

The Fruit of Thankfulness

Denise Lee Yohn



Read more about how brands form valuable bonds with customers in Denise Lee Yohn's the new book, *Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do*. Blending a fresh perspective, twenty-five years of experience working with world-class brands including Sony and Frito-Lay, and a talent for inspiring audiences, Denise is a leading authority on building and positioning exceptional brands. Denise is also the author of the bestselling book *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best from the Rest (Jossey-Bass)*.

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As children we learn to say "please" and "thank you", but as businesspeople we don't use these words as often as we should. Perhaps our manners get lost in our busyness. Or more likely, the hierarchy between customer and service provider, or between manager and employee, leads to a sense of privilege and lack of graciousness.

Whatever the reason, a greater sense of gratitude is needed in our business interactions. **We can practice thankfulness if we cultivate humility, caring, and love in our relationships the way three extraordinary leaders do.**

As the CEO of [PIRCH](#), the home appliance chain that sells \$10,000 in-home saunas and \$20,000 Viking ranges, Jeffery Sears needs to exude confidence—and yet he is one of the most humble business leaders you'll ever meet.

He explained to me how he tries to put himself in his customers' shoes, "You have no idea what's going on in somebody's life when they walk through your door. They could have found out that their child has cancer. They could have found out that their parents are ill. They could have found out that their husband's been cheating on them or vice versa. You just don't know what's going on in somebody's life, so the gift we could give to our guests is nothing more than we're going to make this the best possible moment of your day, that's our job."

This type of empathy and deference can only come from a genuine sense of humility—and it leads to sincere gratitude. Sears has been known to stay up until 4:00am after an event writing thank you notes to every attendee. He even sent me a handwritten thank you after I interviewed him for my blog.

For Carl Sewell, Chairman of [Sewell Automotive Companies](#), one of the largest and longest-standing car dealership organizations in Texas, "genuinely caring" isn't just words in his company's mission statement—they're words to live by. He truly cares for his customers.

Carl and his team are renown for going well out of their way to help their customers— showing up at midnight to open a customer's car that they're locked out of and not charging for the service; driving a car from Dallas to New York for a customer who didn't want to rent a car there; or recognizing a customer stranded with a flat tire on the side of the highway and spontaneously pulling over to help. Sewell explains in his best-selling book, *Customers for Life*, why he and his employees give their personal phone numbers to customers, "We want people to call us, no matter what time it is. They're our customers, and we want to take care of them."^[1]

His genuine caring leads to generous thankfulness—both from his customers *and* his employees. Sewell writes, "Have you thanked your employees today? If you thank customers, you should also thank the folks who do the work." He expresses his gratitude to his employees in many ways, including throwing thank-you barbecues—on company

time. "If you are going to throw a party to say thanks," he says, "Why not have it begin at 3pm on a Wednesday instead of Sunday at 2pm? It shows people you are serious about your appreciation."

And then there's Cheryl Bachelder, CEO of fast food chain [Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen](#), who led her organization through a major turnaround by tapping an unusual source—love. Faced with declining customer traffic, sales, and profits in 2008, Bachelder and her team decided that out of all the stakeholders in their business—including guests, employees, shareholders and board members—they would focus on their franchise operators.

Popeyes made a deliberate decision to do more than simply try to make their franchisees happy. They were going to *love* them. "It was a game-changing notion—to love the people you lead... We would love them for their passion. We would love them enough to listen to their point of view and their business experience." Bachelder said.

She writes about how Popeyes' love for their franchisees is related to their gratitude for the commitment they've made to the company, "They are risk takers—willing to bet their lives and bank accounts on Popeyes. We are grateful."

As these leaders demonstrate, thankfulness is a critical posture to assume in business. But it's not something one can manufacture or fake. It's a fruit planted in the seeds of humility, caring, and love.

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