

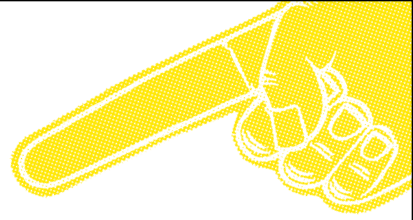


BRITTANY HODAK
FOREWORD BY SHEP HYKEN

CREATING SUPER FANS



**How to Turn Your Customers
Into Lifelong Advocates**



Reviews of *Creating Superfans*

“Exceptional customer experience is the goal of every smart businessperson. *Creating Superfans* gives you not just the playbook for making it happen, but also the playlist. The smart, simple advice and pop culture references put CX into terms your team will relate to, remember, and—most importantly—really use.”

JON ACUFF, *New York Times*-bestselling author, *Soundtracks*

“These pages are filled with powerful stories, specific examples, and a complete framework for turning customers into the engine of your business. I particularly love the section on understanding customers’ stories.”

JAY BAER, bestselling coauthor, *Talk Triggers*

“I know firsthand what it means to have loyal, dedicated fans. Whatever your ‘thing’ is, you’ll find advice in *Creating Superfans* to help you go further, faster, with a loyal tribe cheering you on.”

BOBBY BONES, *New York Times*-bestselling author; TV and radio personality

“*Creating Superfans* contains the secrets your business needs to stand out in a crowd and to attract, engage, and retain your own raving fanbase.”

DORIE CLARK, *Wall Street Journal*-bestselling author, *The Long Game*; executive education faculty, Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business

“This is the customer experience soundtrack that you’ll want to play on repeat for months on end until the ideas, stories, and principles are so embedded in your psyche that creating raving fans will be as easy as 1, 2, 3...”

JOEY COLEMAN, *Wall Street Journal*-bestselling author, *Never Lose a Customer Again*

“Maybe you prefer to spend countless sums on advertising, and countless hours constantly chasing and attaining new customers. Or maybe Brittany Hodak’s masterful guide will help you flip that relationship on its head—instead of selling *to* people, you’ll create advocates and superfans who do the ‘selling’ for you.”

JEFF HADEN, contributing editor, *Inc.*;
author, *The Motivation Myth*

“*Creating Superfans* is the must-read manual for turning your customers and employees into superfans. If you have customers, you need this book—period.”

JOHN HALL, senior contributor, *Forbes*; serial entrepreneur

“There is nothing stronger than third-party advocacy. It’s what every marketer wants! But how do you create the elusive ‘superfan’? Start with this playbook: fun, accessible, and full of practical ideas you can implement right away. A must-read for any marketer in the digital age.”

SHAMA HYDER, bestselling author, *The Zen of Social Media Marketing*; CEO, Zen Media

“When your marketplace is crowded, the ultimate catalyst to conversion is the creation of an army of supporters, fans, and ideally superfans. This book delivers the formula to achieve *exactly* that!”

PHIL M JONES, bestselling author, *Exactly What to Say*

“Brittany Hodak is a master at helping brands connect with their audience in a way that creates deep loyalty and meaningful, authentic bonds. The strategies in *Creating Superfans* are priceless!”

RORY VADEN, *New York Times*-bestselling author;
cofounder, Brand Builders Group



CREATING



**How to Turn
Your Customers Into
Lifelong Advocates**



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SUPER FANS

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Foreword

Same Ol' Situation

Some things in this world are timeless. Expressions like love, music, and storytelling were essential long before any of us were born and will be part of humanity's collective existence forever.

In business, there also exists a set of enduring elements, and two of the most important are word-of-mouth marketing and customer centricity—along with its many subsets, including customer experience, customer service, and customer loyalty and retention.

Brittany Hodak is a customer experience rockstar. And, just like some recording artists burst onto the scene and wow critics and fans with a debut album, Brittany's first book is worthy of a 5-star review. It's like a greatest hits collection you'll want playing on repeat in the minds of everyone on your team.

I met Brittany a few years ago when she spoke to my Entrepreneurs' Organization chapter in Saint Louis and I immediately knew that she "got it." We quickly bonded over our shared love of creating amazing customer experiences. Brittany knows that the importance of customer experience can be traced all the way back to the days of the Old Testament.

Tucked away in the British Museum is a customer complaint letter carved in Akkadian cuneiform that dates to 1750 BCE. It was written by an unsatisfied copper ore customer named Nanni to his supplier, Ea-nasir. The tablet hints that it was not the first correspondence between the two. It reads:

What do you take me for, that you treat somebody like me with such contempt? I have sent as messengers gentlemen like ourselves to collect the bag with my money (deposited with you) but you have treated me with contempt by sending them back to me empty-handed several times, and that through enemy territory. Is there anyone among the merchants who trade with Telmun who has treated me in this way? . . . I shall exercise against you my right of rejection because you have treated me with contempt.

Yikes! That's a lot of contempt.

If you'll give me a little creative license, I'd like to put together a short mashup of Nanni's letter and a modern-day version of what some companies deem (unfortunately) to be an acceptable customer experience:

Nanni walks up to the customer service window and puts the product he was shipped down on the counter.

"I received these copper ingots, but they aren't at all like the ones the salesman showed me," Nanni explains calmly.

"Do you have your original receipt or purchase order?" the customer service representative asks.

"Uh, no."

"Then take this clay tablet and bone stylus, sit down over there and cuneiform down all the details."

"Could you just get my rep? It's Ea-nasir. I think he'll be able to straighten this out. I've traveled through a war zone to get here, and I'd really like to take care of this quickly."

“He’s away on business, but I’ll see what I can do,” the rep says. She walks to a back room, where she stands around for a few minutes. Eventually, she returns to the counter.

“The best thing is for you to just fill out the clay tablet. We will review your case and get back to you as soon as the war is over. Next!”

The issues that upset Nanni almost 4,000 years ago are the same ones that irk customers today.

The product he received did not meet his expectations. He sought resolution to his problem several times (including sending messengers through a war zone to ask for a refund!). Had Ea-nasir Fine Copper set things right the first time, the British Museum wouldn’t have this interesting artifact to display. The relationship between this buyer and seller would have been quickly restored.

Instead, their relationship is poisoned. Trust and confidence have deteriorated to the point that Nanni will certainly have his eyes open for a new supplier—and will very likely tell his friends and neighbors to do the same.

The best and most-loved brands and businesses understand that human desires are the same now as they were in Nanni’s day. Except now, the Nannis of the world aren’t chiseling their complaints into clay tablets and sending messengers across the desert on camels—they’re sharing them on social media and in other public forums that potential customers all around the world can see *in real time*.

Any customer’s feedback, good or bad, can go viral at any moment. One present-day Nanni can shape the perception that millions of people have of you or your business. Even the opinions that don’t go viral play a role in whether potential customers will be lining up to do business with you or running in the opposite direction.

Customer experience is timeless, but it’s never been timelier. High expectations are the rule, not the exception. It’s never been easier

for a competitor to tempt your customers with a promise of a better service experience. Regardless of the field you're in, you won't find long-term success without prioritizing your customers . . . period.

Picking up this book was a great decision. An even better decision is ordering copies for every employee at your company and making it required reading. In the pages that follow, Brittany makes the subject of customer experience not only approachable and exciting, but also fun. Whether it's someone's first year at your business or their fiftieth, they will find value in this fantastic field guide, and they'll be so entertained by it that they may not even realize it's educational.

Brittany's SUPER Model is simultaneously simple and spectacular—implement it as she prescribes in your business and you're sure to find not just success, but superfans. Customers shouting or tweeting (or *carving*) complaints? No way. By the end of this book, you'll be on your way to an army of superfan customers cheering you on. Who knows? Maybe your amazing customer experience will become so legendary that someone like me will be writing about it a few millennia from now.

SHEP HYKEN

Customer service/experience expert, Hall of Fame keynote speaker, *New York Times*-bestselling author, and Brittany Hodak superfan



Interlude

WHAT'S THE first concert you ever attended?

Do you still remember the energy from that night? The crowd, the lights, the songs? Did you go to the show with someone special? Perhaps you went alone but met someone who became a lifelong friend.

My first concert was Matchbox 20. It was 1998, and the band was on the road supporting their seminal debut album, *Yourself or Someone Like You*. My dad drove me and my best friend, Pam, over an hour to the show at Barnhill Arena in Fayetteville, Arkansas, even though it was a school night.

From the first chord of the opening song to the encore performance of “Long Day,” I was mesmerized. I never wanted that feeling to end.

Pam and I bought matching shirts at the merch booth and wore them like badges of honor at school the next day. As we recapped the night’s magic to friends in our eighth-grade homeroom class that morning, I announced definitively that I was going to work in the music industry one day.

And I did. From a humble beginning as a radio station mascot (the best first job ever, by the way), I founded and later sold an entertainment company whose clients included Dolly Parton, KISS,

Taylor Swift, Luke Bryan, Katy Perry, and dozens more of the biggest entertainers on the planet. (But more on that later.)

In the music industry, there are many measures of success for an artist—streaming totals, number-one songs, merchandise sales, and more. But there's one metric that dwarfs the rest: ticket sales.

When an artist goes on tour, how many people are willing to spend their time and money to see them live? Are they a headliner or an opening act? Can they sell out shows in twelve cities or 120?

Now, imagine that *your* most loyal customers are showing up together, city by city, to buy *your* product or service. I know, you might not be an artist. But humor me. How many loyal customers are there? Would they be filling bars, ballrooms, or baseball stadiums?

I've spent most of my career studying fandom: working to understand why some things experience exponential growth while others fail to launch. Why some brands go viral while others go bust. This book is the product of nearly two decades of work and research across many facets of business and pop culture.

Whether we're talking about rockstars or real estate, a brick-and-mortar store or an online business, "superfans" are critically important. They exist in every industry, although they go by different names. Perhaps you call them VIPs, promoters, frequent fliers, advocates, season-ticket holders, or subscribers. They are the customers who will consistently choose you at the exclusion of others . . . and tell their friends—and even strangers—to do the same. The loyal, enthusiastic customers who will keep buying from you again and again.

Think back to junior high. How did you discover new music before algorithms existed to serve up personal suggestions? To start, it was likely a combination of MTV, late-night shows, music magazines, and the radio. Maybe you were lucky enough to live in a town with a fun record store where the clerks always seemed to know about the hottest new thing.

IF YOUR
CUSTOMERS
AREN'T TELLING

★ ★ THEIR FRIENDS ★ ★

ABOUT YOU

YOU'RE IN
TROUBLE

And finally—and probably most importantly—you discovered music from your friends. The people around you whose recommendations you trusted because they knew you. Cousins, older siblings, classmates who were cooler than you . . . when they said, “Check this out!” there’s a good chance you would, right? Maybe they’d let you borrow a cassette, or they’d burn you a CD. Perhaps you’d buy an entire album based on their feedback, even if you’d only heard one song. That’s how I discovered Matchbox 20: it was after a friend in Florida said, “You’ve got to buy this CD!” (Thanks again, Dana!)

Now, fast forward to today. Where did you turn for advice the last time you needed to buy something new? Product reviews from other customers on Google or Amazon? Maybe you opened your favorite social app to see what influencers had to say. Or maybe you reached out directly to people in your network: online or in-real-life friends whose opinions you trust implicitly.

We’re hardwired to believe—and act on—feedback from the people we know, like, and trust. The only thing that’s changed over the past few decades is the amount of people we now have easy access to. Word-of-mouth marketing has been around for as long as people have lived on the planet. Why did Adam take a bite of that forbidden fruit? Because Eve told him it was awesome.

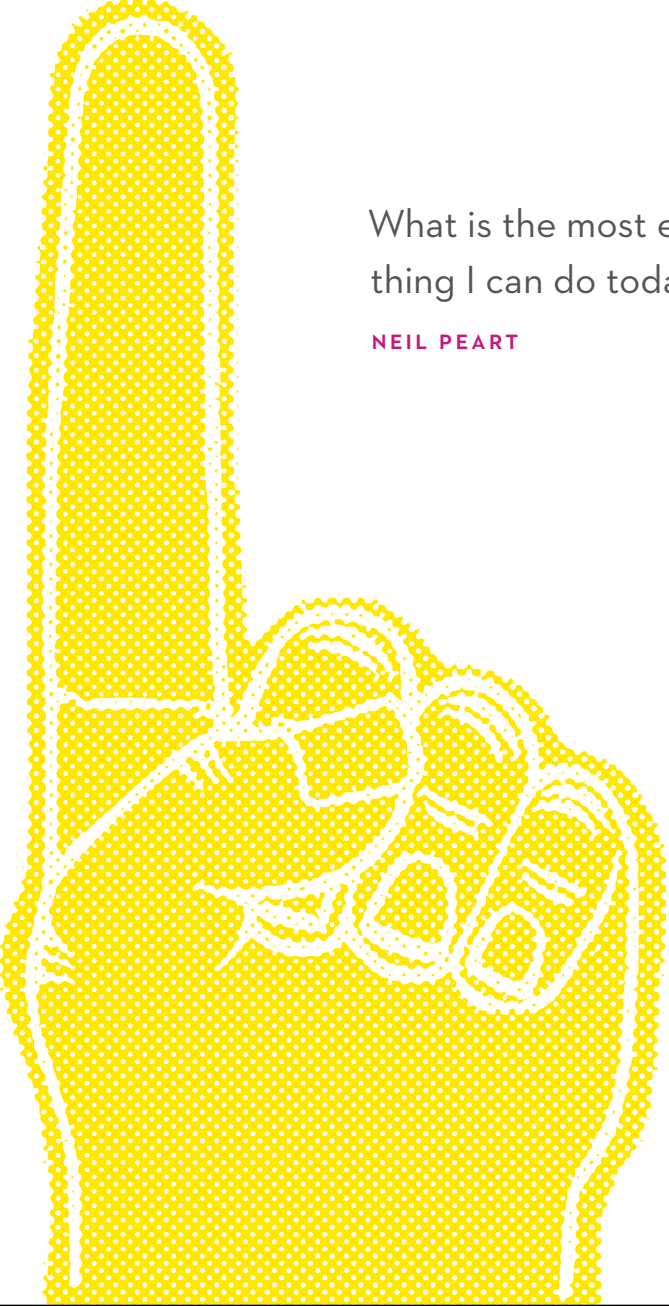
A band’s fanbase grows in large part because of the superfans who advocate on their behalf. The passion those people feel for the band is contagious. Suddenly a few dozen fans in Omaha become a few hundred, and then a few thousand. Then those fans in Omaha tell their friends in Ohio and Oakland and Oklahoma and, before long, the band is selling out shows in forty cities.

Your brand is no different. Whether you’re just getting off the ground or you’ve been around for fifty years, one thing’s for sure: if your customers aren’t telling their friends about you, you’re in trouble.

Customers rarely, if ever, tell others about an average experience with a product or service—just as people seldom comment on a forgettable song they heard on the radio. These things are filler, helping us pass the time between Point A and Point B. Too many businesses fall into the trap of becoming something lots of people “sort of” like instead of intentionally creating an experience the *right* people can’t stop telling their friends about. Don’t be filler; be unforgettable.

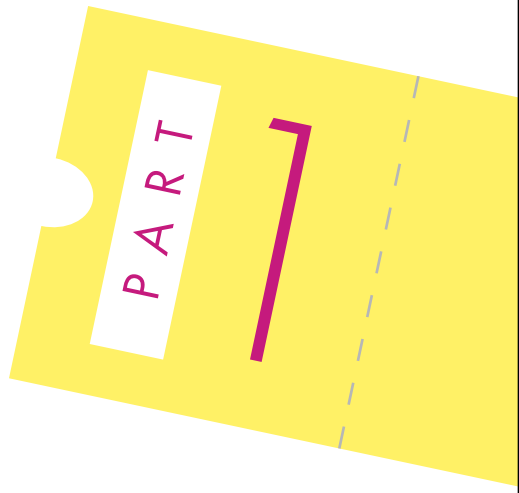
The good news is that you don’t have to have headliner swagger to put some of rock and roll’s best-kept marketing secrets into practice for your business. You don’t even need to carry a tune.

Whatever it is you do or sell, by the end of this book you’ll know everything you need to know about creating superfans of your own. Even if your industry doesn’t have its own version of Spotify, you can still trend locally, nationally, or even worldwide—and create more raving fans for your business than you ever imagined possible.



What is the most excellent
thing I can do today?

NEIL PEART



THE SUPER MODEL



1

Where It's At



The purpose of a business is to create a customer who creates customers.

SHIV SINGH



I'VE BEEN obsessed with the phenomenon of fandom for as long as I can remember.

By age four, I had memorized every line of every episode of *DuckTales*.

As soon as I could write, I started sending fan mail to every player on the Texas Rangers roster . . . and to the coaches, radio announcers, and managers.

I was so fixated with NASA that I spent my entire fifth-grade year trying to teach myself Russian with books from the library, in hopes of better communicating with my future comrades on the International Space Station.

Each of these interests played a role in shaping the person I am today. That's because fandom and identity are intrinsically linked. The things we love become part of our personal stories and influence the way we see the world and everyone who lives in it. They play a role in how and why we form relationships with those around us.

Some fandoms are chosen for us. I grew up in a strict Dr Pepper household: if it wasn't Dr Pepper, we didn't drink it. I'm a third-generation Peanuts superfan, raising fourth-generation fans whose nurseries were decorated with Snoopy-themed artwork, toys, and bedding long before they had a say in the matter.

You may have been born into the fandoms for certain sports teams, or you may have been taught that one brand of toothpaste or tomato sauce is superior to all others. While these connections are interesting, I'm even more interested in the brand decisions we make for ourselves—the products, services, and companies we connect with and take with us throughout our lives.

I'm fascinated by our tendency to self-select the brands, products, professionals, and experiences that we will invite into our personal stories. Why do we love some things but not others?

Over the years, I've found that when brands consistently put customers first, everything else falls into place. Across every demographic and industry, customers pay for products, services, and experiences because of the way they make them feel. Large or small, businesses make more money, find more success, and become more loved when they are unfailingly customer centric. And if those benefits aren't enough, such businesses also become “uncopiable” in their industries, all while enhancing the lives of their employees and customers.

Call It What You Want

According to *Merriam-Webster*, the word “superfan” was first used in 1918 to describe “an extremely enthusiastic or dedicated fan.” Yet, when I started saying “superfan” to prospects and customers almost a century later—when launching my first startup in 2011—I was often met with responses like, “You're talking about teenage girls screaming

for boy bands, right?” or “Isn’t a ‘superfan’ one of those gamers who lives in his parents’ basement?”

I would explain that while, yes, those are extreme examples of superfans, that’s not the totality of the term. “Superfans” aren’t just fanatics on the enthusiastic fringes of pop culture. In fact, they are all around us, making a huge impact on nearly every sector of the economy. They exist for every category of product and service. They come in all ages and from every background and income bracket. And, while it may not read “superfan” on their government-issued IDs, that’s exactly what they are: loyal, enthusiastic advocates whose recommendations influence the actions of those around them.

This book isn’t written to help the existing superstars grow their fanbases: it’s a manual for the rest of us. A proven, easy-to-implement system that anyone (including you!) can put into practice to transform from a potential commodity provider into a category leader in the eyes of your prospects and customers . . . and maybe even a category of one.

Over the past fifteen years, I’ve worked with brands of all sizes—from early-stage startups to beloved nonprofits to corporate titans like Walmart and Disney—to help their executives, salespeople, marketing teams, product designers, and service representatives create, engage, and multiply superfans.

Creating superfan customers should be a top priority for every businessperson and every brand today. A well-executed superfan strategy is one of the most powerful ways to futureproof any business against competitors and market conditions.

When you see “superfan” in this book, I don’t want you to think of people packing a stadium on game day or donning cosplay at Comic-Con. Yes, those are superfans, but not the kind we’re going to focus on creating here. Unless, of course, you happen to be a star linebacker or a sci-fi writer. In that case, proceed! For the rest of us, here’s what I’m talking about when I say “superfan”: *a superfan is a customer*

SUPERFANS

— ARE —

CUSTOMERS

— WHO CREATE —

★ **MORE** ★

CUSTOMERS

or stakeholder who is so delighted by their experience with a brand, product, or service that they become an enthusiastic advocate.

Let's break down the key elements in that definition—the ones that separate true superfans from all other customers. Understanding the difference is critical to identifying your existing superfans and implementing a plan to create more of them.

Money Changes Everything

One qualification for defining someone as a superfan is that they have spent money with your company. They're a *customer or stakeholder*, not just an admirer. This is an important distinction because there is a real-world transactional value to superfandom. While it's true that someone can have an affinity for your brand without first being a customer, they can't advocate in as meaningful a way until a transaction has occurred.

Let's say you ask two friends to recommend an attorney. One enthusiastically recommends someone they have hired on multiple occasions, always with great outcomes. The second friend says their son plays baseball with the son of an attorney who works at a firm nearby. Your friend says, "He seems like a really nice guy!" Whose recommendation are you more likely to act on? The first, obviously.

Why does the first recommendation hold more weight? Because actual customers' feedback is more relevant than feedback from those who *haven't* done business with you. The only caveat here is for any stakeholders who aren't your direct customer but who are involved in transactions with those who are. If you're working in an industry where a third party is often present, both your end customer *and* that intermediary can be superfans.

I Gotta Feeling

Customers are the most powerful tool in the world for creating more customers. But not *all* customers. The next key part of my superfan definition is *who is so delighted by their experience*. If you want someone to become a superfan, their experience must be outstanding—or, at the very least, it must exceed their expectations.

I'll never forget a question posed to me when I was applying for my first trademark. My attorney asked, "Is this a product business or a service business?"

I said, "It's both." He told me the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office would require that I choose one or the other. I was stumped. "They're interconnected," I argued. "The services I provide will very often culminate in a product being produced." At the time, most of my projects involved consulting with recording artists and then creating physical collectible items for their fans—things like limited-edition boxed sets, coffee-table books, and so on. But my clients were coming to me because of my expertise. The service behind those products.

In the years since, I've become an even firmer believer that the "product or service" distinction is irrelevant. We've seen the rise of the SaaS (software as a service) model, which announces right in its name that what was once widely considered a product (software) is now a service. I can't recall if I checked the "product" or "service" box more than a decade ago, but I do remember doing so under protest and arguing that the USPTO should update its applications to reflect the fact that the line between these two worlds blurred long ago into a single, all-important category: *experience*.

We're living in an experience economy. The experience your customers have with your brand or business is the most important competitive advantage you have at your disposal. When you get it right, it's the hardest thing for competitors to copy. Experience is baked into

the DNA of your company . . . and into all of the products and services you offer.

Customer experience, or CX, is the term for the way a customer feels about the totality of their interactions with a brand or business, from start to finish. I love the term, because “experience” is doing a lot of work. For starters, it’s both singular and plural. While the experience of every customer is important, “customer experience” also refers to the sum of the experiences of all customers—for example: “That business is known for its amazing customer experience.”

“Experience” is also both a verb and a noun. It’s something people receive (noun), but that they’re also actively participating in (verb). Pretty cool, right? (Shout-out to all my fellow grammar nerds!)

Think of your own favorite brands. It’s likely that the experience is part of the draw. Up to 86 percent of customers are willing to pay more money for a great customer experience.

If you’re a solopreneur, you may oversee the totality of customer experience, before and after a sale takes place. If you’re a leader, your team may oversee parts, but not all, of the customer journey. If you work at a larger enterprise, you may be responsible for only a small fraction of a very big picture.

The best professionals know that, even if they’re only directly responsible for one part of the customer’s experience, they must understand every part of it intimately. To a customer, it doesn’t matter if you work in sales, support, product design, shipping, accounting, marketing, legal, or another department entirely. Whoever you are, you’re representing the *company*. No irate customer has ever said, “Oh, a *different* department was responsible for this error? Okay, then. I’m no longer upset. Thanks for your help!” Karen doesn’t care what department you work in—she just wants her problem (real or perceived) fixed. She also doesn’t care how long you’ve worked there. If you’re wearing the name tag (literal or metaphorical), you’re in the hot seat.

Tell Your Friends

Now let's examine the final part of my "superfan" definition: *they become an enthusiastic advocate*. Superfan customers are eager to share stories about their experiences with a brand. They don't talk because they're being paid or incentivized in some way by an agreement with your company. They tell people about you because they *want* to.

Superfandom is real, authentic enthusiasm from true supporters. This is the kind of unprompted, unfiltered feedback for which audiences used to turn to the world of so-called "social-media influencers," before advertisers, bots, and bad actors depleted almost every shred of trust and credibility from it.

I'm not arguing that there's no role for influencers in your marketing mix, because there very well may be. Just know that when the word "superfan" appears in this book, it's not meant to encompass any partner whose relationship with your brand is tied to a financial agreement with terms on both sides. Plus, most influencers are overhyped anyway. As it turns out, almost everyone is an influencer—or a micro-influencer, at the least.

It's true: 93 percent of consumers say an online review has influenced their purchase decision. And 91 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. You create superfans by being so exceptional that customers can't help but talk about you. Our hyperconnected world makes it virtually impossible for remarkable products, services, and experiences to go unnoticed for long.

Did you catch the word "remarkable" in there? It's a biggie. Ever wonder why there are so few 3-star reviews in the world, but so many 1- and 5-star reviews? When we have an amazing experience or a

terrible experience, we talk about it. But an ordinary one? When was the last time you were out with a friend and said, “I’ve got to tell you about this new restaurant—it was just okay”? Luckily, this book will help you go *beyond* remarkable, all the way to SUPER.

I Like the Sound of That

Put simply, brands that learn to harness the power of fandom are unstoppable. Identity is a powerful thing. Once a customer identifies as a fan of something, it becomes part of the fabric of their everyday life. As cultural anthropologist Susan Kresnicka noted in *Variety*:

When we define ourselves as fans, we do more—we watch more, share more, buy more, evangelize more, participate more, help more.

If you do your job correctly, your customers will talk about you. Learning to engage your customers doesn’t just get them talking (and, more importantly, get their friends listening)—it makes them feel a sense of ownership in your brand. Your story becomes part of their story.

Speaking of ownership, I hope that by the end of this book you’ll have made the concepts you are about to read your own! If you’re anything like me, recaps help you remember information longer and put it into practice more quickly. That’s why every chapter in this book ends with a “Superquick! Rewind” refresher.

Want even more? Visit BrittanyHodak.com/SUPER for the free Creating Superfans Playbook, plus videos and printable resources to help accelerate and amplify the adoption of this book’s principles across your entire organization.

◀◀ **SUPERQUICK! REWIND** ▶▶

A superfan is a customer or stakeholder who is so delighted by their experience with a brand, product, or service that they become an enthusiastic advocate. Advocates are the new influencers. Treat every customer like they alone have the power to make or break your brand—because they do.

We're living in an experience economy. Customers will pay more to do business with brands that provide exceptional experiences. CX is one of the most powerful ways to futureproof your brand and one of the easiest ways to ensure that more customers come back and become loyal advocates.



2

I Don't Care



*Build something 100 people love,
not something 1 million people kind of like.*

BRIAN CHESKY



NOW THAT we've covered superfans, let's look at the other side of the coin. I'm not talking about "haters," or customers whose less-than-ideal experience has compelled them to leave a negative review or to direct would-be customers to your competitors. Unhappy customers can be highly valuable, because you can learn a great deal from their complaints.

Just as it's been said that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference, the opposite of superfandom is not hate but apathy. The "meh" crowd. Would-be customers—or, worse, *actual* customers—who just don't care enough to care one way or the other.

When I consult with new clients, they often tell me they have an awareness problem: not enough people know about their amazing brand and the wonderful products and services they sell.

This is sometimes the case, but much more often I find that *lots* of qualified prospects and leads are aware of them. Many of these people have even considered them before, but didn't convert.

Even worse, some customers who *did* make a purchase just weren't wowed. The product was fine; the service was okay. It was all very . . . forgettable. Ordinary. And so, when the time came to purchase again, they rolled the dice and tried another solution.

Very often, stagnant growth is not an awareness problem at all. It's an apathy problem.

Comfortably Numb

Apathy is one of the most underrated problems in business today. It doesn't get a ton of press, but it should. Companies of all sizes allocate nearly immeasurable resources—dollars, time, energy, and ideas among them—to chasing new customers. Then, when they've got those customers, they do an *okay* job of taking care of their needs. Naturally, customers get apathetic and think, "Maybe I'll see what else is out there."

I was a Brownie in the Girl Scouts for a year and I remember singing a song that went, "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, and the other gold." The same is true for your existing (aka "old") customers—except, in many cases, they can mean *literal* gold.

It takes less time, effort, and money to sell something *more* to an existing customer than to sell *anything* to a new customer. You can't afford to let your customers become numb, comfortably or otherwise. Apathy drives attrition and eats away at your profits. If you're not paying attention, your customers can shrug and move on with their lives. And the same goes for prospects, who can move on before they've even given you the proper time of day.

There has never been so much competition for human attention, and getting someone to care about *your* thing has never been so

challenging. I'm busy, you're busy, we're all busy. That's where the distinction between "awareness" and "apathy" sometimes gets blurred.

We're living with more distractions than at any point in human history, and we're being inundated with more messages competing for our attention than ever before (tens of thousands, by some estimates). Yet we still find a way to make time for the things we really care about. There is no such thing as "too busy"—only too uninterested.

How many times have you said, "I'm so busy" (and meant it), only to find time the same day to watch TV or play a game or relax with a book? We make time for the things that matter. Whatever you're promoting or selling, the right message—let's call it an "apathy buster"—will help you catapult past the noise and command the attention of the people you care about most. At least initially. Then, it's up to your customer experience to keep them engaged.

I bet you can think of lots of things that you never cared about . . . until you did. Maybe a friendly salesperson persuaded you to try a new product that's become one of your staples. Or, maybe a brand's message made you care (or care *more*) about something for the first time because you identified with that mission or purpose. Or, maybe, you had a firsthand experience with a product that worked so well you now wonder how you ever lived without it. (I'm lookin' at you, Mr. Clean Magic Erasers!) Something made you care. You went from apathy to advocacy. Let's look closely at that journey and how you can use it to create—and *keep*—superfans.

The Climb

There are dozens of giant, low-quality stuffed animals cluttering my kids' playroom, all serving as proof of my lifelong love of carnival

games. From ring toss and balloon darts to milk jugs and water pistols, there's virtually nothing on a midway I won't stop to play.

One of the few games I've never been able to master, although I've tried more times than I care to admit, is the rope ladder. You know the one. It's anchored at a single point at the top and bottom, and the objective is to climb from the bottom rung to the top without losing your balance and bellyflopping onto the inflatable pillow below while strangers point and laugh.

That rope ladder is the perfect metaphor for customer apathy. Way up at the top, on the final rung, is advocacy. That's where you want your customers to reach. But first, they've got to make it past apathy.

And apathy isn't just the first rung. It's also the giant cushion underneath that customers can fall down into. It's the other games and rides and funnel cakes that can distract prospects before they even venture onto your ladder. As if that weren't enough, the workings of apathy are causing that ladder to swing, challenging the equilibrium of every would-be climbing champion.

Much like falling off a rope ladder, customer apathy can happen at any moment, on any point of the climb—even when you least expect it. Advancing from one rung to the next is never guaranteed and should never be taken for granted.

Let's take a closer look at the dangers of customer apathy and what I like to think of as the Ladder to Superfandom.

Apathy

Recall that ladder image in your mind, and consider its base and everything around it to be apathy. Some people will be apathetic to your brand, specifically. Others will be indifferent to the entire category in which you operate. Fine. Don't worry about them. Your thing is not going to be right for everyone, and that's okay. The sooner

★ **ADVOCACY** ★
★ ★
★ ★

— **AFFINITY** —

ADOPTION

— **ACTION** —

ATTRACTION

— **AWARENESS** —

★ **APATHY** ★
★ ★
★ ★

you acknowledge that, the more quickly you can move on to more valuable prospects. Your job is simply to help shepherd the people who *do* care further up the ladder.

Why is “apathy” at the bottom instead of “anger” or “dissatisfaction”? Remember: even anger has value—far more than apathy. If someone has engaged with your brand enough to become angry, there’s a good chance they have useful feedback to offer. Or, they could just be the wrong fit—at which point anger will likely soon fade to annoyance, ambivalence, or . . . you guessed it: apathy. We’ll talk more about dealing with angry customers in Chapter 13.

Apathy at play: Remember that your customers can fall off the ladder at any point in their climb toward superfandom. For each rung I’m about to describe, I’ve laid out the key triggers and warning signs to look for, so you can help your customers regain their balance before it’s too late.

Awareness

Next up is awareness. If you’ve ever watched someone try to scale a carnival rope ladder (or if you’ve tried it yourself), you know that getting from the first rung to the second is relatively simple, because you’re still close to the ground. The same is true for awareness.

Awareness is one of the easiest metaphorical steps in the process. Put simply, it’s when someone knows that you exist. If you’ve got a great product and a strong message (Part 2 of this book will help you nail the second), finding people to pay attention is relatively simple.

It’s never been easier to reach hyper-targeted audiences through advertising than it is today, especially online. By niching down into almost countless layers, you can land in the inboxes or social feeds of the people who fit the *exact* demographic and psychographic profile you want to talk to. For every person on the internet, it seems, there’s

a company offering you the opportunity to reach them. It's nothing new: there are plenty of offline opportunities to micro-target, too. Big data has been big business for decades.

Paying to generate awareness beyond your ideal market is often pointless. That's why smart marketers will bet on 10,000 engaged fans over 1 million casual followers any day—and Part 3 of this book will help you get clarity on exactly whom to target. Your time and efforts will be much better spent thinking about moving customers up the perilous steps still ahead of them.

Apathy at play: What does apathy look like at the awareness step? People whose reaction to hearing your message is, “I just don't care.” It might be a case of the wrong person for your message, or the right person at the wrong time. Either way, apathy kicks in almost immediately and your story becomes one of the tens of thousands of messages that a prospective customer's brain ignores every day. It didn't connect with their story. You've become noise, not signal.

Attraction

Attraction is the next rung up the ladder. This is when someone has given you their information but not their money. You have their interest and, if things go your way, you can move them to “action.” Think of it like spotting someone at a bar (or in an app) and feeling a spark. There's an attraction . . . or at least a willingness to learn more.

At this stage, you need to show your prospect or customer targeted attention. Everyone is busy. Even if they care about your thing, it's easy for them to forget or get sidetracked. If it seems hard to sustain a customer's interest, try a few different methods of connecting with them in order to get a verbal “yes,” “no,” or “not now.” Remember: “no” today isn't a “no” forever. Show every prospect that you care about them and want their business, and there's a chance they'll

come back . . . and an even better chance that they'll remember how you made them feel. Your story is also key in the attraction phase—we'll cover that more deeply in Part 2.

Apathy at play: Did someone unsubscribe from your email list before they made a purchase? Someone asked you for an estimate, and then you never heard back? They cared *almost* enough to become a customer, but not quite. Whether it's because the timing isn't right or because of some other issue, apathy stops your prospect from advancing to the next rung of the ladder.

Action

Ahh, action. That coveted conversion when a prospect shows you the money! The action rung represents the first time someone pays money for your product or service. They've officially graduated from "prospect" to "customer"—congrats! Just don't celebrate too long, because it's still a long way up to "advocacy" and, if you're not careful, the ladder will start to get shaky.

This is where it's critical to remind a customer why they chose you in the first place. If you're in a high-touch business, reach out personally to get details about what their experience was like and tell them you're dedicated to making their *next* experience even better. If your volume of customers is too high to reach out personally, use automation to give them a feeling of personal interaction. Perhaps you can send a video and an invitation to offer feedback (via a short survey or review), along with a highly personalized offer for their next purchase, such as 15 percent off if they re-order within a set period of time.

Here and everywhere, knowledge is power. What percentage of your customers don't come back again after their first purchase? Knowing your average customer purchase cycle and when and why customer attrition is happening is key to moving customers past this

perilous step to the ones above it. How would your business change if every customer who *didn't* make a repeat purchase in the past year (or whatever period of time represents your purchase cycle) decided to come back and do business with you again? Focus on getting the *second* conversion from one-time customers and you'll be well on your way to earning the kind of loyalty businesses dream of. It's far easier and less expensive to sell something to an existing customer than a new one.

Apathy at play: How many times have you tried a product or brand, liked it, and then just never bought it again? If you're like most people, probably too many to count. Maybe you got busy and forgot. Maybe you tried another brand that you liked even better. Maybe you just didn't care enough to drive back to the specialty store that you know carries it. Attrition is a real problem for many companies—especially those that are focused on acquiring customers instead of creating superfans.

Adoption

When apathy doesn't creep in after the first purchase, customers advance to the adoption rung. I define adoption as when a customer has spent money with your brand at least twice. Customers are beginning to embrace your product or service and have now had multiple experiences with your brand. At some point soon, they'll decide they like your brand enough to move to the next rung, or they'll decide that you're okay, but not spectacular. At that point, they'll look for another partner. Your job, obviously, is to help them advance further up the ladder.

If you're in a business where the results are somewhat subjective—maybe you're operating a restaurant or a hair salon or a personal-training gym—it's important for a customer's second experience to

be *at least* as amazing as the first so they know it wasn't a fluke. This reinforces their choice and signals that future experiences are likely to be enjoyable, too.

In music, people use the term “sophomore slump” to describe a second album that fails to reach the same commercial or critical acclaim as a debut album. Many artists fall victim to it. They can deliver something exceptional once, but not again. Don't let your business become a one-hit wonder. Make the second experience, and all that follow it, just as magical as the first. Pretty soon, your customers will be playing you on repeat.

Apathy at play: Very few unhappy customers take the time to complain to a business. Instead, the majority simply leave. No suggestions, no opportunities given to address their grievances. They just bounce like bored coeds at a party when the keg's empty. This often happens even after the adoption stage. Sometimes it's because the first experience was solid, but the second was shaky. Instead of rolling the dice for a third time, customers decide to give another company the opportunity to provide a more consistent experience.

Affinity

They like you—they really like you! Affinity is oh-so-close to the top of the ladder. Once you've got a customer on this rung, they're likely pretty loyal. They may be part of a frequent-customer club, and it's very unlikely that they're rate-shopping against your competitors. You've won them over.

Many consumer packaged goods products find that their customers tend to hang out on the affinity rung. I *like* a lot of the products that I buy again and again, but I'm not going out of my way to recommend them. The brand has my loyalty, for the most part, but not necessarily my enthusiasm, and certainly not my advocacy.

Affinity is also a frequent ladder rung for B2B and B2B2C salespeople and professionals. A customer *likes* her wealth manager, or a realtor *likes* a particular title agent. You've got a good thing going, but they don't feel that enthusiasm or loyalty . . . which means they're a flight risk when a more passionate competitor starts showing them the love.

So: always treat repeat customers at least as well as you treat those first-time customers you're courting so aggressively.

Apathy at play: Often, apathy wins out over affinity because another brand is trying harder to entice your existing customers than you're trying to keep them. Don't give competitors the chance to swoop in! Even if one of your customers ignores the first few offers from a competitor, if they aren't feeling the love from you, there's a chance that curiosity (and apathy!) will kick in and they'll give that competitor a try. If they find the grass is indeed greener, they might not be back.

Advocacy

And, finally, there's advocacy. These customers have felt the love from you, and they love you back. Well done! You've successfully led them to the top of the ladder through an environment rife with threats. Do a little dance while you belt out "Started from the Bottom" in their honor.

What's the difference between affinity and advocacy? Amplification. Advocates aren't just loyal, they're *vocal*. They share the experience they've had with your brand with others, which attracts more customers. That advocacy may be structured or unstructured. It may be scheduled or sporadic. It might happen online or *in line*, at a bank or a bar or a baseball game. Chances are, it's a mix of all the above. These are the customers who create more customers. Those superfans we're working so hard to create.

— WHAT'S THE —
DIFFERENCE

— BETWEEN —

★ **AFFINITY** ★
★ ★
★ ★

— AND —

ADVOCACY?

AMPLIFICATION

Apathy at play: Think you're safe when your fans get to the advocacy stage? Think again. It's not like the board game Sorry!, where getting your game pieces to "Home" means you've got nothing else to worry about. Apathy can still kick in. It's the threat that never ends. Your most loyal customers—even those who are vocal advocates—can lose interest . . . typically, when your story and theirs are no longer in sync.

Can't Stop, Won't Stop

Once someone becomes a superfan of your brand, it's still critical to show them the love. In fact, superfan customers can be even more likely to feel slighted when things don't go their way. Because these superfans have been loyal and feel personally invested in the success of the company, lapses in service can create outsized negative impacts.

Country star Granger Smith once told me that every member of his touring staff has been trained to give extra attention to fans who have visible tattoos inspired by him, his music, or his beloved alter ego, Earl Dibbles, Jr.

In the early days of Granger's career, anyone spotted with such a tattoo got instant VIP service: backstage passes, a meet-and-greet with the band, and very likely some merch from Granger's popular Yee Yee Apparel brand.

"Can you imagine how terrible it would be to have a tattoo of an artist you like, and then go to their show and a member of their team treats you like a jerk?" he asked. "That would be the only thing you thought about when you saw that tattoo from then on. And, since it's on your body, you're basically screwed."

Your loyal customers might not have literal tattoos, but many feel an emotional connection to your brand. Don't make them feel like

they mean less to you than you mean to them. Take care of them, or those tattoos could turn to scars. The last thing you want is formerly loyal customers running up and down the proverbial boardwalk, telling people who haven't even reached the midway that they shouldn't bother trying to climb your rope ladder because you don't care either way if they make it to the top.

◀◀ **SUPERQUICK! REWIND** ▶▶

When it comes to your brand, every customer starts at the apathy stage. Your job is to give them a boost, and advance them up the Ladder to Superfandom: awareness, attraction, action, adoption, affinity, and finally advocacy. But remember! Just because they have moved up the ladder, that doesn't mean the risk is over. Apathy can interrupt the journey at any point, so never let your guard down.



3

Brand New Set of Rules



*It's easier to love a brand
when the brand loves you back.*

SETH GODIN



AS MUCH AS you'd like to think your brand is totally within your control—the clever ad campaigns and social slogans and punchy website copy—the reality is that the employees representing your brand are a *huge* part of the equation. That's because your brand isn't what you say it is. It's what your customers say it is, and their interactions with your employees represent some of the most tangible, memorable experiences they will have with your brand.

You may be thinking, "I don't believe that. People are superfans of brands because of the products the brand makes, not the people who work for the brand." In some instances, you're right. Diehard sneakerheads may overlook a bad experience in a Nike store because they're so brand loyal. So, too, might someone who's been giving money to Apple for more than half their life, or who spent years waiting to take that perfect family trip to Disney World.

Here is what I would (kindly) say to you: your brand probably isn't Nike or Apple or Disney... yet. And until you get there, a huge part of the perception customers will have of your brand is based on interactions with representatives of your company. If you're not yet at the point where your logo evokes an emotional response, then it's up to your employees to make your customers feel something.

Not just *some* employees, by the way. This isn't a C-suite thing. Every person representing your brand has the power to make or break a first impression... or a fiftieth. Remember *Fast Times at Ridgmont High*? Judge Reinhold's character, Brad Hamilton, was All American Burger's employee of the month when he fumbled an interaction with an irate customer. Part of the reason Brad became flustered was because he was filling in for his buddy. But here's the thing: your customers don't care if it's someone's first day on the job or their five hundredth. They just want to have their expectations met... or, preferably, exceeded.

When a customer's expectations aren't met, they often can't tell if the failure is a process problem or a people problem—and they don't really care. They just blame the brand and move on. That's what I did when I attempted to buy a Costco membership and instead left with a lifetime supply of Kirkland-branded apathy.

What's in Store for Me

Costco is a membership-only wholesale store, so customers need a card to shop there. There were no Costco stores near me when I was growing up, so I had never been inside of one until my husband and I moved to Tennessee. I figured that our new suburban lifestyle meant we should belong to at least one wholesale club (after all, we suddenly

had a big, mostly empty house crying out for bulk packages of paper towels), so one Saturday morning we decided to visit both Costco and Sam's Club and sign up at one or both businesses.

When we walked into Costco, I told the employee at the door that we would like to look around and then sign up for a membership.

He scoffed, "We don't allow window shopping," then directed me to the customer service desk. After a ten-minute wait, I repeated my request at the desk, telling the clerk that I had never been to a Costco and would like to look around. Once again, I was told that this was not allowed. I was a little annoyed, but said, "Okay, fine. I would like a membership, please."

The employee asked me a series of questions (directed by prompts on her computer) that were designed to upsell me add-ons: Did I need new tires? Eyeglasses? How about a Disney cruise? I should really consider the Executive membership level.

Finally, after a litany of questions and choices (and her unhidden disdain at my decision to start with the entry-level membership and no extras), it was time to pay. I looked at my phone and saw that it had been twenty-seven minutes since we first walked inside the store.

I handed her my Amex for what I hoped was finally the last step. She frowned and said, "Oh, we only take Visa."

That would've been nice to know at the beginning. I checked my debit card and, luckily, it was a Visa. As I handed it to her, she said, "You should really apply for a Costco Visa credit card."

I politely told her no, and she told me how much I would regret not having one when I inevitably decided to opt for that Disney cruise and Executive membership.

That was the final straw. I said, "I'm done. I don't want to be a member here." We left the store and drove straight to Sam's to sign up. Six years later, we've easily spent five figures at Sam's . . . and

\$0 at Costco. I will probably never have a Costco membership, because I felt both unwelcomed by the employees and inconvenienced by the process.

Bad first impressions are difficult for customers to forget. It's far easier for apathy to kick in when customers don't have much skin in the game—especially when they can quickly find a suitable alternative.

The A Team

Your brand isn't just your logo or your products. To a customer, *every* employee represents the brand. It's whoever seats them at the table when they walk in for lunch. Whoever takes them for a demo ride at the dealership. Whoever handles their paperwork and payment before their appointment. To many leaders, this reality is both exhilarating and a tad frightening. It also underscores the importance of striving not just for superfan *customers*, but superfan *employees*. (You'll find much more about how to create those in Chapter 18.)

Someone recently offered me this unsolicited opinion of treadmills: “You never see anyone in shape on a treadmill. Fit people run outside, where there's fresh air and scenery. You know who you see on treadmills? Fat people.”

This hot take would have been eyebrow-raising enough from anyone, but it was especially mind-bending considering the source: the guy delivering my new treadmill!

That's right, immediately after he hoisted the several-hundred-pound exercise machine up a flight of stairs and down a hallway, he shared that wisdom with me.

I looked at him for a few seconds, trying to figure out if he was joking. He wasn't. He went on to tell me that he *never* uses treadmills, even though he's got “a sick company discount” and belongs to

★ ★ ★ YOUR ★ ★ ★

BRAND

— ISN'T JUST —

YOUR LOGO

a twenty-four-hour gym. In fact, he said, he *only* runs outside . . . at least thirty miles every week, even when it's snowing or 100 degrees.

Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "You're not big though. Why did you buy an expensive treadmill? Do you have a fat husband or something? Either way, you should just run outside."

I would've assumed he worked for a third-party delivery company if it wasn't for the logo on his shirt. I didn't ask how long he'd been at the company, or why he took a job delivering and assembling treadmills. I just thanked him for his help and said goodbye.

Isn't it fascinating how one employee's performance can shape someone's entire perception of a brand? Now, every time I see the NordicTrack logo, all I think about is that delivery man. I've told the story to dozens of friends (not to mention thousands of strangers from stages and on the internet), and it has impacted the way some of them think about the brand, too.

Your brand's reputation is being shaped every day, in every interaction with every customer. Any employee can be responsible for the first (and maybe last!) impression someone forms about your brand. The stakes are high, so let's talk about how to get it right.

◀◀ SUPERQUICK! REWIND ▶▶

Your brand is an ever-changing entity whose reputation is shaped by the interactions your customers have with your employees every day, online and off. Everyone representing your business is a member of the experience department. It's not just about the stuff you sell—it's about the *experience* surrounding it.



4

This Is How We Do It

.....

Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.

WALT DISNEY



WHEN MY husband, Jeff, and I began telling our friends and family we were expecting a baby, I was surprised by how many asked, “What are you doing for the gender reveal?”

It was 2017, when—although they were popular—gender-reveal parties weren’t quite the crashing-airplanes, blowing-up-cannons, setting-forests-on-fire soirees they’ve now become.

Two years before *The Atlantic* published an article titled “How Many People Have to Die Before We’re Done with Gender Reveals?” (with a subhead that read, “Sadly, this is not a hypothetical question”), I was becoming increasingly annoyed with my friends’ incessant questions about something that I considered to be a total waste of energy. These conversations went something like this:

Well-meaning friend #1: What are you doing for your gender reveal?

Me: Won’t the doctor just tell me? We’re paying a lot for this pregnancy, and it seems like that detail should be included.

Well-meaning friend #2: Have you decided when you're having your gender reveal yet?

Me: I am growing a human being inside my body! Why isn't that enough? This is an example of society expecting too much from women.

Well-meaning friend #3: You should really do your gender reveal as soon as possible so that you can start decorating your nursery and registering for your baby shower!

Me: So once I complete this task, I'll be rewarded by two more difficult-sounding tasks I don't want to do? And I'll still be throwing up three times a day? Awesome!

Luckily, Jeff had a better attitude about this than me. "C'mon," he urged. "It might be fun. Let's do something that doesn't involve us planning a party. What if we asked a celebrity to open the envelope for us?"

I said I could get on board for that idea, but he should choose the celebrity. He said the name before I even finished my sentence: "Jim Harbaugh!"

Jim Harbaugh is the coach of the University of Michigan football team, but he's no typical coach. He's like the archetype of the Perfect College Football Coach™. His dad was a football coach at Michigan in the 1970s, so Jim and his siblings grew up running around the field in Ann Arbor. A decade later, Jim enrolled at the University of Michigan and became the team's star quarterback.

He went on to play in the NFL before super-successful coaching stints in college football and in the NFL. By the time Jeff and I started dating in 2008, Michigan's football program began a string of unsuccessful seasons and lost its luster. In late 2014, after two

short-tenured coaches, the program was looking for a new leader to come in and turn things around. When rumors started flying that Michigan's favorite son might be open to the idea of leaving the NFL to take the job, the Wolverine faithful began crossing their fingers.

Shirts saying "Ann Arbaugh" sold out almost instantly. College kids and alums alike started sporting Jim's pant style of choice, khakis. Bloggers were monitoring flight manifests and real estate listings by the hour to look for clues about Harbaugh visits to Ann Arbor.

When it was announced that Coach Harbaugh had, in fact, accepted the job at Michigan, millions of fans—including my husband—went crazy.

Jeff grew up in Michigan. Jim Harbaugh was the quarterback at the very first live game Jeff's father took him to see. Those happy memories helped lay the foundation for Jeff to enroll at the University of Michigan a decade later.

During our years together, I had accompanied Jeff to dozens of Michigan games. Every fall, we crisscrossed the U.S. watching the team play.

For all of these reasons, when Jeff suggested Jim Harbaugh, my heart sank.

"Wonderful," I thought. "Now, in addition to everyone bugging me about this dumb gender reveal, I'm going to have to deal with a husband who will be heartbroken when his hero doesn't write back to him."

I kept my skepticism to myself and said, "Great idea!"

We didn't know Jim Harbaugh. Undeterred, we sent him a letter anyway. After all, we were at least relatively sure which building on campus his office was in.

We wrote a note saying how much fun we'd had at Michigan games over the years and asked if Coach Harbaugh would be kind enough

★ ★ YOU CAN'T BUY ★ ★

SUPERFANS

★ ★ YOU CAN ONLY ★ ★

CREATE THEM

to, in any fashion he chose, let us know the gender of our baby. We included a “letter of intent” from our baby-to-be. Letters of intent are what high school players sign when they commit to teams. We included some cute puns, signed the letter “Baby Hodak,” and put it in an envelope, along with the sealed ultrasound picture.

Even though I’d heard anecdotally that Coach Harbaugh is a nice guy, I didn’t expect any reply. I’m guessing college football coaches are pretty busy. That’s why I asked the ultrasound tech for a second sealed copy of the photo. I planned to open it in a couple of weeks so I could put all of this “gender reveal” nonsense behind me and move on to more important things, like finding pants I could fit into.

I was shocked when I saw a letter in our mailbox a few days later with a University of Michigan logo. I thought it was a coincidence until I saw “Harbaugh” scrawled above the return address. I Facetimed Jeff so we could open it together. We were stunned to find a handwritten note that read:

Baby Hodak,

I have carefully studied the information from your mom and dad, Jeff and Brittany, and on behalf of the University of Michigan am offering you a 2035 scholarship. Hopefully, with “God willing and the creek not rising,” I will be here to coach you.

“Go Blue”

JIM HARBAUGH

I hadn’t even been counting on a reply—I was *definitely* not expecting a handwritten scholarship offer! And while I was excited to know that my little boy was (probably) the youngest recruit in college sports history, I was even more thrilled at the acknowledgment the letter represented.

Someone who had never even met us did something truly kind and meaningful for no personal gain, despite what I assume is an endless list of to-dos. It was an amazing gesture that meant the world to us.

More Than a Feeling

The moment I received that note, I became a University of Michigan football superfan. One card was more effective at turning me into a loyal Wolverine than all the years I'd spent going to Michigan games and tailgates and pep rallies, because it connected *my* story to the *team's* story. A real, tangible connection . . . not a connection through marriage. The halo effect meant I was immediately a superfan of not just Coach Harbaugh and the team, but of *everything* at the University of Michigan. Why? Because that's what he represented—just like you and every one of your colleagues are representing your company.

A few quick internet searches revealed that we were far from the first family Coach Harbaugh had gone out of his way to show kindness to. I found several stories about him sending notes, game balls, and other gifts to fans' weddings, christenings, and bar mitzvahs. He's not some untouchable celebrity whose schedule is too packed to acknowledge people; he's a man of character who leads by example, even when no one is watching.

There are several instances of Jim Harbaugh connecting his story with fans' stories publicly, too—often with many fans simultaneously. My favorite example is a tweet he sent a few days after Halloween one year. It was a photo of himself standing beside a dry-erase board filled with photos of people who'd dressed as him for Halloween. There were about a hundred pictures, featuring fans of all ages decked out in his trademark khakis, Michigan hat, and various maize and blue

ensembles. His tweet read: “Great to see people attacking Halloween with an enthusiasm unknown to mankind! #GoBlue.” Harbaugh fans recognize the phrase as one of the coach’s favorite mantras.

How did every person who saw themselves in that image feel? The same way Jeff and I felt when we got that letter in the mail. Like they were part of something bigger. Like they were *seen*. Sharing that tweet, and others like it, likely secured more goodwill with those fans than any amount of advertising ever could have.

The best marketing doesn’t cost anything. You can’t buy superfans—you can only *create* them.

If you’re thinking, “It’s not scalable to send personalized notes to every prospect or customer, and I’m not a celebrity,” let me offer a few thoughts.

On the first point, it is possible to send handwritten notes at scale. There are plenty of tech solutions, AI and otherwise, that automate outreach. You can also leverage technology to take other things off your plate to give you more time to write notes. Several successful leaders I know time-block thirty minutes to an hour in their calendars every day to share gratitude, either in written form or in emails. And you can delegate or outsource the more annoying aspects of handwritten notes (shopping for cards, looking up addresses, writing the envelopes, adding stamps, and so on).

And on the second point, you don’t have to be a celebrity to make an impact. The power lies in showing people you care about them by taking the time to acknowledge them in some way.

SUPER Model

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You're going to see this next point repeated several times throughout this book. That's because it's critically important to remember it. I want it so etched into your brain that you think about it randomly, when you're brushing your teeth or stopped at a red light. You ready? Here goes:

Superfans are created at the intersection of *your* story and *every customer's* story.



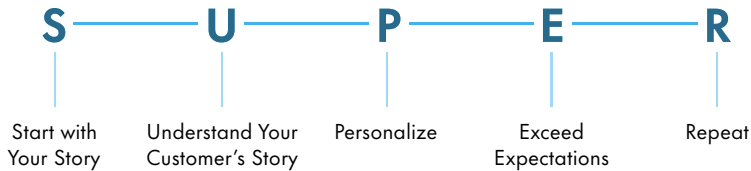
They are forged at that magical, overlapping point where it becomes obvious that you share a common purpose or passion. *Your thing* matters and is relevant to *their thing*.

That core principle is the foundation of a five-step system called the SUPER Model that I've taught to thousands of leaders over the

past decade. It's helped small-business owners grow their annual revenue from under \$100,000 to more than \$10,000,000, and it's inspired leaders at Fortune 500 brands how to reframe the way they think about customer experience. You're going to learn it, but first you need to internalize this truth: superfans are created at the intersection of your story and every customer's story.

The SUPER Model is powerful. And, like most powerful models for change, it is simple by design. Simple to remember, simple to teach to your team, and simple to implement, measure, and refine as needed. That's right, *this* SUPER Model gets even better over time. It's like the Heidi Klum of customer experience frameworks.

If you want to create superfans, being great is no longer good enough. You've got to be SUPER:



The rest of this book is going to teach you to do just that. Here's a quick look at what's coming.

S | Start with your story

Why *start* with your story? Because your clearly defined story is your superpower. It's what helps you go from a potential commodity in the minds of your customers and prospects to a category of one.

In Part 2 of this book, you'll get laser-focused on exactly how to shape and share your story. What sets you apart from every competitor, current and future? What's that secret sauce that no one could

copy? Getting clarity on your story is one of the most powerful (and profitable) exercises you can undertake, and the benefits will last a lifetime.

U | Understand your customer's story

You remember where superfans are created, right? At the intersection of your story and every customer's story. So, after getting clear on your story, the next step is to turn your attention to that of your customer.

Any good marketer will tell you that when you try to attract everyone, you end up engaging no one. And yet that's what so many brands and businesspeople do: craft forgettable messages for mass consumption by large, general audiences. In Part 3 of this book, you're going to learn a better way. I'll teach you a foolproof formula that will help you get closer to your customers than ever before.

P | Personalize

The third step of the SUPER Model is *personalize*. In Part 4 of this book, we'll take a deep dive into how to personalize your process to better connect with the right customers in the right way, whether you're working on a handful of six- or seven-figure deals or tens of thousands of direct-to-consumer transactions worth a few dollars each.

E | Exceed expectations

The letter *E* in SUPER is all about exceeding expectations. In today's competitive environment, customers aren't just comparing you to the best product or service they've received from your competitors. They're comparing you to the best product or service they've received *anywhere*.

Exceeding client expectations isn't a nice-to-have—it's a must-have. In Part 5 of this book, we'll talk about intentional experience design, getting buy-in from your team, and how to recover when a customer's expectations aren't met.

R | Repeat

SUPER customer experience doesn't happen by accident. It happens when systems are designed, taught, implemented, and measured—again and again. By the end of this book, you'll be equipped with the tools you need to wow your customers, whether you're a part-time solopreneur, a customer service rep, or the leader of a billion-dollar brand.

◀◀ **SUPERQUICK! REWIND** ▶▶

Customer experience is not a department—it's a philosophy that must be embraced by every member of an organization. When executed correctly, it becomes your most powerful competitive advantage. This is encapsulated in the SUPER Model:

- S.** Start with your story.
- U.** Understand your customer's story.
- P.** Personalize.
- E.** Exceed expectations.
- R.** Repeat.

Tour Dates

On the Road Again

Want to hang out in real life? Me too! I'm always on tour, giving entertaining, high-energy keynotes packed with actionable takeaways to help organizations big and small create superfans.

I accept about forty in-person speaking invitations per year, plus virtual events and a limited number of consulting engagements, from some of the greatest brands in the world.

Find out why amazing companies like American Express, *Forbes*, HousingWire, Total Expert, and PrimeLending have invited me back again and again at BrittanyHodak.com/Speaking.

PHOTO: NICOLE MURPHY



PHOTO: FIZAH RAZA



About the Author

Hello, It's Me

BRITTANY HODAK is an award-winning entrepreneur, speaker, and author

who has delivered keynotes across the globe to organizations including American Express and the United Nations. She has written hundreds of articles for *Forbes*, *Adweek*, *Success*, and other top publications; she has appeared on programs on NBC, CBS, ABC, and FOX; and she has worked with some of the world's biggest brands and entertainers, including Walmart, Disney, Katy Perry, and Dolly Parton. *Entrepreneur* calls her “the expert at creating loyal fans for your brand.” Brittany is unapologetically obsessed with customer experience and, more than anything, she hopes *you* are a superfan of this book.

We Should Be Friends

@BrittanyHodak | Hello@BrittanyHodak.com | BrittanyHodak.com