

'An innovative and transformative approach that integrates physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual components into an optimal, human-centered service model.' JOSEPH MICHELLI Professor of Service Excellence and New York Times #1 bestselling author

The Future of Service is

5D

why humans serve best
in the digital era

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine you're on hold for some assistance. Your only lifeline is a robotic voice stating, 'Your call is important to us, please hold'. You finally connect, only to realise you're speaking to a perfectly balanced and precise AI-generated voice, reciting the menu options in a monotone, mechanical voice. It doesn't ask you how your day was; it's devoid of empathy. We've all been there, frustrated and shouting at an automated system.

Now, you're standing in a physical queue, greeted by Sarah, a human employee. She seems distracted, and her interactions are robotic in their predictability. She rattles off a script of instructions, never truly engaging with you. Despite being served by a human, you feel just as isolated as you did listening to the robotic voice on the phone.

The two experiences may leave you pondering: 'When did human service become almost indistinguishable from being served by a machine?' We've never been more connected, yet human service feels more distant than ever.

Imagine a world where you engage with service professionals who aren't just doing their job but serving with intention and awareness. Envision a digital platform where convenience doesn't come at the cost of human connection but enhances it. This isn't a utopian dream; it's a vision we can manifest together. We can make it a reality by

integrating 5 dimensions – physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual – into a human-service approach. This is 5D Service.

Welcome to *The Future of Service is 5D: Why humans serve best in the digital era*, a book that aspires to redefine our understanding of what service means in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. The journey from frustration to fulfilment starts here.

My journey to 5D Service started 3 decades ago when I first entered the world of customer service. Over those decades, the human element has kept me going – the smiles, the relief on people’s faces, the genuine ‘thank yous’ that no automated system can replicate. However, I’ve noticed a chasm growing between technological capabilities and human essence in service in the encroaching digital era.

This book was born from years of research, practical experience and a burning desire to bridge that gap. My work has been inspired by many teachers, including Professor Robert Sapolsky, Deepak Chopra and Yuval Noah Harari, along with the seven dimensions for defining what makes us human: mental, physical, social, financial, spiritual, environmental and vocational.

If you’ve picked up this book, it’s likely that you, too, sense the seismic shifts happening in our society. Whether you’re leading a team, business or community, and whatever the area – government, education, medicine, food production, technology, media, entertainment – you’ll have noticed that the phrase ‘customer service’ doesn’t evoke the enthusiasm it once did.

Service industries are madly rushing to digitalise for efficiency, compromising what once set them apart – the act of service by a human. It’s a crucial juncture in time, and digital technology isn’t

just an accessory but an integral part of our lives, altering how we communicate, work and even think.

As we move swiftly into an era of artificial intelligence, robotics and automation, it's easy to succumb to the narrative that machines will replace humans in almost every field, including service. And it's even easier to miss the nuances that make human service irreplaceable. For any leader in service, the new dilemma is how to reclaim the human in 'human service'.

This book offers a mindful pause to reconsider the path we're heading down. What if I told you that, far from making humans obsolete, the digital era will bring a more dynamic, authentic form of service than we've ever seen before?

5D Service is a new paradigm that brings the quintessential human qualities of service back into the limelight.

This book will equip you with a new framework for understanding and implementing service – a 5D approach that leverages the strengths of both humans and technology. You'll learn what these dimensions entail, how to harmonise them, and how to lead a revolution in your own sphere of influence.

So, are you ready to transform your frustrations into a vision for a more humane, more fulfilling future? Are you prepared to participate in a revolution that places the human spirit back at the heart of service? The Future of Service is 5D. The future is now.

HELPFUL BELIEFS FOR READING THIS BOOK

Before you dive into this book, please know we will have a much larger conversation about service than you may think. Following are some helpful beliefs that will set the stage and enable the book to help you create change. You may disagree after reading these beliefs and decide to put the book down. I won't take offence. However, if you resonate with these beliefs, you'll gain incredible value from this book.

Helpful belief #1: Everyone is a customer and a human

You, me and everyone moving throughout the world need goods or services in some shape or form – everyone is a customer.

There's a stigma around the word 'customer'. When I say 'customer care', it immediately narrows people's thoughts to a tiny sliver of a business or a small group of people who work in call centres, behind counters and on shop floors. Shift to this mindset and we will shift our behaviours towards each other. We are all in service to one another.

Helpful belief #2: You can change the world, one customer at a time

How many times are you a customer in a typical day or week? How many times do you interact with staff working for a brand or business who help you solve a problem or give you an answer?

It's time to deprogram what we think customer service is and begin to view it as an extraordinary function in our world. When we do this, we'll serve and lead in a way that influences humanity through small, daily service interactions.

The future of service is about creating a ripple effect that reaches beyond the individual customer to impact society at large. Sometimes, we don't tackle the big issues in life because they feel, well, big. This book (like all my books) is full of pragmatic suggestions, recommendations and tools to make this 'big' idea accessible.

Part 1



HOW WE GOT HERE



1. CUSTOMER SERVICE DIED IN 2020

We are in a bit of a mess. We're at a pivotal point in humanity's history where we could be overwhelmed with sadness and devastation if we take stock of what we have become as a species.

- **Our natural world is under threat.** I'm no expert in climate change, and I find the conversations on this matter extremely complicated. Yet, as I move throughout the natural world each day, I see how consumerism, capitalism, greed for profit and economic growth are disastrously affecting our environment.
- **Our society's social justice issues and the fact that our democracy is under threat have locked people into fear.** Most weekends, when I walk past the steps of Parliament House in downtown Melbourne, Australia, I'm met with banners and protesters screaming their pleas for truth, justice and fairness.
- **Our youth are affected by a mental-health crisis like nothing ever seen before.** According to the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly three in five teenage girls (57 per cent) said they felt 'persistently sad or hopeless' in 2021. That was the highest rate in a decade. And 30 per cent said they had seriously considered suicide – a 60 per cent increase over the previous 10 years (CDC, 2023).

I feel like I've only scratched the surface of the big issues we face today, and as if these weren't enough to create a sense of despair and a crisis of trust, along came the COVID-19 pandemic!

Regardless of where you were in the world and your story around 2020, you would most likely describe that year as characterised by confusion, disorder or even failure.

The changes that took place across society have manifested in various ways, and the mess and chaos of 2020 led to heightened emotional vulnerability and stress among customers and employees – and anyone, really, with a heartbeat. I'm not surprised. We were operating in survival mode.

When you chunk down from the world macro issues into your patch of the workplace or corner of society – the day-to-day interactions and comings and goings of family life, work life and being a community member – it was all being redefined before our eyes.

The great reset. New order. New world. New normal. These phrases were being bantered around like new slang in a kids' playground, and our idea of what 'good' looked like was thrown up for debate. It was almost like we were being permitted to reorganise and redefine what comes next. However, during this period, one of the casualties was the quality of human-to-human service interactions.

As a leader in the workplace, this time was incredibly poignant. Staff and customers were pushing boundaries in ways that made leaders look in the mirror and question everything.

RIP customer service

Customer service, as we knew it before the pandemic, is dead. Gone forever. This is a new era, a new incarnation. And it's having a shaky, Frankenstein-like start to life.

Maybe it's unfair to blame the pandemic for the death of customer service. Perhaps we were already on a slippery slope; perhaps 2020 just shone a spotlight on the lack of deeper purpose in people's lives or on customer service staff's inability to apply service skills when under significant pressure.

Slowly, the resilience of communities, workplaces and individuals weakened, taking the spirit of service with it. If there were already cracks appearing in the workplace culture between colleagues, these were exposed. If a customer's loyalty was already questionable, it didn't survive. If a relationship wasn't built on a solid foundation, it was tested beyond breaking point. And my oh my, were some of our most intimate relationships tested! We all had to dig deep to deal with our individual situations.

We were challenged to look at what was perhaps always there, but there was now nowhere to hide. Everyone's world got smaller. Borders closed, schools closed, global travel came to a halt, and people were forced to stay at home within their local bubble. They could see, maybe for the first time, any disconnect, any absence of purpose in their life – or simply what they were escaping each day when they left home.

Altered expectations

Cast your mind back over the pandemic period.

I recall trying to rent a car. The employee who eventually answered the phone said, ‘Yeah, nobody answers the phone these days . . . Oh, and we don’t have any cars to rent’.

I recall my first overnight stay in a hotel in one of the moments of freedom outside the multiple lockdowns. Housekeeping? No chance. Room service? Not happening.

I recall the restaurant experiences where the wait time for food was over an hour, yet the restaurant was half empty.

I recall the 7-month delivery time for a new couch. That was just the new norm.

I recall going to a luxury day spa for a massage for the first time in 2 years and being presented with a disposable cup filled with beautiful tea, which used to be served in delicate glassware to match the environment . . . and the price.

Yes, I acknowledge these were unprecedented times. But whether it was due to staffing shortages, supply-chain issues or businesses that decided to leverage the situation to lower the expectations of customers and, therefore, lower their costs, the result was that service took a massive hit.

It’s part of human evolution for societal norms and values to change, influencing the standards we expect from the world. But the changes from a pandemic are often accelerated and forced – at least, that’s what it felt like to me, having lived through this one.

So, it’s no surprise that people’s expectations of themselves, others and the brands and businesses they interact with have altered in the

wake of COVID-19. The question is, ‘Has service been resurrected, or have we lowered our expectations forever?’

Service died because there were no staff

My team and I worked with some incredible companies during the peak of this crisis. I recall often speaking with leaders in major stadiums, airports and other venues who were short thousands of the employees needed to serve the crowds of customers coming through their doors.

In June 2022, in Australia (and most of the Western world), almost a third of employing businesses (31 per cent) had difficulty finding suitable staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022). For many frontline staff who stayed – scared, under-resourced and perhaps being given unrealistic expectations to deliver on – the volume of their voice was louder, and employees had more say in their work conditions.

During the pandemic, some organisations prioritised caring for and supporting their people; others did not. The organisations that quickly identified that ‘healthy staff equalled healthy customer service’ emerged strong. The company leaders realised that the staff they did have coming to work were under stress and, given their lack of motivation and weakened resilience, needed extra support and care. The organisations that turned their attention to their workforce resurrected customer service quicker.

They were helped, at first, by an undertone of, ‘Customers will forgive you if you can’t measure up to what they were used to before the world went bonkers’. But towards the end of 2022, the message

and tone changed. I vividly remember saying to leaders, ‘Customers will be less forgiving in 2023. It’s now assumed and expected that you’ve returned your staffing levels to where they were and that you’ve reorganised your operations to deliver excellent service again’.

The world of work is evolving

When people change how they work, it changes how they serve.

In mid-2022, a pilot of a 4-day work week commenced across 90 companies in the UK and Australia, organised by not-for-profit 4 Day Week Global (4dayweek.com). These companies committed to implementing the 4-day-week model without reducing staff wages, with the promise from staff that they would commit to 100 per cent productivity at work. Who would have thought, hey? Back in 1980, Dolly Parton sang:

*‘9 to 5
Yeah, they got you where they want you
There’s a better life
And you think about it, don’t you?’*

Well, here we are in 2023, and we’re no longer just thinking about it; we’re making changes, Dolly!

Workplaces have been propelled into remote work and virtual meetings. Work is in the home more than ever, and home is at work. We’re Zooming with people at their kitchen tables, meeting their children and pets, and judging their virtual backgrounds or artwork on their walls.

Workplace flexibility has dramatically changed and now encompasses work-life balance, physical and emotional health and family care. Work that isn't restricted to trading hours and premises can be done anywhere, at any time, format, or structure.

For leaders, it's tricky to set the direction of employees when the world of work is evolving at the speed of light and even trickier when the customers' behaviours are also evolving. Perhaps the more flexible the workplace becomes, the more flexible the resurrection of service has to be, with far greater adaptability required in how service is delivered.

Customers' behaviours are evolving

Customers' behaviour is also changing in response to post-pandemic life, and it's still not clear if the dog is wagging the tail or the other way round. One way of thinking about it is that customers' behaviours are changing due to us all becoming accustomed to a poor level of service, and therefore not demanding anything unique or extraordinary anymore.

Here's an example. Once upon a time, a big purchasing decision like buying a car or renovating a home seemed straightforward. Now, the demand for materials and manufacturing has slowed the customer journey down, creating a whole new layer of touchpoints and disappointment, and lowering customer expectations of speed and convenience. Supply-chain disruptions since COVID-19 have led to product shortages and delays. According to the ABS, more than two in five businesses (41 per cent) faced supply-chain disruptions in June 2022, down from a peak of 47 per cent in January 2022 (ABS, 2022).

Another way of thinking about changing customer behaviours is that customers are demanding safer and more convenient ways of doing business with a brand and demanding service from the comfort of their homes.

The pandemic forced businesses to adapt their operations and customer service frameworks. Telehealth consultations became mainstream during the pandemic, mainly out of necessity. However, post-pandemic, it was clear that consumers had become more willing to use telehealth than before COVID-19 and that providers were more willing to adjust their work practices.

In the same way, Uber Eats led the way during lockdowns, offering contactless orders and delivery. There's no need to exchange menus, cash, credit cards or even a smile – and this hasn't changed post-pandemic.

Or have customers' behaviours changed because people's motivation and resilience were tested beyond belief during the pandemic? And because there's been a subtle ripple effect from the reduced social interaction due to social distancing, remote work, lockdowns, travel restrictions and so on? Let's not forget just how extreme this was at the time. In my wonderful state of Victoria, Australia, you were limited to moving within a 5 km radius of your home and barred from leaving home after 8 p.m. I never thought I would see such a time in history.

Logic would say that these shifts and changes in working and being served by each other meant that people had fewer opportunities to interact with others and, therefore, got out of practice with their social skills. It appears that this, in turn, altered our expectations of customer service; it felt like people were extremely forgiving

at first if they were on the receiving end of a miserable human interaction from an employee, knowing that the employee was not coping and was just trying to get by in an out-of-control world.

However, this patience appears to have worn off over time, and we've ended up with fluctuating customer tolerance levels. Businesses are trying to clamber their way back to pre-COVID-19 ways of working and serving people and wondering why they can't achieve that.

Fluctuating tolerance levels

'They lost it at me.' 'They blew up in front of two other staff.' 'They went off at me.' These are phrases that a group of retail professionals used in a live webinar with one of our facilitators to describe how a colleague behaved towards them. I was shocked.

If you're not familiar with these bits of slang (I'm in Australia, don't forget, and we have a somewhat strange way of talking at times), what those phrases mean in plain English is that the person yelled at them quite explosively.

This is not okay. None of us would condone this behaviour, yet it's happening increasingly from both customers and staff. Sadly, you only have to google 'abuse of service staff' to get a flood of surveys, studies and new reports from different industries and countries. It's sort of accepted information at this stage that it's 'normal' for service staff to cop abuse.

As society changes, people's tolerance for different behaviours, attitudes and beliefs can also shift. Some people have dialled up their resilience to various things in the past few years and can bounce

back quickly. Their tolerance may have decreased in other areas, though – they might be impatient with slow responses or intolerant of misinformation, for example. We will examine this grumpy, sensitive behaviour more deeply in Chapter 3.

Our motivation was under attack

To give service, you need a healthy dose of motivation. However, motivation isn't permanent; it's temporary and needs renewing each day, especially when you're serving fellow humans with all sorts of needs and emotions to navigate. You need to feel motivated to smile; you need to feel motivated to listen actively; you need to feel motivated to problem-solve and go above and beyond to find a solution to something that may not be obvious. You need to feel motivated to let the other person, in some cases, save face, even when they're in the wrong.

But being motivated by something external, such as money or entertainment, won't cut it when we're constantly surrounded by loss, stress and fear. Eventually, the spirit in each of us wants something more purposeful. Superficial motivation leads to superficial behaviour, and under pressure, it ultimately leads to unstable emotions because we can no longer keep faking the 'expected behaviour'. We're exhausted; we've had enough.

Our resilience was under attack

From 2020 to a good part of 2022, many of us were swimming in a cesspool of tragedy and bad news. People lost their lives, their

loved ones, their businesses, their jobs and their freedom. People lost control. And this meant that there was more division and less unity among people.

Something as simple as behaving kindly and compassionately towards another human being is difficult when you cannot manage your own emotions. No matter how skilled and well-trained you are in service or how strong your soft skills are, if you cannot self-regulate, you cannot access those skills when you need to.

Onwards

The past has happened, and we can't change it, but we can change what happens next.

The pandemic has shifted us into a time when it feels like no one can hold others to account for anything anymore, and many people just want someone to blame and to fix the mess we find ourselves in.

But what if focusing on the future of service in your patch of the office, your neck of the woods, your corner of the world, is a way through this mess? What if we're all playing a little too small? We're looking for someone to blame for what we've become as a global collective, feeling that it's such a behemoth job to address the issues that we become paralysed, leading to inaction. What if we were to play a bigger game, to serve each other much better than we have been of late?

To serve means to put the needs of others first and work to benefit others in some way. As a concept, service can be critical in creating a more sustainable and equitable world where people's needs are met across multiple dimensions.

- **When we serve our natural world**, we promote sustainability by reducing waste and pollution and engaging in practices that protect our natural resources. We remember where we came from and, with respect, serve the plants, animals and planet to keep healing us and giving us back life.
- **When we serve society, we promote social justice.** Service can help address social inequalities and promote greater equity by helping marginalised communities and, without judgement, advocating for social justice and human rights.
- **When we serve the health of others**, we improve health outcomes in our community by promoting healthy living practices and providing access to medical care in poor pockets of our communities.

Whatever your role – whether you're a CEO, head of a team or department or perhaps an emerging leader – looking for direction and setting direction is critical for the future. It starts with small, ordinary actions of daily service. Over time, they will change the direction of humanity.

By working together and engaging in acts of service, each of us in our workplace, communities and homes can positively impact the world. Now, I'm no unicorn, nor am I a powerful politician. I am a person, just like you, who can create a legacy not based on what I do personally but on what I help others do.

The current state of play on this planet propels me into action day and night – I want to do my bit through a lens of service. Service is necessary. Service is essential for our future. Let's look at where we're heading and how this may impact how we lead and serve our

people, customers and society. Let's prepare, think a little differently and perhaps let go of some of our legacy ways of thinking and make room for the new.

The future will not be like the past. Strap in, and I'll get my crystal ball.

2. THE FUTURE ≠ THE PAST

*‘Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass.
It’s about learning to dance in the rain.’*

—Vivian Greene

Each day, as I become more aware of the rapid changes happening in society, the number of directions this chapter could take multiplies. The saying ‘What got you here won’t get you there’ has never been truer.

With every death, there is a birth, and we are birthing something new. It’s a wonderful time to be alive and be a leader who serves and influences how others serve. New ways of thinking will be required to lead organisations and lead a new way of serving customers. To influence the future of service, I’m suggesting we start by narrowing in on the role of technology and the role of humans to understand the sweet spot between them.

At this point, it’s probably relevant to share that I was born in the late 1970s. This means I’m in awe of and fascinated by where digital technology has taken us; it also means I have to work a little bit harder to stay up to date because advanced technology isn’t something I was born into. It isn’t intuitive for me. For example, I was the remote control for my family’s TV. If someone wanted to change the channel, I had to get up and turn the dial myself.

I turned on my first computer in a computer class at 15. In my teens, I didn't have a mobile phone: I spoke to my mates at night on a phone attached to the wall in the living room. If you were lucky enough to have a second phone in the home, another family member might 'accidentally' pick up halfway through your conversation. When we finally got the internet in our house – this amazing thing promising to change our lives – we couldn't speak on the home phone while the internet was being used.

Cash was king and credit cards were processed with a heavy, sliding metal contraption and a bunch of coloured carbon copy papers; it was far easier to write a cheque than it was to use a credit card. The term 'kiosk' meant a building at the beach where we would go and buy ice creams and bags of candy with our loose change.

The drive-through at McDonald's was a novelty and the quickest way to get fast food. Whenever you walked into a store or up to a counter, you were served by a human. The closest we got to self-service was the salad and dessert bar at Pizza Hut: an absolute novelty.

Now, life without digital technology almost seems unimaginable. Children as young as 12 months old use iPads and computers for education and entertainment. A landline phone in the home is rare. Everyone has a device that is always with them, not just for communication but for information at their fingertips, location-finding and safety reasons. Today, we get Wi-Fi on planes. I'm using it right now to write this book!

Nowadays, we see signs saying, 'We are a cashless store', and people use credit cards via their phones (thank goodness, because I've often left the house without my actual credit cards!).

Nowadays, thanks to the many home delivery services, you can order food through an app and have it on your front doorstep within minutes.

Nowadays, a ‘kiosk’ replaces a customer-facing staff member, allowing companies to save on labour costs and customers to self-serve, check-in, checkout and get on with their day without ever speaking to a human.

Our world moves fast. It is designed to help us get what we want when we want it. Our world is slowly removing humans from service interactions at every possible turn. Robots are taking over our world. Is that a little too dramatic? Okay, perhaps a more accurate way to say it is that many tasks these days are being done by technology coded to perform that task.

Technology is destroying and evolving service at the same time

If we take a balanced view, this digital revolution is not being driven entirely by big tech companies – you and I are also driving it, thanks to the sneaky and profiteering focus of big tech companies on persuading us how to think, how to behave and who to identify ourselves as.

Remember when social media first hit your mobile device? Think back to the 2000s. Slowly, subtly and stealthily, we were persuaded – some may say manipulated – to change our behaviours. The novelty of being ‘liked’, ‘loved’ and ‘followed’ provided a steady release of dopamine that made us feel good. Remember when the function of ‘tagging’ people in photos was introduced?

A thumbs-up or love-heart emoji on a photo of someone you knew was a social, tribal way of showing others that you acknowledged them.

Remember, too, when the messaging apps started making three moving dots appear while someone was responding to you? It was designed to keep you on the channel and online until you got the response. Our unconscious need for a response, validation or the continuation of a conversation meant that we stayed online and connected to our devices for longer.

Many reputable software engineers, investors, founders and computer scientists who worked to create the algorithms at Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest have said in some way that social media is not a tool for making our lives easier or better – it's manipulation, using your own psychology against you. I've never heard a parent say they want their kids to spend more time on social media. Have you?

Just as social media has changed how humans behave, other technology is changing how we serve people across all service interactions. We need to wake up to this now, to look into the crystal ball and see what potential threats are coming our way instead of being swept up in the magic of technology.

Technology is reconditioning the way we interact and cope with the human stuff. It's mostly unconscious, fed by our need for and addiction to productivity, speed, convenience and greater efficiencies in the workplace and life.

The internet has made it possible for us to shop and access information at any time of day and night. As a result, we now expect businesses to be available 24/7 to answer questions and provide

support. Companies that fail to offer round-the-clock support risk losing us to competitors who do.

The savvier we become with technology, the faster we expect response times. We expect increasingly quick and convenient ways of getting products and services, and demand efficiencies in doing business with brands. The high bar set by companies like Amazon, with their same-day or next-day delivery options, has normalised quick delivery times. We expect personalisation, self-service options and instant gratification. The way things used to be in service, before many technological innovations kicked in, is almost unimaginable now; perhaps we wouldn't choose to return to the way things used to be.

The digital revolution has caused a significant shift in how we live, work and communicate, and continues to impact our daily lives profoundly.

To understand the future of service, we need to understand the future of AI

AI tech has been around for many decades: the term 'artificial intelligence' was coined at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956, often considered the birth of AI. During this period, researchers built the first AI programs, which could play games like checkers and solve algebra and logic problems.

Some interesting AI statistics as of 2023, according to the Techjury article '101 Artificial Intelligence Statistics' by Josh Wardini:

- AI can increase business productivity by 40 per cent.
- The number of AI startups grew 14 times over the previous 20 years.
- Investment in AI startups grew 6 times since the year 2000.
- Some form of AI is present in 77 per cent of our current devices.
- By the time I finish writing this book in 2023, there will be 8 billion AI-powered voice assistants.
- Some 72 per cent of business executives believe that AI will be the most significant business advantage in the future (Wardini, 2023).

I'm no AI expert, but I'm fascinated by these statistics and how AI is changing how we work. AI has already made us more efficient in the workplace. For example, robotic automation of Amazon's warehouse operations, introduced in 2012, reduced their order processing time from 90 minutes to under 15 minutes. Did you know an estimated 10 per cent of nursing activities by humans could be replaced by automation by 2030? The Techjury article is worth a look, and it's only the tip of the iceberg.

Chatbots have also taken a seat at the workplace table, and the more sophisticated they become, the more opportunities we have to enhance the customer experience. It's estimated that 85 per cent of customers' relationships with business enterprises will be managed without human involvement. AI gives customers more real-time communication faster.

I take a deep breath in putting this next stat down on the page: according to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) report, *The Future of Jobs 2020*, automation may displace 85 million jobs by 2025. However, the report also estimated that 97 million new jobs would

be created – new roles that generate, manage and maintain the automation technology, as well as roles to manage the ethics, safety and security associated with it (WEF, 2020).

In all revolutions, certain jobs go away, and new jobs are created:

- Lamplighters used to go around and light the gas streetlamps at dusk, but once we brought in electric streetlamps, that job was unnecessary.
- Switchboard operators are no longer needed, with manual telephone switchboards mostly phased out.
- Bank tellers were replaced by Automated Teller Machines (ATMs).
- Checkout staff are slowly being replaced by self-checkout technology and online purchasing.
- Video store employees have disappeared entirely with the rise of streaming platforms.

In addition, jobs have been created that didn't exist in the 1800s, opening up opportunities for people – professional service roles such as computer programmer, data scientist, web designer, aerospace engineer, renewable energy engineer, video game designer and social media manager.

But is this AI revolution the one that will reduce the largest number of jobs?

AI will definitely enhance many jobs – make them easier, more fun and higher paid – and create new jobs that we can't foresee yet. Excellent. This is good news, right? It makes sense that technological advances will give us time back and make our lives easier. I've heard it said that it once took 85 per cent of the population to

work to feed everyone in a village, and now it only takes 2 per cent. So, if we're not doing the tasks needed to feed the village, what exactly are we all doing? From where I see things, working across various countries and immersed in multiple companies, we seem to be still working, and working pretty hard at that, even given the post-pandemic changes to work! What will we do in the future, and what will our purpose be in the day-to-day workplace?

According to McKinsey's report 'Jobs lost, jobs gained: Workforce transitions in a time of automation', automation could replace 30 per cent of the human workforce globally by 2030 (McKinsey & Company, 2017). So, if we hand the role of front-facing service over to intelligent robots, what will the role of humans be?

Front-facing customer service roles are at risk of extinction

I believe front-facing service roles are at risk of extinction. Why?

<ChatGPT has entered the chat.>

ChatGPT is the fastest-growing app in human history, and generative AI is changing humans and how we serve each other. It hugely reduces our need to think critically and creatively, problem-solve, and apply emotional reasoning to our responses and written replies.

Instead of just being ordinary chatbots, ChatGPT, Google Bard, Microsoft Bing and so on, use generative AI. This means that each day, they're learning more ways to generate their own new answers from the data that we, the public, are searching and prompting for.

In episode 367 of the Lex Fridman Podcast (25 March 2023), Sam Altman, the CEO of the company behind ChatGPT, OpenAI, said

that the category of jobs that will be impacted the most by ChatGPT is customer service. He believes there'll be way fewer jobs relatively soon, particularly in call centres and frontline services, because ChatGPT and GPT-4 language models will become better at these jobs than human beings – and 10 times more productive.

Of course, Altman and other leaders in the AI development space are well aware of the technology's potential negative consequences. In 2023, Altman and the CEOs of Google, Amazon, Meta, Anthropic, Inflection and Microsoft made voluntary commitments to self-regulate their AI offerings. According to Stanford University's 2022 AI Index, some 37 AI-related bills were passed into law globally in 2022 in attempts to regulate and reduce the risks of AI (Artificial Intelligence Index, 2023). The European Union passed its comprehensive Artificial Intelligence Act into law in June 2023.

Putting aside the deeper issues with AI and the world's attempts to deal with them, let's ask a simple question: What will be the quality of service if we allow AI to do it all for us?

I've heard it said that AI is already as good as the **average** doctor at providing diagnoses, as good as the **average** lawyer at weighing up probability and risk, and it's as good as any **average** worker at knowledge work such as information synthesising and processing. It's even as good as the **average** management consultant in a business setting. But who wants **average**?

Perhaps generative AI will become better than average the more it learns and retains knowledge. Still, knowledge is never enough to create extraordinary service interactions. Knowledge is gathered from learning, while most would say that wisdom is gathered from day-to-day experiences and that we reach a state of 'being wise'.

Wisdom is the sophisticated ‘science’ needed in service – experience through the lens of humanity, from the heart, combined with the practical ability to make consistently good decisions in service interactions.

Our creativity, innovation and genius come from being wise. It’s the application of knowledge and the discernment that comes from perspective. In service interactions, a robot or machine may have the ability to know what to say, but a human being (the greatest technology) will have the wisdom to know when and how to say it.

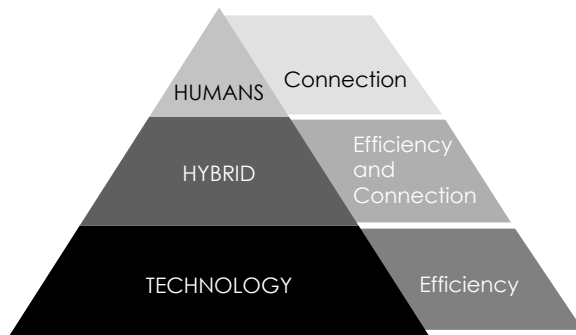
Who wants average? The service pyramid

There are times when we want to be served by technology: we want the efficiency.

There are times when we want to be served by humans: we want the connection.

There are times when we want both.

Enter the service pyramid.



SERVICE PYRAMID

‘Too many modern companies have replaced a person with a number and mistakenly called that number a customer.’

(Sinek 2022)

Humans are at the top of the pyramid – we do the connection parts of service best. We need to remember that at the heart of service is humanity. We have names, hearts and minds; we are spiritual beings having a human experience and thrive from connecting with other humans. AI and digital solutions often provide an average experience focused on an outcome: to get the job done. But getting the job done doesn't mean it's done exceptionally well. Average service doesn't impress us. Who wants to be average?

If you're genuinely interested in being extraordinary in service, not average, and in bringing service excellence, then technology is just an enabler. You are still the composer and conductor; technology alone won't raise the bar for the future of service. In the digital era, humans serve best when they know when to leverage their human qualities and when to let technology do its thing.

Being human is our advantage

Being human is a privilege and a purpose in itself.

While technology is grabbing everyone's attention, we forget that service roles always require a level of presence and attentiveness. The unwritten task for every person in service is to make each person they serve feel like they're the only person in the room.

Can you recall what it feels like to be served by someone who is

present – someone who makes you feel in that moment that you are important and gives you their undivided attention?

Our minds think tens of thousands of thoughts a day – we're addicted to thinking and already have to work hard to stay attentive before the distractions of notifications and devices. Now, modern technology is competing for our attention, too. But giving attention in service interactions – one-to-one, one-to-many, leaders to employees or employees to customers – is the advantage that humans have over robots. It's why humans will always serve best, if we know how to hold our attention and give our attention.

Good judgement and uniquely human skills make a difference in people's lives: AI and robots (at least for the moment) can't give attention or offer connections the way humans can. It might be able to turn its view to see from a different angle, but it cannot give attention. It's the skill of paying attention (rather than just following or giving instructions) that is our advantage. It's critically important to polish, refine and shape this skill for the future of service.

Here's an example of how crucial human attention, judgement and connection can be. In October 2022, I was involved in a car accident in Nice. My partner and I had been travelling for 28 hours from Australia and were keen to get to our accommodation to rest our heads. Our car was hit from behind by a tanker truck carrying LP gas; we were pushed several hundred metres down a five-lane motorway and eventually smashed into a concrete barrier. The car was a write-off, but we were both unharmed – a miracle.

The service agent at the rental car office, Mathieu, had no idea we'd be involved in such a serious accident 15 minutes after he sent us on our way. But it was his humanity that I believe saved our lives.

You see, our booking in the system was for a small car. It would have been easy for Mathieu to process the booking as it was and keep moving through the very long queue behind us. But something told him to slow down, ask questions and determine our needs and wants on this European driving holiday. His curiosity, his awareness of his own senses – paying attention to our needs – led him to upgrade us from a Fiat Punto to a larger SUV – and of course, the larger car had all the safety features and more metal to protect us at the time of impact.

This story is just one example of millions of ordinary interactions employees have with customers daily, impacting their lives in extraordinary ways.

In the future, the digital revolution will enable sophisticated robots to give you instructions for:

- taking your medicine,
- applying for a home loan,
- buying a car, and even,
- giving you advice and support for grief and loss.

These are examples of robots serving humans during meaningful experiences. These are the moments in life that matter – experiences that most of us would remember and suggest are significant. They require compassion and attention, and yet, for speed and convenience, we may well turn them over to machines.

As with anything in life, it's about balance. We need to get really good at being human so that, at the very least, whatever is fed into the machines is as close to a caring human as possible. If we

don't go into this era of humanity with our eyes wide open, before we realise it, AI will have completely taken over and be impacting the entire system, like a cancer that has slowly spread. We need to diagnose early and start treatment to maintain a strong level of humanity in the workplace, both through creating the most ethically sound AIs possible – because let's face it, AI is here to stay – and, most importantly, redefining the need for humans in customer-facing job roles.

Technology is advancing exponentially, but human physiology – our brains – has not evolved at all. And yet, we are magnificent and magical. We have abilities within our multilayered dimensions that it's time to utilise and expand fully –tech cannot replace that.

I would suggest a future in which humans work with robots but are not controlled by robots is a great harmonious vision to hold on to. Because if we're not careful, we'll start believing that robots are better than us. And that is simply not true.

Leaders, your job now is to look at the touchpoints of service in your business that require technology and the touchpoints that need humanness. The sweet spot for the future is the hybrid of technology and the 5 dimensions of service in your teams, workplace and business. This is how we rebirth service, allow our collective magic on this planet to be seen and keep humans at the top of the service pyramid rather than letting technology rule our world.