

# INTRODUCTION

*The words printed here are concepts. You must go through the experiences.*

Saint Augustine

Most choices in life usually present us with the chance for a do-over. A car purchase, for instance. You'll most likely do that more than once. Don't like the coffee or service you got at yesterday's café? Go to a different one today. Are your instincts flashing Code Red in the back of your mind while talking with a potential business partner, employer, or employee? Cut the conversation short and usher that person out the door. Sure, there's a disappointment, but that's nothing compared with the worry, loss of energy and money, and unrecoverable waste of time that a star-crossed commitment would have represented.

Other choices in life don't leave much room for reconsideration. Marriage, for instance, is at least *supposed* to be a one-time only event. Consequently, one's 25th wedding anniversary is probably going to happen only once in a person's life. Another choice that really can't be changed in, shall we say, mid-stream, is a luxury cruise. When you're long into a cruise and you realize you've made a big mistake, chances are you're stuck with that decision, at least until you reach the next port—or you have the kind of budget that can easily absorb a rescue helicopter.

So, when you combine the two—25th anniversary and luxury cruise—you're a customer with high expectations and much at stake. There's a lot invested in your choice. So naturally, everything has to be perfect down to the last detail.

When my husband, Kent, and I started thinking of ways to celebrate our 25th anniversary, we decided on that luxury cruise—but with some trepidation. What if we put our money down, got into the middle of the ocean, only to discover that we wanted nothing more than to get the heck off *right now*? But we followed a trusted friend's advice and selected SeaDream Yacht Club

for our big event. And everything was just as it was advertised—and reputed—to be. The personal and customized service, the champagne and caviar reception, the fresh flowers and the Belgian linens, food that looked like a Renaissance still-life painting and tasted divine, everything perfect down to the last, most minute detail.

Until the first night. Around 2:00 A.M., Kent and I woke up to the sound of alarms, bells, and whistles. It stopped pretty quickly, so we went back to sleep. The next morning a glance out the window told us we were still out to sea when we should have been portside in Valencia, the first stop on our itinerary. We found a note slipped under our door. It was from the captain, telling us that one of the engines had caught fire overnight. Nothing to worry about, really. We're just limping along on one engine, and the first order of business is to get that engine repaired—which meant that our itinerary was blown to smithereens. We would not be seeing the port of Ibiza. And we'd be waylaid in Valencia for a day or two while waiting for the repairs to be completed.

For those passengers counting on sticking to that particular itinerary, I'm sure it must have been a terrible disappointment to be forced to miss those ports of call. But I was plenty happy with what I could see from the deck, reclining on my *Balinese Dream Bed*, a cold beverage in hand. From my perspective as a CEO obsessed with how companies live out their brand proposition by the way they treat their customers and clients, I could see plenty as a luxuriating passenger watching the ship's values in action from the deck. (No matter how relaxing the vacation, the business hat really never does come off, does it?) And what I saw was more interesting than even the views of Valencia:

- The ship's engineers, who had been immediately flown to Spain from their station in Germany to work on the problem, which they did around the clock until the engine was fixed.
- The ship's director of entertainment, who hired local Flamenco dancers to entertain us, and set up a huge screen on deck, allowing for an impromptu outdoor rock concert video to be shown under the stars to prevent us from getting bored as we waited for the repairs to be completed.
- The ship's owner, who happened to be aboard the yacht during the trip, personally apologizing to all of his guests, and offering us complimentary massages in the ship's spa, a full rebate on the days we were stuck in port, as well as waiving all land excursion fees, and offering a generous discount on future bookings, which a number of the 100 guests took full advantage of before the cruise ended.

For cruises run by other companies, we on the mainland know that things have gone awry by watching disgruntled (or sick or scared) passengers talking into cameras on CNN, swearing they'll never sail again. And on this cruise, there were disappointments, to be sure. But the net result of those unplanned scenarios was that more passengers signed up for additional cruises before leaving the ship than is typical for the cruise line. And Kent and I said to each other: "If we ever go on another cruise, we will only go on a SeaDream Yacht Club cruise."

Pay attention to how we worded this agreement: not only would we use SeaDream Yacht Club again, we would *only* use SeaDream Yacht Club—to the exclusion of all other lines in the luxury cruise space. This is one do-over we'd happily do over again, exactly the same way.

The reason: because of the way in which this cruise line extended its value promise to its clients and then lived out that value proposition, regardless of unexpected circumstances, it has made itself a company that is so integrally self-possessed in what it does, stands for, offers to its clients, and treats its own people, it doesn't have to compete with its competitors. At least in the opinion of these two customers.

Any cruise line can serve up a chilled lobster salad on deck, and keep the drinks cold and coming. But what the SeaDream Yacht Club did to secure our loyalty to the company was the authentic experience it provided: the way it walked its talk. Sure, we shared their frustration in their inability to get us back out to sea as quickly as we had all hoped. The engine part that was needed to get us going again was not readily available. And the generator they rented from a local source stopped working in the middle of the night, leading to temperatures hovering around 80 uncomfortable degrees in the cabins. So, they made up extra beds on deck (those Balinese beds really came in handy!) as well as in the much-cooler library. And they did so with such genuine care, concern, and good humor that the whole thing ended up feeling like a group slumber party.

*Stuff* happens, and it happens to even the best of companies. The way in which the SeaDream staff handled this particular stuff actually provided an opportunity for them to shine in the face of adversity. They passed this particular test with flying colors, which resulted in increased customer admiration and loyalty, despite the mishaps and flaws of this particular trip.

## WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This is not a book about executing a business strategy flawlessly. This book is about creating authentic total experiences that express an organization's core vision and values so integrally and seamlessly governed by an authentic,

core vision that you truly set yourself apart from everyone else in your space. Customers want to do business with you, regardless of the price. Employees want to work for you because of your high performance standards and your vision of what your company offers to the world. All your stakeholders want to work with you because of what you stand for, and because you consistently and dependably deliver on your value proposition.

You will own your place in the market not by how well you execute your strategy but by how well you live out your authenticity in the expression of total experiences that touch your customers, your employees, your community, your vendors—any and all who come into contact with your organization. Those customers who demand a do-over will be coming back to you because they want more of what you have to offer. You'll have no problem delivering it—and this book will show you exactly how to make that happen.

In this book I will introduce you to a tried and true process for creating (or reimagining) an enterprise that delivers precisely the authentic set of experiences that set you apart from everyone else. Here's a rundown:

Chapter 1: Authenticity. This chapter explores the competitive and operational advantages associated with establishing your own authentic enterprise, specifically in keeping with the unique vision you share with all your stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Experience Matters. No matter what the nature of your organization might be, your authenticity is expressed through the experiences of all the people who come into contact with it. This chapter outlines the nine rules of great experiences and how they show up to your stakeholders.

Chapter 3: What Is Total Experience Design™? When you look at your organization's offerings in terms of a total framework of experiences in the realm of the 4P Model™ (Perception, People, Products and Services, Place), you are able to see how they interlock with each other to create what is known as *total experience design*.

Chapter 4: Go Big or Don't Bother. The pursuit of authenticity and total experience design demands a full-out commitment from the leadership so that all the stakeholders feel supported as they embark on this adventure. This chapter challenges you to double-check your true readiness in this endeavor.

Chapter 5: Discover. This chapter launches the 5D Process™ (Discover, Dream, Define, Design, Deliver) that is designed to help you and your team visualize the same ideal and authentic organization and take action to get there. The first D, Discover, shows you how to assess your current situation before you start taking action toward your ideal future.

Chapter 6: Dream. This is the chance to fully explore your organizational creativity and innovation. By following the exercises outlined in this chapter, you and your stakeholders build a shared, vivid, multisensory idea of what your enterprise will be, what it will stand for, and who it will serve. This shared vision will powerfully carry your team forward during the energetic, even uncertain times ahead.

Chapter 7: Define. Now that you know where you are, what your current conditions are, and where you want to go, it is time to identify all the gaps and conditions that keep you from realizing your dream right this very minute. Don't be dismayed by the number of gaps you and your team might identify. It means that you have set the bar high, so your ultimately transformed organization will be an inspiring example of what you are capable of when you establish your authentic dream and achieve it.

Chapter 8: Design. Every enterprise and organization undergoing its authentic transformation will have its own design process to initiate. Still, there are common leadership considerations around supporting your people as they begin designing all the ways to close those gaps that they discovered in the Define phase.

Chapter 9: Deliver. At last! Completion is in sight. Still, you need to track your progress, measure your results, and understand how to continue to lead your people as they are finding their footing in this new environment. And, by the way: completion may be in sight, but don't think you are finished yet. Your journey to authenticity never really ends.