

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER™

A Brief Book Summary Of:

*S.A.L.T. & Pepper: Hank Davis' Recipe For
Success In Retail And Beyond*

Book Summary



THE SALT & PEPPER GROUP

Summary In Brief

Consumers complain about it, managers are frustrated by it, companies are hurt by it and many associates themselves do not seem to really enjoy doing it. “It” is retail customer service, and nearly everyone on all sides of the customer service equation may be losing their connection with the value of the incredible customer service experience.

Certainly Hank Davis did. He’s a customer service representative at a branch of a Chicago retail bank and the protagonist of *S.A.L.T. & PEPPER*, by Millennium Consulting Group’s Richard Henry and co-author Rick Miller. A business handbook, inspirational object lesson and “non-fiction novel,” *S.A.L.T. & PEPPER* entertains even as it provides invaluable lessons about business, customer service, leadership and life.

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER, available at www.saltandpeppergroup.com and on www.amazon.com tells the story of a young man who, led by strong branch and executive leadership, undergoes a transformative change of heart that raises him from unmotivated mediocrity to inspired excellence.

Written for both retail leaders and the customer service professional, the book is required reading for all who seek to become masters of the incredible customer service experience. For those in leadership positions, the book acts as an efficient and effective tool for training, inspiring and leading teams while instilling an attitude and approach focused on exceptional service and personal success.

All of the characters in the book – Hank, his teammates and his managers – are composites based on Henry’s 28 years of study and observation in various business sectors. Everything in the book – the leadership styles and management strategies applied, the retail service techniques implemented and the lessons learned – is based on real-life events, stories and proven service methodologies.

Readable and fast-paced, *S.A.L.T. & PEPPER* is packed with detail and uses practical examples that tell and also show. We see motivational strategies implemented by company leaders and we see Hank put customer service best practices into action.

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER is a “story-teaching” tool that shows:

- How to inspire and motivate individuals to perform at their best.
- How great customer service is a major business differentiator in a business world of razor thin margins and intense competition for customer loyalty.
- How effective leadership and coaching practices can create a highly engaged and directed customer service team, regardless of age or experience.
- Why mastery of customer service is a uniquely valuable path to professional skills development and career advancement.
- Why delivering customers great service can be *fun* and *personally rewarding*.

- How to apply the right techniques for delivering excellent customer service.
- How a simple concept or single encounter can alter, for the better, the trajectory of a person's career and life.

Why The Book And Great Customer Service Are Important

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER is an important book because the stakes involved are big and getting bigger. In our Web 2.0 world, poor customer service reverberates far beyond individual consumers who have been mistreated or misled. Many disgruntled consumers are now likely to use the power of a blog, Facebook, LinkedIn, Yelp or other social media sites to share their customer service dissatisfaction to their angry hearts' content. Consumers increasingly rely on peer reviews on the web when purchasing products and services, and exposure to poor customer service is highly damaging.

United Airlines recently learned this lesson, fairly or not, after an unhappy passenger vented his frustration over what he felt was poor handling of his luggage – specifically his guitar. A folk singer, he posted a humorous and derogatory music video on YouTube that has gone viral; as of this writing, it has been viewed more than 8 million times. You can check out the video by searching “United Breaks Guitars” on YouTube. And by the way, he mentions the name of the actual customer service representative from United in the song.

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER provides invaluable guidance for avoiding that nightmare scenario.

An important theme of the book is a sad phenomenon of contemporary American life that has direct bearing on customer service. Unfortunately, it seems good “old fashioned” respectful customer service is slipping by the wayside. The image presented of Hank Davis (a cynical and totally uninspired customer service representative) should be easily recognizable for many in customer service and professional leadership roles.

What makes the story even more important to the individual reader is the magnitude of the attitudinal and pragmatic changes made by Hank that, ultimately, skyrocket him to an incredible level of success and good fortune. We believe any leader or service professional can follow this same path and, in doing so, create a more rewarding and successful life.

The Story In Brief

Hank is an everyman – an average guy from an average suburban town. After sliding through school he takes the first job he has available to him: customer service representative in a branch of a large mid-western bank. Rather than adopting a “work hard to become successful” attitude, Hank maintains the cynical “do as little as possible to get by” outlook he took on as a mischievous youth. Hank could not see how an entry-level customer service position could possibly benefit him in business or help him achieve incredible personal success in life. As a result, he remained unmotivated, uninspired and unproductive during the early days and months of his career with the bank.

In the beginning, Hank does the minimum. A lackluster team player, he's easily bored by customer service details. He regards his job as dead-end and his higher-ups as "privileged" elites who were given positions of authority and wealth based on their "connections." He does not realize that many of the people who achieved great success at his company had done so by working their way up from the same position he now held. His attitude toward service quality, characterized by a knack for evading customers, epitomizes an attitude succinctly expressed in the book: "A lot of retail associates don't enjoy, or even want to deal with, customers."

Until, that is, the day the bank CEO shows up to observe the branch. This is "Ed Pepper Day," and for Hank it is transformative. This single day and this single visit would change everything for Hank. This visit from Mr. Pepper would provide Hank with the motivation and direction he needed to jump-start his ambitions, focus and, ultimately, his personal lot in life.

Ironically enough, Ed Pepper himself is only a minor player on Ed Pepper Day. Mostly, he quietly observes the activity around him during his annual visit to Hank's branch. The real significance is how Hank, his branch manager and his teammates seize the day and take their personal performance to the highest of levels. On Ed Pepper Day, the branch reaches extreme levels of sales and service excellence.

A hero of the story is Cathy, the branch manager who provides Hank with the leadership and direction he needs to pursue the right path to success. In preparation for the day – she works to get the branch "Ed Pepper Ready" – and on the day itself, she uses the occasion to bring out the best in her staff, to show them what they are capable of and also what a bank branch operating at an optimized level looks like. The staff, driven by respect for Cathy and awe of Ed Pepper, responds positively and Hank witnesses the branch perform at its most productive levels ever.

The spirit of excellence demonstrated on Ed Pepper Day is new for Hank, and he likes it. On Ed Pepper Day, everybody arrives early, creates solutions for customers on the fly, works effectively and enthusiastically with their co-workers and optimizes their time – Hank even uses some of his lunch hour to generate a new relationship with a small businesses owner on the block.

Ed Pepper Day is like a day of perfection for Hank and, based on how he sees his leaders, co-workers and customers respond, he commits to himself that he will be a mediocre performer no more. He commits, to himself and to his teammates, to treat every day as Ed Pepper Day. His competitive spirit has been unleashed and his view of what it takes to become successful in business and in life becomes crystal clear. He now knows how to build relationships with leaders, teammates and customers and he realizes how powerful these skills can be as they relate to the pursuit of a successful life.

Hank's S.A.L.T. & PEPPER Formula Learned On "Ed Pepper Day"

The following is a brief overview of the S.A.L.T. & PEPPER formula Hank built as a result of his day spent with Ed Pepper:

- **The "S" In S.A.L.T. & PEPPER** - Hank becomes "addicted" (his term) to the rewards and good vibes that come from helping customers and growing the branch's business. For him, every day becomes Ed Pepper Day. But his new outlook on customer **service** goes beyond just friendliness and responsiveness.
- **The "A" In S.A.L.T. & PEPPER** - He transforms himself from a passive and uninformed order-taker into a professional who provides consultative **advice** and is actively involved in the decision making process of his customers. He does this by learning the products and services offered by his company and learning to match them to his customers' needs. Their resulting respect and return patronage generate the positive feelings that Hank finds to be so gratifying. His career is launched and he resolves to become a master advisor and problem solver for his customers.
- **The "L" In S.A.L.T. & PEPPER** - As Hank's performance improves, Cathy notices and encourages. Rather than regarding Hank as a threat, she delights in his achievements and reports them to her superiors at bank headquarters, motivating Hank all the more. As an example of good **leadership**, Cathy knows that in publicly recognizing Hank's success his example will rub off on his teammates. She also understands that improved performance of the branch will reflect well on her. Finally, she exemplifies what many consider to be the ultimate measure of success for any leader: the ability to inspire people to become successful. What goes around comes around.
- **The "T" In S.A.L.T. & PEPPER** - Hank's sharpened focus on the customer alters his approach to **teamwork**. He willingly asks peers to help him with customer challenges. In some cases, he refers potential sales opportunities to colleagues with more specialized knowledge than he possesses. In these and other ways he nurtures strong relationships with his colleagues by sharing, rather than claiming, credit for a job well done. He learns, from Cathy and other leaders, to celebrate his teammates successes.
- **The "Pepper" In S.A.L.T. & PEPPER** - Hank recognizes how highly engaged his team was on Ed Pepper Day. He commits to himself, and to Cathy, to always maintain the same level of engagement he brought to the table on Ed Pepper Day. Further, he vows to treat every customer who walks through the front door as if they were themselves Ed Pepper. With this level of focus and engagement, he determined, his performance and personal success levels would go through the roof and his life would become more rewarding.

More Lessons For Hank Following “Ed Pepper Day”

On Ed Pepper Day, and in the days following, Hank learns many more valuable lessons about business and life. He concludes that a job in customer service is like going to graduate school for a degree in personal psychology and/or an MBA. He realizes customer service sits at the hub of all business life. Nobody, in any company, is closer to the customer and their wants and needs than the front line customer service representative. He realizes a job in customer service enables him to better understand people and how they make decisions, businesses and markets, as well as the products and services provided by his company. The lessons he learns on the retail floor will prove to be the foundation for his incredible success going forward at the bank and, later, as an entrepreneur.

Hank calculates that in a typical day he serves more than 20 customers. He asks them questions, listens to their needs and helps them find the right solution to their problem. He realizes he has more than 5,000 unique business encounters in a typical year. This experience is beyond *educational* and shows him how to deal with, solve problems for and win over people from all walks of life. It also requires development of critical skills around:

- Listening
- Creative problem solving
- Advisory conversations
- Rapport Building
- Team Dynamics
- New account sales
- Customer retention
- Objection resolution

The result for Hank is a highly developed awareness of his customers, insights he uses to build a career based on strong market knowledge, the competitive advantage of excellent customer service and development of new products and services that address customer needs.

But beyond skills acquisition and development of business knowledge, the life lesson Hank learns is that his bad attitude toward his role as a customer service representative can poison many areas in life. Conversely, full engagement of one’s skills and abilities – no matter what the job – is fulfilling and rewarding in its own right. He found this to be true for the individual, and for the organization.

In the end, Hank parlayed these many lessons and his new dedication to success into a rapidly improving professional career. He was promoted several times and eventually employed the lessons he learned and mastered on the retail floor to launch his own company, which has also been wildly successful. To Hank, the recipe for success has all been pretty simple since he was inspired on Ed Pepper Day: just add a little S.A.L.T. & PEPPER and success is sure to follow.

Hopefully, customer service professionals – and their leaders – will recognize Hank Davis, the average performer who drifts into his first job as a retail associate. And, hopefully, they will be inspired by Hank, who undergoes a change of heart that alters his view of work, himself and what is possible in life. In the process, they will come to see customer service as one of the best business educations available, and they can use this expertise to build a fulfilling career – and life.

Rules For Customer Service And Personal Success

We asked Hank to share with us some of his “rules for success.” The following is a list of his top 20 favorite rules for service excellence and personal success:

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER For You:

Hank's Rule # 1 - Treat Every Customer The Same Way You Would Treat Your CEO

Hank's Rule # 2 - You Have To Develop Your Own Personal Vision Of Success For Your Life

Hank's Rule # 3 - You Have To Develop A Personal Attitude And Mindset For Success

Hank's Rule # 4 - You Have To Look Successful, Speak And Sound Successful

Hank's Rule # 5 - You Have To Work With P.O.W.E.R. - Passion, Optimism, Wit, Energy And Resilience

Hank's Rule # 6 - You Have To Know How To Gauge & Read Your Customers, Teammates And Leaders

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER With Your Customers:

Hank's Rule # 7 - The Lobby Is Your Stage, So Be A Star And Lead The Cast

Hank's Rule # 8 - Your First 10 Seconds With A Customer Are Critical, So You Have To Make Them Count

Hank's Rule # 9 - You Have To Know How To Conduct A Quick Situation Diagnostic With The Customer

Hank's Rule # 10 - Effective Listening Is A Game Of Physical And Verbal Responses

Hank's Rule # 11 - You Have To Give Advice That Solves Problems Or Makes Things Better

Hank's Rule # 12 - You Have To Give Advice Based On What You Would Do Personally

Hank's Rule # 13 - Objections Are Opportunities, So Smile When You Get Them And Say: “Good Question”

Hank's Rule # 14 - You Have To Show Customers You Love What You Do

Hank's Rule # 15 - Opportunity Does Not Stop Where The Lobby Ends. There Is A Big World Out There!

S.A.L.T. & PEPPER With Your Team:

Hank's Rule # 16 - Lead In The Store With Attitude, Execution, Coaching, Team Support And “Stepping Up”

Hank's Rule # 17 - Two People Working Together And Leveraging Strengths Are Stronger Than One

Hank's Rule # 18 - Be A Fan Of Your Company, Your Teammates, Your Leaders And Your Internal Partners

Hank's Rule # 19 - Make Sure You Are Coachable And Learn To Coach Others

Hank's Rule # 20 - You Have To Get Involved In The Community, And You Have to Have Fun

Rules For Leadership & Coaching Success

We asked some of our favorite leaders to share with us some of their “rules for success.” The following is a list of the top 20 favorite rules for leadership and coaching excellence with a specific focus on SALT & Pepper:

- Rule # 1 - Great Coaches Measure Their Success By The Success Of Their People
- Rule # 2 - Great Coaches Provide Their People With Tools And Opportunities To Excel
- Rule # 3 - Great Coaches Understand Personalities And How To Adapt Their “Coach Approach”
- Rule # 4 - Great Coaches Engage By Helping Create A Personal Vision For Success
- Rule # 5 - Great Coaches Help Their People Understand The Power Of Optimism And Enthusiasm
- Rule # 6 - Great Coaches Help Their People Better Understand The Look And Sounds Of Success
- Rule # 7 - Great Coaches Can “Coach On The Fly”
- Rule # 8 - Great Coaches Can Facilitate Productive And Fun OneOn-One Coaching Encounters
- Rule # 9 - Great Coaches Can Coach And Lead By Example
- Rule # 10 - Great Coaches Capitalize On Every Opportunity For Celebration And Recognition
- Rule # 11 - Great Coaches Make Success A Fun And Measurable Experience
- Rule # 12 - Great Coaches Act As Advocates For Their Team Inside The Company
- Rule # 13 - Great Coaches Act As Advocate For Their Team With Customers
- Rule # 14 - Great Coaches Conduct Great Sales Meetings
- Rule # 15 - Great Coaches Know How To Get Creative With Rewards And Incentives
- Rule # 16 - Great Coaches Coach With P.O.W.E.R. – Passion, Optimism, Wit, Energy And Resilience
- Rule # 17 - Great Coaches Turn Up The Fun But Maintain Their Professional Leadership Role
- Rule # 18 - Great Coaches Use Empathy And Understanding To Tackle Roadblocks
- Rule # 19 - Great Coaches Have Coaches And Are Coachable
- Rule # 20 - Great Coaches Know How To Strategize But Stress Excellence In Execution

About The SALT & PEPPER Group

The SALT & Pepper Group, a subsidiary of Millennium Consulting, provides best-practice-based research, training, and consulting services. Our customers are retail organizations aiming to deliver best-of-class sales and service experiences. Our offerings are based on the five principles outlined in the acclaimed book *S.A.L.T. & Pepper: Hank Davis' Recipe for Success in Retail and Beyond*:

Using best practices gained from more than 20 years of sales and service research and the data we collect in the field from our Retail Service Quality Index, we deliver the insight your teams need to achieve sales and customer service excellence in the retail sector. Whether you need to help your managers develop effective leadership and coaching skills or want to inspire your floor-level associates to be at their best every day, The SALT & Pepper Group has the recipe for success.

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