

BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

A resource for the book *From Impressed To Obsessed* by Jon Picoult

A Message From Jon

From Impressed To Obsessed is a great book to read alongside others. That's because most everybody has memorable business experiences that you can learn from, whether it was in their capacity as a customer or an employee. If you read and discuss the book with others, you're certain to hear more examples of how organizations and individuals have employed the book's 12 Principles (even if they did it unknowingly).

A special note for organizational leaders: If you're trying to get everyone on your team on the same page with regard to customer experience, then read the book *together*! It's a great way to build a shared understanding and a common vocabulary around what the customer experience is and how to create a great one. Use this Discussion Guide to facilitate a constructive dialogue among your staff, perhaps convening them after every 3 to 4 chapters to review and talk about what they've read. It's an effective way to not just educate your team in customer experience, but to drive a candid conversation about what your organization should do differently to leave a stronger, more memorable impression on those you serve.



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Chapter 1 – Lessons From Wrap Rage

- The Amazon wrap rage story shows how the customer experience is comprised of a broad spectrum of touchpoints. It also illustrates how companies often overlook certain touchpoints, not realizing their importance to customers, or not appreciating how they could be turned into points of differentiation. Can you think of an example of a company (maybe even your own), or an entire industry, that doesn't pay proper attention to a particular customer touchpoint? What could they do differently to design that touchpoint more deliberately?
- Some people argue that customer experience is becoming even more important than product or price when it comes to a business's competitiveness. Do you agree with that argument? Do you think product and price are distinct from the customer experience itself?
- What was your reaction to the definition Picoult proposed for customer experience ("How customers feel about their interactions with you")? Was there anything that surprised you about that definition? Anything you felt was missing?
- The need for customer service is often triggered by a deficiency in the customer experience. Do you think that statement holds true in your organization? Why or why not?

Chapter 2 – Know Your Customer

- Based on how Picoult explained the concept of "customer," who would you say is *your* customer?
- Do you think everyone in your organization has a clear idea of who their customer is? If not, how do you see that influencing their interactions with others, be it inside or outside of the organization?
- Do you believe there is merit to organizational leaders viewing their staff as a type of customer? If so, in what ways do you think you personally, or your organization as a whole, could better serve employees?

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Chapter 3 – The Economic Calculus

- Were you at all surprised by the results of the Customer Experience ROI Study cited in this chapter (showing the disparity in shareholder return between CX Leading and CX Lagging firms)? Given that study, and the other customer experience ROI drivers described in the chapter, why do you think so many organizations are reluctant to significantly invest in customer experience improvements?

Chapter 4 – The Competitive Bar

- According to the ACSI, customer satisfaction levels in the U.S. are no different today than they were a quarter century ago. Does that ring true for you? If so, how do you explain that stagnation?
- Picoult cites data illustrating how companies are often delusional when it comes to assessing the quality of their customer experience. Do you think your organization falls into that category? If no, then why are you confident that the organization has a clear, accurate picture of customer sentiment? If yes, then what should the organization do differently to avoid this common pitfall?

Chapter 5 – Onstage and Backstage

- Do you think it's possible to deliver a well-choreographed customer experience without it appearing too scripted? Can you think of a company that you feel has struck the right balance there, delivering a carefully orchestrated customer experience, but without it feeling "canned"?
- The chapter touches on the "backstage" elements that figure in to the customer experience equation. Are there backstage components in your workplace that you feel are misaligned with the organization's customer experience aspirations, and might make it more difficult for staff to consistently impress customers (e.g., recruiting practices, training programs, employee toolsets, performance metrics, compensation/reward approaches)?

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Chapter 6 – The Choreography

- Picoult argues that B2B companies can learn much from the customer experience design techniques of B2C companies. Do you agree with that statement? In what ways do you think that customer experience design considerations for a B2B business should rightfully differ from those applied in a B2C business?

Chapter 7 – Create Peaks and Avoid Valleys

- Of all the interactions you've had with businesses in the past, which ones stand out in your mind (be they good or bad)? Which ones seem to have been seared into your memory? Why do you think those interactions left such a lasting impression on you?
- If you were to create a rudimentary customer journey map for your organization, what do you think it would look like? Would there be peaks and valleys, and if so, where would they be in the experience?
- Can you think of a business you've patronized that effectively "spread the pleasure" or "compressed the pain" to help enhance the quality of the experience? Can you think of opportunities to accomplish that in your own organization?
- If the key to a great, loyalty-enhancing customer experience is to create some tall peaks that people will remember, do you think that means that an organization should deliberately make some parts of the experience just mediocre so, by comparison, those peak elements will stand out more? Or, put another way, can there be any peaks if every aspect of the experience is phenomenal?

Chapter 8 – Finish Strong

- Can you think of a customer experience you've had where negative elements early in the interaction were ultimately overshadowed by a strong finish, leaving you with an overall positive impression?

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- Are there customer episodes within your organization that might be good candidates for tacking on an additional touchpoint, in the interest of finishing more strongly than might otherwise be possible?
- Are there transitions in your organization's customer experience that could be better choreographed, to turn (in Picoult's words) "experience endings into strong beginnings"?

Chapter 9 – Make It Effortless

- Do you think we "live in a world rife with friction," as Picoult contends? As a consumer, do you find yourself gravitating to businesses that are easier to work with?
- What business stands out in your mind as being the most effortless to work with? What have they done to earn that distinction?
- In what ways do you think your organization saddles customers with unnecessary, avoidable effort? How might customer effort be reduced at those touchpoints?
- If a great, effortless customer experience costs less to deliver in the long run (because unnecessary, expense-inflating customer inquiries are preempted upstream), then why do you think more organizations don't make it easier to work with them? Can you think of ways by which organizations' siloed mentalities (and compartmentalized financial accounting) might obscure the economic benefits of an effortless customer experience?
- Picoult introduces the idea of "unproductive employee effort," noting that the easier it is for your staff to deliver the experience, the happier both they and your customers will be. Are there ways by which your organization unintentionally (or unknowingly) makes it hard for employees to deliver a consistently great customer experience?

Chapter 10 – Keep It Simple

- Most people would agree that simplicity in business has value, be it in product/service design or internal process engineering. Why then do you think that so many organizations

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get mired in complexity? If everyone agrees that simplicity is good in theory, why is it rarely delivered in practice?

- What do you think about the idea, illustrated by Sheena Iyengar’s jam tasting experiment, that too many choices can actually be bad for customer engagement? Have you experienced this in your own life – delaying (or completely avoiding) decisions because you were so overwhelmed by the many choices available?
- What was your reaction to the study illustrating the significant impact that font readability had on the conversion of sales prospects? In your organization, can you think of pre-sale or post-sale materials that might be disengaging customers, due to the lack of visual appeal (and resulting perceived complexity) of the documents themselves?

Chapter 11 – Stir Emotion

- When you think of your most vivid memories (good or bad), do you find that they are “laced with emotion”? Does your personal experience support the idea that emotion is indeed a memory cue that helps us recall certain events much better than others?
- MailChimp’s “Freddie high five” and GE’s Adventure Series imaging equipment respectively illustrate the concepts of accentuating positive emotion and mitigating negative emotion in the customer experience. Can you think of unrealized opportunities in your organization’s customer experience to capitalize on either of these concepts?
- Picoult stresses the importance of making people feel special during their experiences. As a customer or an employee, can you think of a time when an organization (or a boss) made you feel special, thereby amplifying the emotional resonance of your experience with them? What exactly did they do to accomplish that?

Chapter 12 – Give the Perception of Control

- Did the experiential benefits of “perceived control” resonate with you? Have you personally felt less comfortable, as a customer or an employee, when you thought you had diminished control of what was happening around you?

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- Are there parts of your organization's customer experience where you think people might be at risk of feeling a loss of control? How might you counter that, and give them the perceived control that's described in this chapter?
- Do you find that you don't sometimes set expectations, or keep people informed, as clearly as you might like (and as Picoult suggests)? If so, what would you attribute that to? Setting clear expectations and keeping customers informed seems pretty straightforward. Why do you think it doesn't happen more routinely?

Chapter 13 – Be an Advocate

- Can you think of a business that claims to put customers' interests first, but then fails to demonstrate that in its actions? How does their marketing message get contradicted by the operational reality?
- ING Direct and Southwest Airlines are held up in this chapter as examples of companies that put long-term customer loyalty ahead of short-term profit maximization. Do you think that's a sound strategy? Are there companies that do the opposite and still succeed – and, if so, why?
- What kind of cultural norms and values do you think an organization must have in order to make decisions like ING Direct and Southwest did (willingly forgoing huge revenue opportunities in the name of customer advocacy)?
- In the Costco example, do you think Costco really negotiated a better deal on the inkjet pricing – or do you think they orchestrated that entire sequence of events (deliberately holding back the extra \$10 discount) to essentially choreograph an advocacy-driven experiential peak that customers would remember? Does it even matter whether it was pre-planned, or negotiated on the fly?
- What impediments exist in your organization to people taking Velcro ownership for every customer contact that comes across their desk?
- What's one thing you could do differently in your role, to better embrace the idea of "escorting" versus "pointing"?

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Chapter 14 – Create Relevance

- Best Buy survived the onslaught of Amazon by focusing on aspects of the electronics purchasing experience that had great relevance to customers, but weren't being effectively addressed by other firms (e.g., hands-on exploration of devices, as well as in-home technology installation and consultation). Do you think both firms can thrive in the market – why or why not?
- IKEA and Disney are mentioned as examples of companies that carefully considered what was truly relevant to their customers (and it led to their development of tangential offerings). What do you think *your* customers really care about? What are the implications for that on how you do business in the future?
- In your role, how might you go “into the wild” to observe customers in their natural habitat and better understand their wants, their needs, and their frustrations?
- What are some of the things that you think are most relevant to your staff in their capacity as an employee of the organization? Are there aspects of the employee experience that are highly relevant to the workforce, but aren't getting the attention they deserve?

Chapter 15 – Pay Attention to the Details

- After reading this chapter, are there experiential details that you've personally encountered as a customer of a business – and maybe overlooked – but now better appreciate how they shaped your overall impression of the interaction?
- Picoult talks about how small details in the workplace (like department names and job titles) can shape employee behaviors in sometimes unintended ways. Are there terms or labels used in your organization that could possibly shape the employee mindset in a way that's not customer-centric?
- Starbucks' CEO, Howard Schultz, made a big financial bet when he instructed his team to rip out and replace all of the chain's espresso machines. What do you think Schultz did right to get both his team, and the company's Board, to support his turnaround plan – including the costly reshaping of subtle details in the store experience?

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Chapter 16 – Personalize the Experience

- What do you think are the different organizational competencies required to excel at creating a *personalized* experience, as opposed to just a *relevant* experience?
- Pandora underestimated the threat posed by on-demand (rather than radio-style) streaming services such as Spotify. Which of the 12 Principles do you think an on-demand music streaming service like Spotify capitalizes on, in contrast to Pandora?
- Personalization arguably comes at the expense of privacy – customers need to share personal information with a business in order to heighten the individuality of the experience they receive. What do you think is the key to balancing people’s desire for experience personalization with their interest in privacy protection. Can you think of a company that has effectively struck that balance?
- The story about the Dubai Ritz-Carlton staff’s response to the couple who couldn’t get down to the beach was impressive. But what does it say about the qualities that the Ritz-Carlton employees themselves possess (and that the company probably looks for during the recruiting process)?

Chapter 17 – Deliver Pleasant Surprises

- Do you have any memories of pleasant surprises received, either from a business you patronized or an employer where you worked? How did they deviate from the script to create a memorable impression on you?
- Think about the cognitive scripts associated with the business you work in – the sequence of events and the flow of the experience that customers are accustomed to. Is there any part of that script that you think people dislike, but they just accept it because it’s part of the expected routine in your industry? Is there an opportunity there to deviate from the script, break the industry mold, and deliver a pleasant surprise?
- The chapter recounts one of the many surprising things that Herb Kelleher, co-founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, did to distinguish his style of leadership (in a positive

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way). Thinking about leaders you've worked for in the past, did any of them do something unique, something unexpected, which inspired you and motivated you to work hard on that leader's behalf?

Chapter 18 – Recover With Style

- What's the worst service recovery you've ever experienced? What did the business do wrong, and how did it make you feel? What could they have reasonably done differently to recover more gracefully?
- Think about the best service recoveries that you've ever experienced. What's the common theme that runs through them? What did the businesses – or the individuals representing them – do that helped turn a bad situation around?
- In this chapter, Picoult describes how US Airways dealt with an instance of experience failure (the infamous maggot flight). In Chapter 13, he described how Southwest Airlines deals with experience failures ensuing from delayed or canceled flights. How would you contrast these two airlines' different approaches to experience recovery? What's different about how they manage their respective operations? How do you think their company cultures might differ?
- What do you think was the single most important element in Ritz-Carlton's recovery after shrinking Picoult's wife's dress? They obviously did a lot of things right, but if you had to point to one thing that probably made the biggest positive impression on the couple, what would it be and why?
- How do you think your organization performs when it comes to experience recovery? Why, if at all, does it fall short relative to your aspirations?

Chapter 19 – Great Performances

- Picoult shares some examples of companies that are beloved by customers, yet clearly don't distinguish themselves using all 12 Principles – indeed, they seem to even violate some (e.g., not advocating for customers, not being easy to do business with). Can you think of other examples of companies or industries that have great appeal to customers, but achieve

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that by deliberately focusing on just some of the 12 Principles, at the expense of others. Why do you think that works for them?

- Several case studies are presented in this chapter, demonstrating how successful companies employ the 12 Principles. Which case study was most impressive to you and why?
- With its thank-you notes, Framebridge found a clever way to use technology to deliver a highly personalized customer experience on a very large scale. Does their approach make you think differently about how technology can be used to differentiate the customer experience?

Chapter 20 – Start Impressing

- Are there one or two things that you learned about customer experience design from this book that surprised you?
- One key theme in the book is that meaningful advancements in customer experience quality can be achieved without necessarily having to invest in multi-million dollar technology and operations projects. What's an example of a low-cost (or no-cost) experience design technique that you think could be immediately applied within your own organization?
- Picoult encourages readers to be “brutally honest” with themselves when evaluating the current quality of their organization’s customer experience. How do you plan to do this – to make sure you’re benefiting from an objective, accurate, unvarnished view of your organization’s customer experience.
- The importance of the *internal* customer experience is stressed throughout the book. How would you rate your organization’s focus on that component? What would you suggest be done differently to heighten awareness and attention around the delivery of great internal customer experiences?
- Picoult talks about the opportunity that business leaders (and anyone in the workforce) has to model the customer-focused behaviors that the organization is trying to promote. In the context of “serving others as you’d want them to serve your customers” – what one thing are you committing to do differently when interacting with staff or colleagues?