

SUMMARY

ZOMBIE LOYALISTS

PETER SHANKMAN



Summary of “Zombie Loyalists” by Peter Shankman

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Learn how to use great service to create rabid fans

Introduction	6
The Power of a Zombie Loyalist Army	7
Encourage Your Employees	9
Before Building an Army, You Must Infect Your First Customer	11
Be Genuine and Surprise Your Customers	13
The Power of Social Media and Owning Your Mistakes	15
Final Summary	17



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Introduction

Let's talk about real zombies. You know the ones. The ones who are complete die-hards. These zombies are the people who are so completely in love with a company, they build an army of followers around them and convince them to fall in love too. You see, there is nothing better for bringing in new customers than current customers. "Not advertising, not marketing, not social media, and not public relations (PR) - *nothing* in the world brings in more new customers than happy current customers." These happy current customers? These are the zombies I'm talking about. So if you want to build a company, you're going to have to learn how to build an army of customers so strong and in love with your business, that they take over your advertising, marketing, and PR for you. Throughout *Zombie Loyalists*, you'll learn how to take care of this army. How to train it, feed it, water it, make it happy, and even how to nurture it. You're going to learn how to build an army of Zombie Loyalists that will help you take over the world. Okay, maybe you won't be singlehandedly taking over the world, but you'll certainly be bringing in new customers!

Author Peter Shankman is many things. He's an entrepreneur who has successfully sold three companies, he's an investor or advisor to at least a dozen companies, including tech start-ups, clothing companies, and even NASA. He runs a blog and co-hosts *The Mistake Podcast*. All of these things keep him traveling 300,000 miles per year which allows him the opportunity to observe, write, and come up with ideas, even the idea for this book. So keep reading to find out how to build your army of Zombie Loyalists and become a company that people fall in love with.

The Power of a Zombie Loyalist Army

The power of Zombie Loyalists can be seen every day. For example, when you're in the market for buying something, like a new digital camera or even a new jacket, what do you do? Many times, you might do something as simple as asking your friends, family, and coworkers for recommendations. When you get a recommendation from someone you trust, are you more likely to buy that product? Of course! Don't you trust your friend or family member over an advertisement on the internet or in a magazine? Well, Peter Shankman learned this powerful lesson about recommendations on a flight out of Los Angeles.

As he sat down in his seat on the airplane, Peter removed his MacBook Air, iPad, power cord, and headphones all from his jacket. That's right. *From his jacket.* You see, Peter is on the advisory board of a company called SCOTTeVEST which is a clothing company that makes travel clothing, like the jacket with tons of pockets, the exact one he was wearing on this United flight out of Los Angeles. As the woman stared in awe, she asked him about his jacket and, immediately, Peter began talking. Not only was this jacket perfect for flying, but it was also the reason Peter was able to travel four days in Tokyo with nothing but that jacket. Of course, he mentioned that he was on the company's board as well.

"I would hope so," was her reply, and she continued to explain how she had been completely sold on the jacket. She took out her phone to order one online and Peter gave her a 20 percent off code which then spurred the woman to not only buy a jacket for herself but also one for her husband, one for each of her three children, and even one for her assistant! In just five minutes, Peter had helped SCOTTeVEST sell roughly \$700 worth of clothing. Later throughout the flight, the woman leaned over to Peter and showed him a page in *SkyMall magazine* that had an ad for the same jacket. "This is the jacket I just bought, right?" she asked. "Yup," Peter replied, "that's them." The woman then said, "Gotta tell you, you make a

much more convincing advertisement than the one in this magazine.” And that’s when it hit Peter.

This woman bought five jackets not because she saw an ad, but because *Peter* sold her on it. It was his enthusiasm that made her pull the plug and purchase *five* of them. Peter was a better advertisement than a magazine, and at that moment, he was a Zombie Loyalist for SCOTTeVEST. And guess what? In just five minutes, he created another zombie on the airplane that day, infecting her with the love of an amazing jacket. Imagine the number of jackets that were then sold from *her* recommendations, and so on? This, my friend, is the power of a Zombie Loyalist army.

Encourage Your Employees

So now that you know the power that zombies have on your company, how can you build such a strong army? How can you get people raving about your product in the way Peter raved about his jacket? When it comes to breeding Zombie Loyalists, there is just one common denominator: incredible customer service. You see, no matter how prestigious your brand is or how passionate your customers are, your company will be nothing if you don't provide fantastic experiences for your customers. The problem, however, is that most CEOs believe that their customer service is already great! In fact, 80 percent of businesses believe they deliver "superior" customer service. Only 8 percent of those businesses' customers agree. How can there be such a large disconnect?

Unfortunately, the biggest factor for this disconnect is communication. So if you expect your employees to provide incredible customer service, then creating better internal communication is the best place to start. For instance, when human resource professionals conduct exit interviews with customer service employees, one of the top reasons for leaving is always "not being listened to." I mean, not listening to employees is why unions exist in the first place, right? When we fail to listen to our employees, we can experience some devastating consequences. Just look at Morton-Thiokol who chose not to listen to Roger Boisjoly, the engineer who warned that the O-rings designed for the Challenger Space Shuttle wouldn't hold up in colder weather. Unfortunately, that mistake cost lives.

In the end, it's really very simple. Employees want to know that everyone will listen to them, including managers, directors, vice presidents, and even CEOs. The company culture should always include listening to employees and ensuring that their opinions and contributions are valued. Because if employees don't feel valued, why should they make customers feel that way? For example, Peter once worked at a yogurt shop in Manhattan. One day, he noticed that the brass poles holding the awning above the entrance were "the dirtiest things you've ever seen," and had probably never been

cleaned. So about thirty minutes before closing, Peter grabbed some brass polish he found in the storage room and began buffing the hell out of those poles.

Before he was finished, the franchise owner of the store came outside and asked Peter why he wasn't behind the counter. He responded that if the poles shone, then perhaps the store would attract more customers. Immediately, the owner said, "I don't pay you to think. Get back behind the counter." After that day, Peter never showed up again. He was shut down. And the worst part? He truly believed he was doing something that would help the company. He was making minimum wage, he had a simple idea, and his reward for taking initiative was, "Shut up, kid. You're an idiot." If companies don't reward their employees or fail to value them, you'll never create Zombie Loyalists. Simply put, a company that doesn't empower its employees to help improve the company certainly won't be in business for long.

Before Building an Army, You Must Infect Your First Customer

So now that you've created a company culture that values your employees and even created a team of employees who knows that it's all about the customer, it's time to start turning your customers into Zombie Loyalists. Zombie Loyalists who are willing to infect everyone else around them and bring more Zombie Loyalists through your door. But before you can build an army, you must start with one zombie.

The best way to infect your first customer is through using the power of surprise and implementing small acts of kindness. For example, being in the car dealership business is rough. It's an industry in which everyone is immediately suspicious of you before even walking in. However, one car dealership was able to successfully create Zombie Loyalists by putting their people over profit. In fact, the rule is that "People over profit makes more profit." Melissa Schulz and her husband had been buying Honda's cars for years. Now, that doesn't make them Zombie Loyalists, right? I mean, do you love your Honda but *also* love the car dealership in which you bought it? If you're like most people, then probably not.

One day, however, Melissa took her Honda to her dealership with a broken driverside window. At the time, her husband was out of work and paying \$500 for a new window was certainly not in the budget for Melissa and her family. While Melissa was talking to the salesperson at the repair shop, the manager overheard her story and looked up Melissa's history with the dealership. In the end, the manager stepped in and said, "Since you're such a good member of the Honda family, Melissa, we're going to fix your window at no charge." And that was that. The dealership created a Zombie Loyalist.

Melissa was so excited that she actually went back to the dealership with candy to thank them. When she needed a new car, where do you think she went? When her friends needed a new car, who do you think she

recommended? The cycle continues as those friends continue to recommend the dealership to their friends. In the end, the car dealership was out \$500, but they quickly made that money back and more through the power of Zombie Loyalists. Of course, there is a caveat in that the manager was able to step in and make that decision for Melissa. But there are many other things that employees can do to spread kindness.

For example, one bodega in San Francisco had an employee who asked a girl wearing headphones what she was listening to when she approached the counter. When she responded that she was listening to T.I., he sang “You can have whatever you like!” each time she walked into the store that week. Overall, it’s important that everyone, employees, managers, and owners, try to go that extra mile to infect their Zombie Loyalists and make them want to rave about you to their family and friends.

Be Genuine and Surprise Your Customers

Once you infect your first customer, it's time to start working on that army. Remember, Zombie Loyalists love nothing more than infecting other people with their love of a product or service. Think about it, when someone asks for a recommendation for a local restaurant, how quick are you to put a list together of your favorite ones? Exactly, customers love to recommend the things they love, all you need is to start giving them a reason to do it. One of the best ways to do this is by rewarding customers with special favors.

For example, when a couple booked a couple's massage at a spa in Maryland, they were asked by the receptionist if it was a special occasion. Well, it was indeed a special occasion, it was the couple's anniversary so they provided this information but didn't think anything of it. When it was time for their spa, however, they walked in and were surprised to find a chocolate cake that had "Happy Anniversary" written on it. This seemingly small gesture created lifelong Zombie Loyalists. The couple enjoyed telling their friends about their experience at the spa which made them feel special on their anniversary. Of course, this isn't the only way in which you can create Zombie Loyalists.

Additionally, you should show customers that their problems are important to you. You see, when customers are complaining about a problem, they are likely stressed about a million other things on top of the problem they are experiencing with your company. For this reason, employees who shrug off customers' problems as unimportant will only make the situation worse for the customer and the company. Therefore, employees should work to find simple, fast solutions to their problems. In the end, you'll see how grateful those customers become and you'll likely create Zombie Loyalists out of them!

Let's take a look at Harlan, for example, who had chosen to wear a blue pinstripe suit to an awards gala he was invited to. Right before the event, Harlan shockingly realized that the gala required him to wear only black. In

a panic, Harlan desperately called tuxedo shops in the area trying to find one that would help in his dire situation. When he called one particular tuxedo shop, he was told that the shop was about to close. However, Harlan pleaded with the shop and explained his predicament. The shop agreed to help Harlan and invited him in to see what they could do. When Harlan arrived, they had a tailor waiting for him, and just 30 minutes later, he was walking out of the shop in a fitted black suit. That day, he became a Zombie Loyalist and told his story to the 1,000 guests of the gala during his speech. Does word-of-mouth advertising get any better than that?

The Power of Social Media and Owning Your Mistakes

As we've previously mentioned, customers are far more likely to trust their friends and family over a brand's marketing. This is why it's so important that you get customers talking and spreading the word. So where should you begin? Social media! Okay, don't freak out. Many companies today associate social media with a sea of bad reviews and complaints. But social media has the power to do so much more than sharing the bad stuff. In fact, people love to share the good as well.

Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are great platforms for customers who wish to share a positive experience they had with a company. So when a customer shows their appreciation through a comment, post, or review, be sure to respond and thank them for their kind words! Take it a step further by offering the customer something in return for showing their appreciation. For example, if someone tweets about the delicious meal they had at your restaurant, respond by thanking them and offering them a free drink for the customer and his or her friends. Not only will you promote good reviews, but you'll likely see the customer come around more often and bring plenty of friends!

If you want people to share their experiences online, you'll need to give them a reason. In fact, you can do even better if you can get the customer to share a photograph on social media. A picture is worth a thousand words, right? For instance, one man once took his very pregnant wife out to dinner at a nearby Red Robin. After a nice meal, the couple received the bill which included a small note from the waitress who wanted to wish them luck with the birth. The couple was so pleased with the gesture that they took a picture of the message and posted it on the forum website, Reddit. Eventually, the photograph made its way to the consumer website, Consumerist. You see, going viral doesn't always have to be a bad thing.

Of course, the journey to creating Zombie Loyalists won't always be smooth sailing. Sometimes you might go viral for the wrong thing, you might do something that makes even your most loyal zombies turn on you. Making mistakes is normal so you shouldn't fear them. Instead, you should acknowledge that you messed up and assure your army of zombies that you are trying to improve. Loyalists are incredibly forgiving people, so you'll be surprised at how simply owning up to your mistakes will improve your relationship.

For example, Dennis is a Zombie Loyalist and a regular patron at the restaurant O'Hara's. However, after informing the managers on multiple occasions about the problems he experienced, nothing changed. Eventually, he got so fed up that he told the staff he wouldn't be coming back. Three months later, Dennis received a message from O'Hara's informing him about the changes they had made and invited him to dine with them just once more to see those changes. When Dennis arrived, he was met by the owner who thanked him personally. In the end, Dennis gave O'Hara's a second chance and he once again became a Zombie Loyalist.

Final Summary

When it comes to turning boring customers into raving, infectious zombies, it's surprisingly easier than it sounds! If you're in the business of selling a product or service, you certainly know the power and influence of word-of-mouth recommendations. That's why customer service is key to creating loyal followers of your brand. Of course, it doesn't just start with your employees, it starts at the top. Once you create a company culture that values each person and respects their contributions and opinions, then it's time to start working on building your army of Zombie Loyalists. You can build your army by encouraging employees to go the extra mile, create a unique gift, special experience, or even reward them for being loyal and spreading the word. When you treat your customers with kindness and respect, you'll soon have the strongest army of Zombie Loyalists who will stop at nothing to share about their love for your brand. You see, in the world of business, kindness always wins in the end.



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