

# SERVICE EXCELLENCE BASED ON PRINCIPLES: THE FRED FACTOR



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## The “Fred” Story

The first time I met "Fred" was just after I had purchased what I called a "new old house." A first-time homeowner, I'd only been living there for a few days when I heard a knock on my front door. I opened it, and saw a mailman standing there.



"Good morning, Mr. Sanborn!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "My name is Fred and I'm your postal carrier. I just stopped by to introduce myself, welcome you to the neighborhood, and find out a little bit about you and what you do for a living." Of medium height and build with a small mustache, Fred was an ordinary-looking fellow. But, while his physical appearance didn't convey anything out of the ordinary, his sincerity and warmth were noticeable immediately.

I was taken back. I'd been receiving mail for most of my life, but I had never received this kind of an introduction from my postal carrier. But it did impress me as a nice touch. I replied, "I'm a professional speaker." "If you're a professional speaker, you must travel a lot," said Fred. "Yes, I do. I travel anywhere from 160 to 200 days a year." Nodding, Fred went on. "Well, if you just give me a copy of your schedule, I'll hold your mail and bundle it. I'll only deliver it on the days that you are at home to receive it."



This was amazing! But, as I told Fred, that was probably not necessary. "Why not just leave the mail in the box on the side of the house?" I suggested. "Then I'll pick it up when I came back into town." Fred explained, "Mr. Sanborn, burglars often watch for mail building up in a box. That tells them that you're out of town, and you might become the victim of a break-in."

Fred was more worried about my mail than I was! But after all, I realized, he was the postal professional. He continued, "Here's what I suggest. I can put mail in your box as long as the lid closes. That way nobody will know that you're gone. Whatever doesn't fit in the box, I'll put between the screen door and the front door. Nobody can see it there. And if that area becomes too full of mail, I'll just hold the rest of it for you until you come back into town."

At this point I started to wonder: does this guy really work for the U.S. Postal Service? Maybe this neighborhood had its own private mail delivery service. Still, Fred's suggestions sounded like a terrific plan to me, so I agreed to them.



Two weeks later I returned home from a trip. As I put the key in my front door lock, I noticed that my doormat was missing. I was puzzled; I doubted that anyone was actually stealing doormats. I looked around on my front porch and I found my doormat in the corner. It was covering something.

Here's what had happened: While I was gone, UPS had misdelivered a package sent to me. The box was left on somebody else's porch five doors down. Lucky for me Fred the Postman was on the job. Noticing *my* box on the wrong porch, he picked it up, carried it down to my house and put it out of view. He also attached a note explaining what had happened, and then tried to make it less noticeable by placing the doormat over it. Not only was Fred delivering the mail, he was now picking up slack for UPS! His actions really struck me.

As for myself, I wanted to thank Fred more formally for his exceptional service. When Christmas rolled around, I left a small gift in the mailbox for him. The next day, when the mail was delivered, I found an unusual letter in my box. The envelope had a stamp on it, but the stamp wasn't canceled. That's when I noticed the return address. The letter was from Fred the Postman. Fred knew it was illegal to put a letter that wasn't posted in the box. So, even though he personally carried it from his house to my house, he still put a stamp on to keep it legal.

Over the next ten years, I received consistently remarkable service from Fred. I could always tell the days when he wasn't working my street just by the way the mail was jammed in my box. When Fred was on the job it was always neatly bundled.

Also, Fred took a personal interest in me. One day while I was mowing the front lawn, a vehicle slowed in the street. The window went down and a familiar voice yelled, "Hello Mr. Sanborn! How was your trip?" It was Fred, off duty and driving around the neighborhood.



To this day, I can't tell you what motivated Fred. I know he didn't get paid more for his extraordinary work. I doubt he received any special recognition from his employer (if he did, I never heard about it). I know he wasn't privy to any exceptional training or incentive programs.

*--Edited, by permission, from "The Fred Factor" by Mark Sanborn*

## Service Excellence Concepts From “Fred”



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## Parallel Acts From “Fred” For Your Customers



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## What Makes Fred a “Fred”?

In an interview with Fred, Mark Sanborn asks Fred probably the most important question of all: “Why do you do what you do?” The following is a summary of his answer.

### 1. Do Good And You’ll Feel Good.

- a. “I have to feel good about myself each day, and the satisfaction of taking care of people helps me do that.”



### 2. The Best Never Rest.

- a. “I have a tremendous need to accomplish as much as I can each day. I take care of people who don’t always know what I do for them. But even if nobody knows, I do.”

### 3. Treat Customer And Others As Friends.

- a. Fred doesn’t think in terms of “customer service.”
- b. “I want to go home at the end of the day feeling like I’ve taken care of my folks. I don’t think of them as postal customers, but as friends who appreciate me for helping make their lives a little easier.”



### 4. The Impact You Have On Others Is The Reward.

- a. He did what he did and continues to do what he does for the simple reason that he feels it is the right thing to do.

### 5. Live The Golden Rule.

- a. “I see a lot of ‘me, me, me’ in our culture. I choose to give people a few less things to worry about.”

### 6. Fear Nothing Except To Waste The Moment.

- a. “Look to every day as a new day, and make each day better than the last.”
- b. Fred practices the “art of the extraordinary” because of his personal commitment to make the most of each day.



## Principles of “Fred”

### 1. Everyone Makes A Difference

- a. Nobody can prevent you from choosing to be exceptional. At the end of the day, the only question that matters is: What kind of difference did you make?
- b. Doing a job in an extraordinary way is an individual choice.
- c. Questions to consider:
  - Do you add to or take away from the experience of your customers and co-workers?
  - Do you move your organization closer to or further from its goals?
  - Do you perform your work in an ordinary way, or do you execute it superbly?
  - Do you lighten someone’s burden or add to it?
  - Do you lift someone up or put someone down?
- d. There are no unimportant jobs, just people who feel unimportant doing their jobs.



### 2. Success Is Built On Relationships

- a. Indifferent people deliver impersonal service.
- b. Service becomes personalized when a relationship exists, when time is spent understanding your customers, and then when that information is used to enhance the service outcome.
- c. The quality of the relationship with your customer can determine the perceived quality of the product or service.



### 3. Continually Create Value For Others

- a. Make it your objective to outthink (rather than outspend) your competition
- b. Use your imagination to create value...think harder and more creatively.
- c. It very well could be that your greatest competition is the job you could have done!  
We compete against our own potential every day, and many fall short of what we are capable of doing or being.
- d. Avoid mediocrity, being only willing to do just enough to get by and nothing more.

### 4. Reinvent Yourself Regularly

- a. Everyday is a new day...another day to recommit
- b. “Everyday is a gift” (Dr. Carl Kjeldsberg, ARUP Laboratories)...use your passion to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.
- c. Be compelled by passion, purpose, curiosity, and excitement.

