



# Book Lead with Your Customer

## Transforming Your Culture and Brand into World-Class Excellence

Mark David Jones and J. Jeff Kober  
ASTD Publications, 2010  
[Listen now](#)

- play
- pause

00:00  
00:00

---

### Recommendation

Many business leaders view their corporate culture and their brand image as two separate entities. To achieve “world-class excellence,” executives should treat these as two sides of the same coin. Former Walt Disney Company executives Mark David Jones and J. Jeff Kober outline their “World-Class Excellence Model,” which encompasses service concepts any organization can use to deliver exceptional customer service and engender employee loyalty. The authors offer case studies from successful companies, including Disney and Apple. These ideas aren’t novel, but *BooksInShort* finds that the book demonstrates how to apply them to your firm.

### Take-Aways

- All businesses, whether they sell a product or service, or operate in the public or private sector, have one goal in common: to succeed.
- Your employees are “internal customers”; your clients are “external customers.”
- The “World-Class Excellence Model” centers on your company’s values and vision.
- This model consists of the “Six Ps Customer Formula”: “Promise, People, Place, Process, Product and Price.”
- Your company culture makes an internal promise to your employees; your brand makes an external promise to your consumers.
- A company is only as good as its people, that is, its employees and its consumers.
- Place is your workplace environment and your products’ physical or virtual setting.
- Internal processes affect smooth operations; external processes govern product delivery.
- Your internal products are the compensation and benefits you offer employees. Your external products include your customers’ entire interaction with your brand.
- Your customers’ price equates to the cost of the product and the buying experience. Your employees’ price is the time and effort they spend working at your firm.

### Summary

#### Chain of Excellence

All businesses, whether they sell a product or service, or operate in the public or private sector, have one goal in common: to succeed. Each firm struggles with the problems of budget constraints, unresponsive or obstinate leaders, employee disengagement, customer complaints and burgeoning competition. Envision workers and consumers as the same: your customers. Your “internal customers” are your staffers, and your “external customers” are your clients.

“The long-term, real-world success of excellent organizations is the result of their commitment to tenaciously follow tangible, pragmatic best practices.”

Use the four-part “Chain Reaction of Excellence Model” to develop your organization. Each level of success leads to the next:

1. **“Leadership excellence”** – Encourage action and promote achievement by communicating a clear vision and creating an environment conducive to success.
2. **“Employee engagement”** – Motivated, caring and committed workers are essential.
3. **“Customer satisfaction”** – Inspire passion and loyalty from your customers.
4. **“Loyalty and long-term success”** – Successful organizations boast customer and employee advocates who generate revenues and value over the long term.

## “The Customer Compass”

World-class companies know what their customers want, and shape their products and services accordingly. They collect demographic and psychographic information about their clients. Acting on this data enables them to outperform the competition, exceed customer expectations and engender lasting loyalty. Study your customers via the four points of the Customer Compass, which correspond to your consumers’ unique qualities:

1. **“Needs”** – Customers’ needs go beyond satisfaction with your product or service. Humans share five basic needs: “to be heard and be understood,” “to belong and contribute,” “to feel stable and in control,” “to feel significant and special” and “to be successful and reach one’s potential.”
2. **“Expectations”** – People have different expectations walking into a used car lot than they do entering the lobby of the Ritz-Carlton. Once you understand your customers’ expectations, provide an encounter that goes beyond their preconceptions.
3. **“Style”** – Recognize the different ways people interact, process data and respond. Then customize your products and services in accordance with their preferences.
4. **“Walk”** – To understand people, walk a mile in their shoes. Only by experiencing first-hand what your employees and customers see and feel can you understand them. For example, every executive at Starbucks must spend time working as a barista, while higher-ups at Pret Star make sandwiches for customers several times a year.

## A Strategic Model for Achieving Excellence

The “World-Class Excellence Model” helps leaders with an overall understanding of business strategy by identifying best practices and techniques. The model’s purpose is to: “Anticipate the customer experience, recover well from the unexpected, lead employees through a transformation initiative” and “sustain continuous improvement to build a legacy of excellence.” Include your staffers in your definition of “customer.” Linking these internal and external points of view allows you to build your external brand as you create strategies that promote internal excellence.

“Unless you understand what your customers want, you will not succeed.”

The heart of any effective strategy is a clear understanding of your company’s “values and vision.” These guide organizational decision making, as well as hiring, training, development and employee recognition. Delineate “operational” tactics that are specific enough to guide your workers’ behavior. For example, Chicago’s Primera Engineers guides its staff’s day-to-day conduct according to the acronym QTIB, which stands for “quality, teamwork, integrity and balance.” At the Walt Disney Company, every worker upholds the values of “safety, show, courtesy and efficiency.” Your corporate vision inspires your staff by proclaiming your business’s “higher purpose.” At Disney, every employee’s ultimate goal is to “create happiness.” Make sure every member of your organization understands and embraces your company’s values. Hire people that fit your firm’s philosophy, and reward behaviors that reinforce its terms.

## “The Six Ps”

The Six *Ps* are the vehicles by which companies deliver their values and vision. Each helps serve your employees and your customers.

### 1. “Promise”

The first *P* refers to the promise your company culture makes. Employees have certain expectations about where they work. Every day, organizations either compromise or fulfill this promise. Companies defend their internal promises by acting in a way that upholds their stated values and vision, committing to above-the-bar work, reinforcing this commitment via language and symbols, and supporting the culture with rituals and traditions.

“Your organization will change for the better when you broaden your concept of ‘customer’ to include your own employees.”

Walt Disney believed in experiencing his amusement park as his guests did. He took the Jungle Boat ride and was disappointed that it lasted only four and a half minutes instead of the prescribed seven. He and the ride supervisor, Dick Nunis, discussed how the pilots should run the ride. Over the next weeks, Nunis retrained and timed every pilot until every trip took seven minutes. A month later, Walt rode the Jungle Boat several different times and gave Nunis and the pilots a thumbs-up gesture. Disney upheld his company promise by being present around the park, training employees and promoting Nunis.

“Creating your organization’s culture and building your brand are inextricably linked.”

Externally, “promise” stands for the pledge your brand makes to consumers. Your brand promise is implicit in your marketing messages. Fail to live up to it, and you’ll alienate consumers and destroy their trust. Align your brand promise with your core values and capabilities. Reinforce this promise through your design, logos, marketing materials and service. Make sure employees understand the brand promise so they can deliver an integrated, comprehensive experience.

### 2. “People”

Your company is only as good as its employees, so prioritize supporting your people, the second *P*. Care about them as individuals. For example, Con-way provides food and drinks for its drivers on hot days. Hire only people who fit your culture. Use your orientation program to teach corporate history, values, vision and culture. Make learning and development important. Use reward and recognition programs to reinforce desired behavior and exemplary contributions.

“Everything in the workplace is like a billboard – it advertises a message about the quality of what you do.”

In an external sense, “people” also refers to your customers. Your frontline employees bear the most responsibility for delivering customer service. Create strategies so they can optimize your buyers’ experiences. Staffers must understand how to interact with customers to uphold the company’s values. The Ritz-Carlton outlines three behaviors that every worker must know and use:

1. “A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest’s name.”
2. “Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest’s needs.”
3. “Fond farewell. Give a warm goodbye and use the guest’s name.”

“Any serious effort to build up the culture requires intense focus on the most important resource of any organization: its human resources.”

Designed interactions that make customers feel special are “choreographed care.” At Harley-Davidson in Orlando, Florida, employees ring a bell when someone buys a motorcycle.

### 3. “Place”

For your people to excel at their jobs, create an environment that allows them to do so. This includes having the right hardware and software, correct lighting and comfortable furnishings. Give customer-service employees a “back of the house” break-time area as a safe place to unwind, decompress and recharge. Your environment should echo and promote your company culture. Staff members at Red Bull’s office in London use slides to descend from floor to floor. In the early days of Google, employees toiled away on plywood boards held up by sawhorses.

“It’s human nature to take promises very personally – regardless of whether it is in a personal or professional setting.”

In the external arena, “place” means creating a physical or virtual area that adds value to the customer experience. Augment customer interaction through all five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. The workplace influences customers’ perceptions of the quality of your product or service. Leverage your location to enhance your customers’ experiences. Apple stores, for example, allow customers to try out their products. In 2007, Apple won the title of “most sales per square foot of retail space.”

### 4. “Processes”

When processes impede accomplishment, an organization has issues. This happens, for example, when workers can’t get approval for necessary purchases or receive the runaround when trying to solve problems. Inefficient processes adversely affect employee productivity, because reaching any goal requires extra time, effort or money. Many companies combat inefficient processes by reducing the layers of management and keeping individuals and teams informed and connected. Identifying and breaking down “silos” – vertical departments that put their operational well-being ahead of the well-being of the company – is essential in streamlining processes.

“World-class organizations ensure that what they deliver is equal to or greater than what they promise.”

Most people dread going to the Department of Motor Vehicles because it involves waiting in long lines, filling out duplicate forms, finding out you don’t have the correct information, and the like. Poor processes block a good customer experience. Don’t let your organization’s processes make it a burden to do business with you. Streamline your processes so customers only have to ask for information one time, so they don’t have long waits and so they can solve problems with “one-stop solutions.”

### 5. “Product”

Treat your employees like internal customers. The products that matter to your workforce include salary, benefits and perks, such as on-site childcare. Compensating people appropriately will keep them committed and energized. Focus on offering a “culture-based” package that considers the employee’s overall experience. Offer competitive pay and health coverage, and make sure your “non-salary related” benefits are up to par. These include paying reimbursements for class fees, offering career development and training, underwriting health care for part-time workers, matching donations to charities, paying for community volunteer time and providing extended illness or maternity pay.

“Employees yearn to be associated with an organization of which they can be proud.”

Providing a quality product or service to external customers is a given, but companies should consider the variables that surround the brand experience, such as design, packaging and display. Find a balance between quality and quantity. Determine how many product choices you want to offer. Too many options might confuse or overwhelm your customers.

### 6. “Price”

For your employees, “price” refers to the time and effort they spend working for your company. Part of the price is intangible, such as emotional expenditures and their feelings about the work they do. For customers, the word “price” also has tangible and intangible interpretations. The tangible experience is the amount of the money clients pay for your product or service. The intangible price includes the feeling your product or service engenders in addition to its overall experience.

“Values are what we care most deeply about; they are the foundation of your corporate culture.”

Although world-class companies do everything within their power to avoid mistakes, errors and letdowns will occur. The appropriate response is threefold. First, give your frontline employees the power to act autonomously so they can offer immediate solutions or reparations. Next, ask workers to generate low-cost or even no-cost ideas regarding improving service. Last, learn from every mistake and put processes in place to avoid repeating them.

# About the Authors

**Mark David Jones** is Chief Operating Officer of World Class Benchmarking, where **J. Jeff Kober** is CEO.

---

---