questions might put you in a vulnerable position but I feel that vulnerability is the state in which we grow the most. By constantly repeating what we know or going back to our comfort zone we don't give ourselves the chance to grow. To excel you have to be at the edge of vulnerability.

Naked in front of thousands of people

How would you feel standing naked on stage in front of a group of people? Awkward, right? That is what vulnerability can do to you. It can expose you. It can confront you with your biggest fears. In many organisations, the biggest fear management can have is to hear that they are doing a lousy job. It will rub off on the team and they in turn will also be unhappy. But sometimes you need to anticipate vulnerability. That is exactly what we did. Together with a facility management organisation we conducted a survey that put us in a vulnerable spot.

We asked about 6,000 customers three questions. To be clear, we took 150 companies and for each one surveyed 40 of their customers. These companies ranged from a local bakery on the corner to Fortune 500 companies. The results that came back were not so surprising, at least not to me. They showed, once more, that Guestology 2.0 is spot on. It showed that human aspects were the most important to them. Not some fancy waiting room with James Eames chairs, not the designer coffee, but the down-to-earth human expectations. The smaller things that make their day just a little better. Have a look at the results.

The first question was: What adds to hospitality when you interact with an organisation?

The top answers ranged from a friendly host(ess) to sufficient parking, a personal approach, clear signage, involvement of the host(ess), eye contact, the room décor, an eye for detail and comfortable chairs, in that order.

Not that surprising, but there is something to say about the order. Once again, that we value human interaction over functionality or environment.

The next question used a bit of reverse psychology. Where a lot of organisations use systems to measure customer satisfaction, we approached it in a different way. Systems like NPS, the Net Promoter Score, is a great way to see how you are doing but is equally dangerous. For those who don't know NPS, the most practical way to explain it is those smiley faces you sometimes see on your way out of the toilets in airports or train stations. You can push a button with a smiley on to let them know if the toilet was clean enough. NPS is very similar. The question is, on a scale of