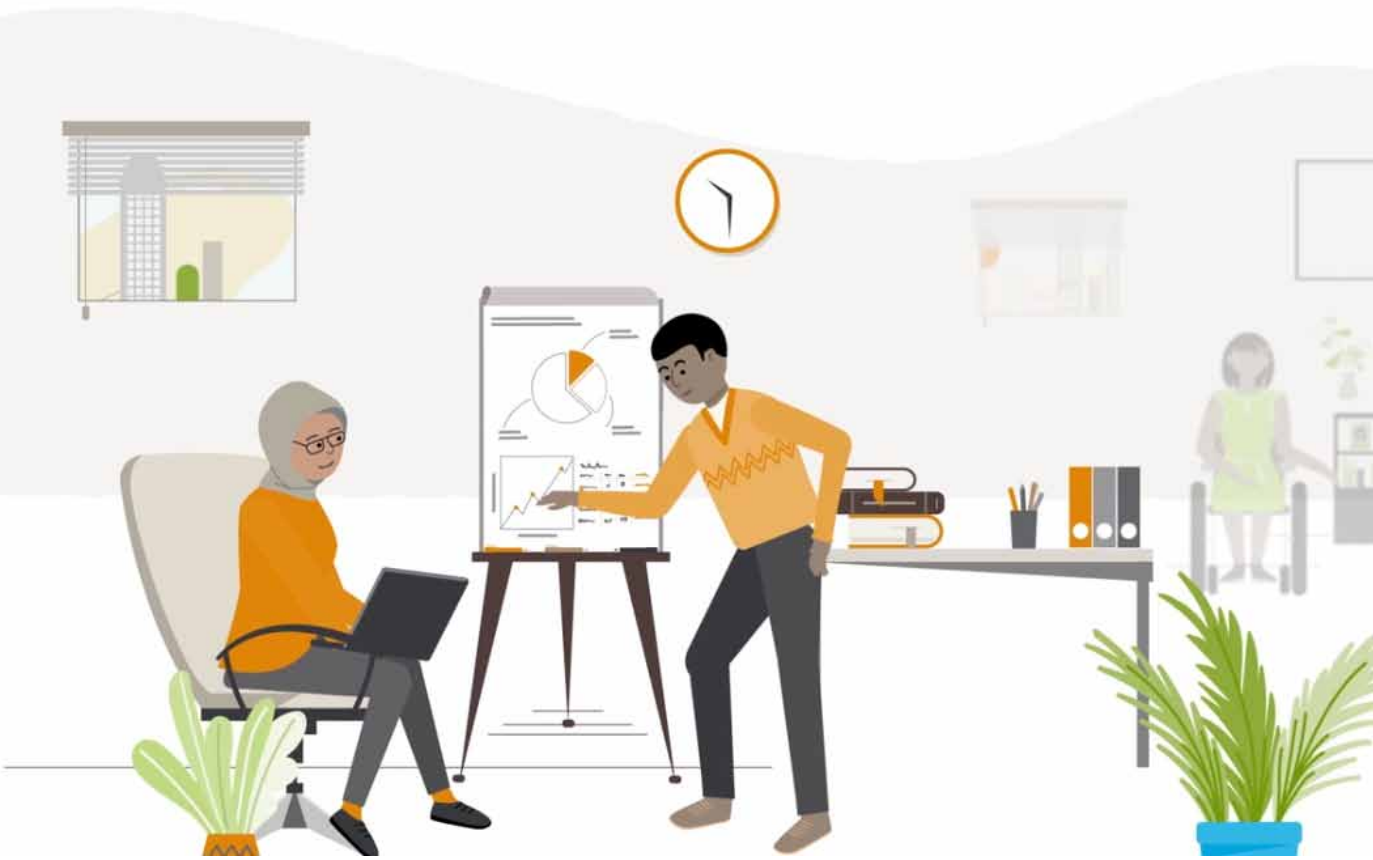


# Wired for Connection

Why great service is built on small moments of connection



service animals™  
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# Wired for Connection: Why great service is built on small moments of connection

“Human beings are wired to connect” according to Michael Platt Ph.D, a biological anthropologist. He was referring to our social brain, which he called the most complex and intelligent of all animals. The neocortex is larger in humans and contains those brain areas involved in higher social cognition, language, behavioural and emotional regulation, and empathy. So, connection is there in our wiring. Of course, we’ve always known this, but it’s taken the pandemic and lonely months of self-isolation and lockdowns to really bring it home.

We are social animals and thrive on connection with others, socially and professionally – yet we’ve spent much of the last 18 months physically apart, socially distanced, often isolated even whilst we remain virtually connected. It’s interesting that **the more hi-tech we become, the more we crave good old-fashioned face-to-face interaction.** Whilst Microsoft™ Teams, Zoom™ and others have enabled us to meet online, it’s so much harder to form connections when we can’t see people because their cameras are turned off, or they (or we) are multi-tasking. Which means we’re missing vital signs and not listening at full capacity. Even when we can see each other, it’s harder to read body language or tone of voice, and impossible to grasp that 6<sup>th</sup> sense we often get when we’re face-to-face with someone. That intuition that tells us we’re on someone’s

wavelength – or not. It’s interesting that the one aspect of virtual connection that offers us an opportunity to share more intimacy is often discouraged in the “rules” of virtual meetings: access to someone’s home, with everything that it says about them, which we’re encouraged to replace with blank walls or a corporate backdrop, so our background is as impersonal as possible.

Service technology has enabled us to self-serve in ways that frequently by-pass the need for human interaction. Pre-Covid, this seemed like a good thing, as it drove efficiency in our busy lives; during lockdown whilst it facilitated and enabled certain transactions it also highlighted the removal of the human touch and reminded us how isolated we had become.

**Even pre-Covid we had become the loneliest society in human history and distance working has, in many cases, exacerbated this.**



**In the UK, once initial euphoria about working from home wore off, 50% of people reported feeling lonely**

Gallup research

**1 in 5** report not having a single friend at work

Gallup research

**40%** of office workers globally feel lonely

Gallup research

Loneliness is not about the number of friends we have; it's more about our subjective experience of feeling connected, understood and seen for who we really are. And as this research shows, it's just as important at work as it is at home. Where it's absolutely critical is in our customer relationships.

The continuous digitalisation of service has enabled many organisations to survive or even thrive in the Covid world. Now, as we emerge from lockdown and social restrictions, **we need to find the sweet spot between technology and the human touch.**

A recent CGS survey confirmed that we want more human connection in service interactions.

**39%** of customers in the UK said that the opportunity to speak to a live agent is a “make or break” factor to having a successful customer interaction

No matter how brief these service interactions are – they matter. A nice way of thinking about them is as “small moments of connection”. Interestingly, it's not just customers who crave connection

– it's those who deliver service too. Many are reporting how much they miss “normal” human interaction with customers, without the need for masks or social distancing. Fundamentally those who work in service jobs thrive on delivering service, because service at its best is a two-way emotional connection that makes both parties feel good. And it can happen in seconds.

But is it really possible to create rapport in such a short space of time – minutes or in some cases just seconds?

Co-op certainly think so! They got this so right with their “I've got time to chat” campaign. They took the idea of “small moments of connection” and translated it into a campaign designed to “make sure that our customers who might be feeling lonely or isolated get a little friendly chat to hopefully brighten their day”. Home delivery drivers wore “I've got time to chat” badges and were encouraged to stop for a socially-distanced friendly chat with those that wanted it – acknowledging that grocery shopping was a rare opportunity for human interaction during lockdown. At the same, Co-op were strengthening their online shopping experience – a perfect example of using both technology and humanity to improve the overall customer experience.



Powerful – and yet so simple, and it takes mere minutes. A great demonstration that service is based on rapport. But back to our earlier question: is building rapport really so simple? Well, yes and no. Like all seemingly effortless human interactions, it can be broken down into behaviours that can be developed and improved. Usually building on our own natural communication style. (We can help with that – but more about it later!)

We love the way that best-selling business author Simon Sinek talks about service. He says it starts with your friends and family, and in our socially-distanced world, this makes perfect sense. “Do your friends feel seen, heard and understood?” he asks. “Do you show them empathy, do you listen?” This is exactly what we need to be doing more of with our customers, internal and external if we want our them to feel more emotionally connected to us, and more understood.

**“Many small moments of connection”** is a nice way of thinking about service and our need for human interaction, but it’s not just about the breadth of our connections, it’s also about the depth. What then, does a meaningful customer connection look or feel like? It’s the same things that underpin the service trend of hyper-personalisation, usually delivered by some kind of CRM platform: understand me, know what’s important to me, show an interest in me. It’s about feeling validated as a human being – and that’s what provides the emotional connection. It’s deeper than just being friendly, although being friendly is a great starting point!

When organisations communicate with us as their customer we look for two things: content and feeling. If we’re sitting in a bank, we may not understand everything that we’re being told but we certainly know how we’re made to feel: patronised or listened to; talked at or understood; cared for or unvalued. For bank meeting read also internal meeting, customer service location, and so on.

Great service is based on the emotional connections that we make with others, using empathy, listening for facts and feelings and asking questions to understand. To do this well,

organisations need to dial up their collective emotional intelligence, that all-important EQ, and focus on developing and improving soft skills. Not surprisingly McKinsey research points to a shift in the most important skills to develop: social and emotional skills such as empathy, resilience, adaptability, communication.

At the heart of emotionally intelligent conversations with others is the ability to understand ourselves and how we come over to others, to read others and gauge what’s important to them, and to adapt and respond in a way that’s meaningful to them. Simple but deceptively difficult.

Most of us were brought up to **“treat others the way you want to be treated” – which is well-intentioned but fatally flawed.**

Let’s imagine we’re on a station concourse; your train has been cancelled and what you want is a fast, efficient conversation with a customer service agent who points out the options for you to get home: what time, what platform, any changes. What might happen is that the lovely caring customer service agent may deliver exactly the service they’d like to receive: a lot of apologies, some rapport building and empathy before getting down to telling you what you really need. And, of course, the situation could also be reversed; solving the problem might be super-important to me as a customer service agent, and therefore I might focus on giving you the updated information you need so that you can hurry off and make the train – treating you the way I would want to be treated. But what if all you want is an appreciation of what a nuisance this is for you? A proper apology, some empathy and then the solution... so actually, I might come over as cold and uncaring – which would be news to me as I simply thought I was doing my best to manage your situation... and so it goes on.

When we treat others the way we want to be treated, we risk misunderstandings despite our good intentions. This, then, is one of the great skills of service: understanding our own natural style and how we tend to approach situations, “reading” the other person and responding appropriately in a way that works for them.

Which may mean adapting our approach a little.

Incidentally, this is just as important with our internal customers. Imagine I'm outgoing and chatty, more big picture than detail oriented. Whilst you are less interested in the big picture and need the detail to feel comfortable and confident. If I deliver a plan to you with a lot of personable preamble before diving into a fairly high-level overview of the plan... exactly how I would wish to be treated... how might you feel? Probably something along the lines of "cut the waffle and give me more detail". So, if I'd "read" your communication style, I might have adapted my approach to incorporate more detail than I'd usually include and get straight down to the facts before asking for your opinion - as you will be more responsive when you feel more comfortable that what you need is there.

When we have high levels of EQ, we pick up on what it is people want and intuitively make the switch. At SignalCX, we believe in treating others the way they want to be treated, and this is at the heart of our Service Animals™ proprietary profiling tool. It helps individuals, managers and teams understand their own unique natural service style - how they tend to interact with others. And encourages individuals to hold up a mirror and think about how they communicate. You thought you were being efficient, but the other person thought you were cold; you think that you're friendly and approachable, but to someone else you're overbearing.

But where Service Animals really makes a difference to individuals, is the ability to quickly and easily identify others' styles and understand what's important to them. By adapting your

style to the other persons, you can build rapport and trust faster - both of which are at the heart of great service - and make both parties feel good. Feedback from our customers indicates that Service Animals has a profound effect on individuals and the way that they understand themselves, which in turn impacts the way they approach customers. The biggest surprise is usually how simple and sticky the Service Animals tool is - yet how powerful the results.

Recognising that we are all customers of each other - maybe not formally, but we are all dependent on other teams - then this approach is as critical internally as externally. The better the relationships we have with each other, the easier it is to get things done, and that means better business outcomes. At SignalCX, we like to say that service oils the wheels of business.

But to finish, we go back to the beginning: making emotional connections with others is at the heart of being human, and the faster we can build some humanity back into our relationships, the faster we can reconnect with each other and with our customers. Which isn't a nice-to-do, it's an organisational imperative. We all know the facts: organisations that are strong in service also report better business metrics, including revenue. Organisations that learn how to do this in the new world of work, and how to integrate human behaviours smoothly with new technology are the ones that will succeed. Kick-start that journey with Service Animals. It'll make an immediate, tangible difference to the way your team members connect with their customers - naturally and intuitively - and in a way that drives value.

**Service Animals™** is brought to you by **SignalCX**, a consultancy focusing on customer experience. For nearly 4 decades, we have worked with some of the world's best brands to design and enable great customer experiences. The SignalCX customer experience journey will help you develop a culture that has the customer at its heart, with employees who are energised and excited and a growing body of customers who love the way that your organisation makes them feel. Apart from this lovely warm glow, you will achieve tangible, measurable and bottom-line driven results.

Service Animals has been developed and refined for the past 30 years, and has been used by almost a million people around the world. Its roots lie in the psychological theories of Carl Jung, but this model has been honed through years of work with psychologists, clients and our own team members. Service Animals is the only tool that focuses on how we all use our individual communication styles to form the service experience we deliver to customers and colleagues.

**To find out how Service Animals can help you and your teams deliver better results, visit us at: [www.serviceanimals.com](http://www.serviceanimals.com)**