

This Way UP!

BY
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Have you ever seen that advertisement for Eveready batteries in which a pink drumming bunny rabbit persistently bounces around, even when the other bunnies grind to a halt? Interviewing Ron Kaufman is a little like sitting down for a chat with that indefatigable bunny.

Ron is the CEO of provocatively-named consulting company, UP! Your Service, and his enthusiasm for his subject (and, I suspect, anything else that sparked his interest) is absolutely infectious.

Something of a Singapore expat stalwart, Ron first landed here in 1990, tempted to Asia from his native America by an invitation to help Singapore learn from the service success of its iconic airline.

His qualifications for involvement in this joint venture sound a little spurious, until you look at them from a different perspective. Ever the entrepreneur, his first commercial success after graduating with a degree in international history was creating a Frisbee company. Nothing as straightforward as manufacturing the famous flying disc, Ron's business involved getting people to play Frisbee – and using that as a way to bridge gaps in understanding.

“Studying history,” Ron explains, “I became interested in how countries and communities recover after conflict, and the role that sport can play in bringing people together.

“Frisbee is the perfect mediation sport: you cannot play it alone, it is

‘uplifting’ in the sense that the only way to play with a Frisbee is to send it up into the air, and it is reflective. How you send the Frisbee to your partner plays a large part in how he or she sends it back.”

For eight years, Ron took his ‘diplomacy game’ into companies and organizations, and even on international tours, encouraging very different people to work together to achieve something very accessible and, ultimately, great fun.

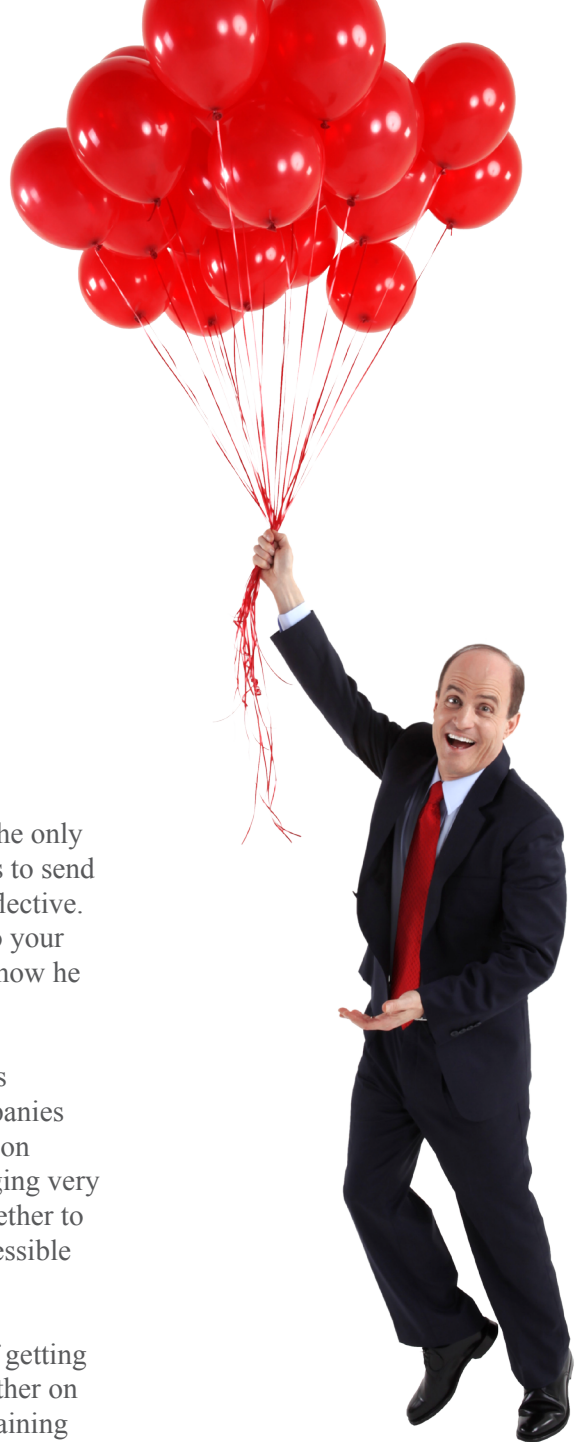
Commercialising the task of getting people to be nice to one another on the Frisbee field, parallels training for good customer service, which is exactly what Sim Kay Wee, the then senior vice-president of Singapore Airlines, and others in the Singapore service joint venture, saw Ron as capable of doing.

The JV operated for nine months, after which the team were deemed to have equipped enough local trainers with the skills to carry on the job of improving customer service. To this day, Ron believes that Singapore does prescriptive harmony well (you tell the different races they must get on, and they will), but still needs to work on a culture of service – in his mind, by uplifting the people's spirits, instead of constantly trying

to upgrade their service skills.

Rather than joining the exodus of ang-mohs when the JV matured, Ron elected to stay, and his private consulting career took off. His inimitable presentation skills and ability to infuse an audience with passion for his subject rapidly became widely sought after, both in Singapore and regionally.

Between 2000 and 2005, he then self-published a series of books on the subject of superior customer service, starting with UP! Your Service from which his business name was taken. He also developed a solid curriculum structure to



complement his seminars, but, like all exceptional service providers, he faced a stumbling block: when the service you provide depends on your direct involvement, you cannot grow beyond the number of hours you personally have in a day.

“Roger Hamilton of Results Foundation was the one who spelt it out to me: ‘Ron, you have fantastic commercial value, but you have low leverage. You have to find a way to spread your value,’” Ron says.

The UP! Your Service College was launched. Ron expanded his curriculum range, and added a series of training videos in which he himself stars. Equipped with these materials, the UP! Your Service message can now be taken on the road and adapted by local practitioners for use within their own organisations. Over time, the college will add courses in related service areas, created by professionals with different service expertise.

Singapore is a great base for UP! Your Service – it is convenient and, like Ron, it is ambitious, efficient and effective. On the other hand, it has not been the easiest place to get the service message across. Ron has found neighbouring countries where the people have natural warmth, adapt to the service concept more readily.

“People are born in a society or accept a job in a particular company, then adapt to fit into that culture. This can work positively (good service breeds good service) or negatively.”

Many of the tools Ron uses in his service training – which he clearly yearns to take to the world and not just to his organisational clients – are actually very simple. His logo features a bright red balloon; it’s uplifting and makes people smile. He distributes cards that say “Keep

it UP! Good Job!” and, in smaller print, “Pass it on ...”

And he practices what he preaches. At dinner the night before we meet, Ron shared a meal with his daughter, Brighten, in a local restaurant he frequents. Brighten’s drink is brought to the table, but deposited unceremoniously in front of him, by a waitress who does not even make eye contact.

She looks terrified when Ron beckons her back, but in his friendly, persuasive manner, he explains to

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her that, had she made eye contact, she would have known immediately that the drink was his daughter’s and not his, and the service result would have been much, much more positive. He then hands her one of his ‘Keep it UP!’ cards.

She smiles, relieved that she is not in trouble, but also clearly understanding the difference such a change would make. Ron watched her throughout the evening, eye-to-eye with her customers, clearly pleased with herself and with the impact this small change was having.

We might not all be bouncing up the stairway toward customer service excellence with quite the same gusto as Ron Kaufman, but if he can continue to spread his UP! Your Service message so effectively, surely the world will be a better – and better served – place.

This Way UP!



UP! Your Service enables organizations to quickly upgrade service performance and secure a sustainable advantage by building an Uplifting Service culture.

The UP! Your Service methodology aligns, integrates and accelerates your activity in three essential areas: Service Leadership, Service Education, and The 12 Building Blocks of Service Culture. This proven approach leads to an action-oriented culture empowering everyone to delight customers and colleagues with consistently Uplifting Service.

UP! Your Service was founded by Ron Kaufman, one of the world’s most sought-after educators, consultants, and thought-leaders in the world of superior service. Ron is a regular columnist at *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*. He is the author of 15 books on service, business and inspiration and has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*.

With offices in Singapore and the USA, UP! Your Service works with a diverse clientele of businesses, associations and government agencies throughout the world.

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