

Book Study Guide

The following is a list of key discussion topics presented in *The Zappos Experience*. This information is presented in the book as the “Try These On for Size” sections and may serve as group conversation starters.

Chapter 2:

- 1) Do you have explicit corporate values? If so, do they reflect a blend of founding principles and the evolving demands of the marketplace? Or are those values static and immutable?
- 2) What do your customers value? How do your corporate values match up with the wants, needs, and desires of your customers?
- 3) Since values can be both explicit (stated) and implicit (unstated), do your corporate actions align with stated values? If not, what do the major decisions of your business suggest about your company’s real values?
- 4) How willing are you to consider revising stated values to match your demonstrated actions or revising actions to match your stated values? What might those revisions look like?
- 5) What are your personal values? Have you taken the time to examine your values lately? If you ask people who know you well, what values would they ascribe to you? Would those values align with your self-perception?
- 6) From a business perspective, are you willing to ask your entire company to weigh in on your current and aspirational values? What percentage of your company would say that your current values meet the CRUD test of being Credible, Relevant, Unique and Durable?
- 7) How would you describe the values that currently define your company?

- 8) What values can you credibly aspire to in your business? What would it take to move those values from aspiration to reality?
- 9) How prominent are your values in the prospective applicant's journey to your job posting?
- 10) Do you specifically direct applicants to review your core values?
- 11) Have you involved your employees in videos, or other creative vehicles that fit your business, to give a flavor for the role of values in your organization?
- 12) Do you give applicants options on how they present their application or cover letter so you can get a richer sense of them even before you look at their qualifications?

Chapter 3:

- 1) Is your onboarding process the same for frontline workers and executives? If separate tracks exist, what does that suggest about your culture?
- 2) How many hours of your orientation process address policy, procedures, etc.? How many hours are dedicated toward culture?
- 3) Does your onboarding process immerse participants in your culture or does it simply preview it?
- 4) How effectively does your orientation process build empathy for the customer experience and create interdepartmental connections?
- 5) What do you think of Zappos paying new hires to leave?
- 6) If you had to guess, what percentage of new hires would leave under a similar offer in your business?
- 7) Would you ever consider paying people to exit your company if they sensed they were not a culture fit? Why or why not?
- 8) If given a similar offer after orientation, does your onboarding process sufficiently reflect your culture such that new hires could make a realistic assessment of their fit?

Chapter 4:

- 1) How much do you know about your customers' wants, needs and desires?
- 2) What have you done to design a customer experience that not only responds to customer needs but also anticipates them?
- 3) Have you mapped your customer journey across all contact points and do you understand the sequence of events your customers encounter as they seek to have their needs met?
- 4) What qualitative and quantitative methods are you using to track your customers' journey with your business?
- 5) How are you using the voice of the customers to refine processes that will make their time with you as effortless as possible?
- 6) Are enhancing customer knowledge and accuracy of order processing important aspects of your service value proposition?
- 7) How do you help customers make objective, well-informed purchase decisions?
- 8) If order fulfillment is important to your brand, how well are you executing?
- 9) Losses for fulfillment error rates of 10-15% in the drive-through quick service restaurant sector are estimated at \$8 billion. How much do you think your company could gain, by way of revenue and customer satisfaction, if you improved order fulfillment accuracy?
- 10) What opportunities exist in your company to innovate inventory strategies or to build redundant systems of accuracy checking?

Chapter 5:

- 1) Are you focused on only the speed of your service?
- 2) What actions of leadership demonstrate a corporate commitment to service velocity?
- 3) What is the Internet chatter about your service speed and effectiveness?

- 4) Do service standards exist for service urgency across all channels of contact (phone, chat, web, face-to-face) with customers? Is your service being delivered consistently against those standards?
- 5) Are your customers aware of your service velocity standards? How would customers test your service against your standards or against your competition? What would they find?
- 6) From the standpoint of being a learning organization, is your business a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire?
- 7) Would your company be described as nurturing new and expansive patterns of thinking, and is it a place where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning to see the whole together?"
- 8) What processes and training do you have in place to drive product and service knowledge? Is support for this training consistent or does it fluctuate with economic factors?
- 9) How effective is your service recovery? What are your customers saying about the effectiveness of your response to product or service breakdowns?
- 10) Does your leadership set the tone for the importance of the service recovery effort?

Chapter 6:

- 1) What are the small and epic acts that lead to your service story?
- 2) What are people remembering about the way contact with your business made them feel?
- 3) If a brand is what people say about you when you are not around, what is your business and personal brand?
- 4) How are you capturing and retelling large and small wow's delivered by your team?
- 5) What is your "way we serve statement?"

- 6) If a group of researchers traipsed across your corporate landscape asking how customers should feel doing business with you, what range of responses would they hear?
- 7) How would you characterize the balance your business has struck when it comes to service consistency and personalized customization?
- 8) When you look at your company policies, do they lead to both smoother business operations and enriched customer experiences? If not which ones might be eliminated or modified?
- 9) In what ways do your people act to serve customer needs, even when those needs don't seem to serve the short term interests of the business? Would you ever send a customer to a competitor, if it was in the best interest of the customer?

Chapter 7:

- 1) How are you helping your service talent develop greater “personal emotional connection” skills?
- 2) Are you assessing your service staff's ability to build rapport and participate in relevant and engaging personal discussions or do your evaluations focus exclusively on things like “smiling,” “eye contact,” and “transaction accuracy?”
- 3) Is your service quality assurance program growth-oriented (goal-setting, honest feedback without ratings) or designed as a metric of performance?
- 4) How comprehensive are your service feedback mechanisms? Do employees have input as to the information solicited? Do you actively ask customers to share their side of what will likely turn out to be “wow” stories?
- 5) Are you using a variant of the Net Promoter Score (NPS)? Can you isolate data from NPS results and trace it back to individual service providers? Are you sharing the aggregate and individuals results of your NPS surveys as a tool to enhance emotional connections with customers?

- 6) Can you imagine asking your customers to rate your staff and offer comments in response to the following question: “If you had your own company that was focused upon service, how likely would you be to hire this person to work for you?” What do you suspect results would look like across your business? Would you also provide those results to your staff as a tool for enhancing service excellence?
- 7) Would you be willing to ask your staff how happy they are at work on a MONTHLY basis? What percentage of your team do you suspect would answer the survey each month? What do you think those results would reveal?
- 8) If you did survey your staff monthly, would you provide them all of the results of that study, including every comment provided?
- 9) How much does your customer trust your business? How much does your staff trust leadership? How do you know?

Chapter 8:

- 1) What would happen if all leaders in an area of your business left tomorrow? Have you developed other staff that could seamlessly take over those leadership positions?
- 2) If you hire new employees straight out of high school, trade school or college, how workforce ready are they? What strategies have you developed to supplement any workforce readiness deficits in areas of core knowledge for your business?
- 3) In addition to time on the job and performing well in a current position, what skills, knowledge and behaviors do entry-level staff members need to possess before they advance in your organization?
- 4) Have you developed a map of typical progression pathways in your company with attendant milestones? Have you identified the skills, knowledge and behaviors required at each milestone?
- 5) Do you discuss personalized progression plans with your staff?

- 6) Have you developed toolkits, recommended/required reading, on-the-job training activities or cross-training strategies to assist your staff members' progress?
- 7) What is the nature of leadership-level training at your workplace? Does it reflect a balance of soft and hard skill development?
- 8) Do you accept the late coach Lombardi's premise that leaders are not born but made by effort and hard work? If so, what "work" is involved in your leadership skill training program?
- 9) How do you encourage personal and professional growth in your business?
- 10) Can you imagine having a "dream manager" or "coach" in your company? Would that position be an unnecessary expense or a justifiable investment?
- 11) What is your 30-day goal? What are the 30-day goals of your team members? Who will follow up to hold you accountable and celebrate your growth to the "next level?" Who follows up and celebrates your team members' 30-day goals?

Chapter 9:

- 1) How elastic is your brand? What are the limits of the product or service offerings you could provide for your customers?
- 2) If asked, would your customers view you as a provider of such quality customer experiences that they would want you to venture into other industries? If so, in what industries might they suggest your involvement? If not, what would you need to do to be considered in that way?
- 3) Could you imagine offering customer experience or leadership training to other businesses? If so, what is it about your business that is worthy of study?
- 4) What lessons might you learn from Zappos? Are you actively involved in benchmarking other businesses and/or participating in a community of business leaders who share your interest in service excellence?
- 5) How effectively have you leveraged social media in your business?

- 6) Have you encouraged a large percentage of your workforce to responsibly but actively and authentically communicate through the social media?
- 7) Is your approach to social media built around conversation and connection?
- 8) Have you capitalized on the power of videos in blogs and product presentations?
- 9) Do your online videos and blog content reflect quality writing and production? Are your videos converting into sales and building relationships between your customers and your brand?

Chapter 10:

- 1) How genuinely committed are you to the joy and fun of your work environment?
- 2) Has your commitment to workplace positivity sustained through the ups and downs of the economy such that you have created “an environment focused on key human capital elements?”
- 3) How innovative and interactive is your work environment? Do you accept Malcolm Gladwell’s view that, “the best ideas in any workplace arise out of casual contacts among different groups within the same company?” If so, how are you encouraging that casual contact?
- 4) Are you thinking about workplace fun in the context of short, mid, and long-term employee joy and happiness?
- 5) How do you encourage employees to playfully get to know people beyond their immediate work team? Do you have a process that rivals the *face game*?
- 6) Do you have daily, ritualized and brief activities (like the *Minute to Win It* example) that energize employees to more enthusiastically engage in their work?
- 7) Are your managers willing to be silly to incentivize employee performance? How frequently are your performance goals linked to playful outcomes?
- 8) Do you have reward and recognition programs in place that involve employees tracking the value-based behaviors of their peers? Do those programs recognize extraordinary

things done to wow colleagues or are they only developed to recognize extraordinary efforts directed toward customers?

- 9) What recognition programs do you have that require staff to acknowledge people outside of their workgroups?
- 10) Would you consider allowing staff to provide financial bonuses to peers at their own discretion? Why or why not?

Chapter 11:

- 1) How would you and your staff assess the level of work stress in your environment?
- 2) What is being done to mitigate the toxicity of the psychosocial work environment, remove emotional hazards, modulate the pace and intensity of work, and increase your employees' sense of control?
- 3) What is the impact of your workplace on the families and acquaintances of your staff?
- 4) Do you have, or would you consider, a nap zone or quiet area in your workplace? Why or why not? How do you use research on workplace productivity to guide decisions like initiating a trial "power nap" initiative?
- 5) Do you think your workplace is passing the "alarm clock test" or is work less attractive than the snooze button?
- 6) Assuming your resources are limited, how are you partnering with outside service providers to offer discounted services to make the lives of your staff easier (dry cleaning pick-up or chair massage, for example)?
- 7) How are you mobilizing your workforce to make "face-time" contributions in your community?
- 8) On a continuum from extremely undercompensated to extremely overcompensated, factoring all elements of how employees are treated – not just pay and perks, where do you think most employees would rate your company?

- 9) What low-cost ways (e.g. small acts of recognition or appreciation) could you use to increase the likelihood that your staff would see your business as more than equitable?
- 10) Do you believe in the principle of reciprocity or are you concerned that too many staff will take without giving back? How does your perspective affect the way you lead?
- 11) Do your teams set audacious performance goals? Is performance against those goals consistent with your level of investment in your culture?
- 12) Are your employees evangelists of your brand? How can you tell?
- 13) How many of your job applicants are referred by your existing employees? Are your customers and other observers talking about the way you care for them and for your people?