

ENCOUNTERS:

**The Building
Blocks of We
Relationships**

By: Steve Yastrow



Part of the Meaningful Results Series from Steve Yastrow.
Driving Business Results from the Inside Out

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A Note from the Author:

Writing my new book, *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*, taught me a very important lesson: A strong relationship is the best way to differentiate you or your company in your customer's mind. Products can be copied, services can be duplicated ... but strong business relationships are unique. If you want your customer to see you as one-of-a-kind, forge a "We" relationship with her.

I created this e-book to help you implement one of the key ideas in *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*, We relationships are built *one encounter at a time*.

Learning to create relationship-building encounters with customers, as opposed to relationship-eroding *transactions*, is one of the most profitable business habits you can develop. If you can regularly turn mere customer interactions into encounters, you will see your business relationships grow.

But, creating encounters takes practice. This e-book is an implementation tool to help you with that practice. Print it out, carry it with you, write all over it and, most importantly, use its ideas each time you meet with a customer.

Learn to master the three elements of an encounter: Engagement in the moment, conversation and uniqueness. And, as you do, watch your business relationships improve.

Steve Yastrow

For more information on Steve Yastrow's book *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship* please visit www.Yastrow.com.

Consider this:

Every time you interact with a customer, only **one** of three things can possibly happen:

1. Your relationship **improves**
2. Your relationship **stays the same**
3. Your relationship **becomes weaker**



Our definition:

Encounters: Interactions that strengthen your relationship.

Transactions: Interactions that damage your relationship or, at best, have no effect on your relationship.

Can *you* think of another possibility? We can't.

Customer interactions that improve relationships are called **encounters**, and are the building blocks of strong, We relationships. Customer interactions that damage or, at best, have no effect on customer relationships are called **transactions**.

Which would you rather have with your customers, encounters or transactions?

Think about a recent exchange you had with a customer or colleague. What effect did that exchange have on your relationship with that person? Did it strengthen and advance the relationship?

Here is what you'll find inside. . .

- Master the three elements of an encounter
- Optimize your next encounter
 - Preparing for the encounter
 - During the encounter
 - Following up after the encounter
- Use the Encounter Wallet Card on page 20 to help you integrate these ideas into your upcoming customer interactions

The 3 Elements of an Encounter

Strong customer relationships are built one encounter at a time. Your goal, in your next interaction with a customer, is not only to make a sales pitch, or to sign a contract, or review your product offering, your goal is to create an encounter that advances your relationship.

What transforms a customer interaction into an *encounter*, saving it from the fate of becoming a transaction? There are three elements that will turn an interaction into an encounter.

Encounter Element #1. Engagement in the moment

Be there! ... 100%, alert and in-tune
Invite your customer to be there!

Encounter Element #2. Conversation

Beyond storytelling ... focus on dialogue

Encounter Element #3. Uniqueness

A unique, authentic moment between two unique, authentic people

If these three elements are present, you will create a relationship-building encounter. If even one of them is not present ... well, sorry. You will have a transaction.



Encounter Element #1: Engagement in the moment

Distraction is an aspect of life these days. Think of the last time you were talking on the phone and you could tell that the person on the other end of line was clicking away on his or her computer checking emails. (When was the last time you did that?)

There are many things that can distract you. Maybe your car broke down this morning and you are wondering if it will be ready tonight so you can make it to your son's baseball game. Or, you just lost a valuable employee and must replace him or her quickly. You might be excited about an upcoming vacation, and cannot stop thinking about it.

An encounter requires full attention. Distraction leads to transaction. The first element of an encounter requires you and your customer to be fully engaged in the moment:

Be there! ... 100%, alert and in-tune

In an encounter, you are fully committed to the interaction with your customer. You are present. There is nothing else happening but the encounter.

You can tell when someone is not fully engaged with you ... and your customer can tell if you are not fully engaged with her.

Encounter Element #2:

Conversation

Invite your customer to be there!

Your customer must also be 100% in the moment with you. Your mission is to invite your customer into the moment with you. A simple truth: If you are 100% in the moment, your presence will make it much easier for your customer to join you in the moment.

When was the last time you were talking with someone—a friend, family member or work colleague—and the person talked non-stop, leaving no space to respond or participate in the conversation. Were you listening? Did you start to lose interest?

The second element of an encounter is all about having a rich, fluid dialogue. An encounter requires conversation—rich dialogue—and the avoidance of monologue. It is a meaningful exchange of back and forth contributions which result in a collaboration that advances the relationship.

Beyond storytelling ... focus on dialogue

Your goal is not to tell your story, or simply listen to your customer's story. An encounter is a fluid conversation exchange in which you create a shared story with your customer.

Monologue → Transaction

Dialogue → Encounter

Encounter Element #3:

Uniqueness

You can tell when someone is just telling you their *shpiel*, as if they were reading from a script they have recited many times before. You can tell when someone is treating you as a commodity, without recognition of who you are.

The third element of an encounter is uniqueness. An encounter requires uniqueness. It has the feeling that it has never happened before, and that you and your customer are creating it together, for the first time.

A unique, authentic moment between two unique, authentic people

Encounters are not scripted. They feel fresh, spontaneous, and one-of-a-kind.

In an encounter, you and your customer interact as fully integrated unique people, not simply as representatives your job roles.

Your Next Encounter



Preparation: **Get Ready To Have An Encounter!**

You are about to interact with a customer. Will it be a relationship-building *encounter*, or a *transaction* that is, at best, relationship-neutral and, possibly, damaging to your relationship?

Before entering your next customer interaction, stop. Get ready for your next encounter by reviewing the following thoughts and ideas.

The goal of this meeting: have a great encounter

Encounter element #1:

Engagement in the moment

Visualize you and your customer together, engaged in an encounter. Think ahead ... what will it take to get in the moment?

Getting yourself in the moment:

*Here are some techniques to help you prepare to engage in the moment with your customer: (for more on this, see pages 47 – 56 in Steve Yastrow's book **We: The Ideal Customer Relationship**)*

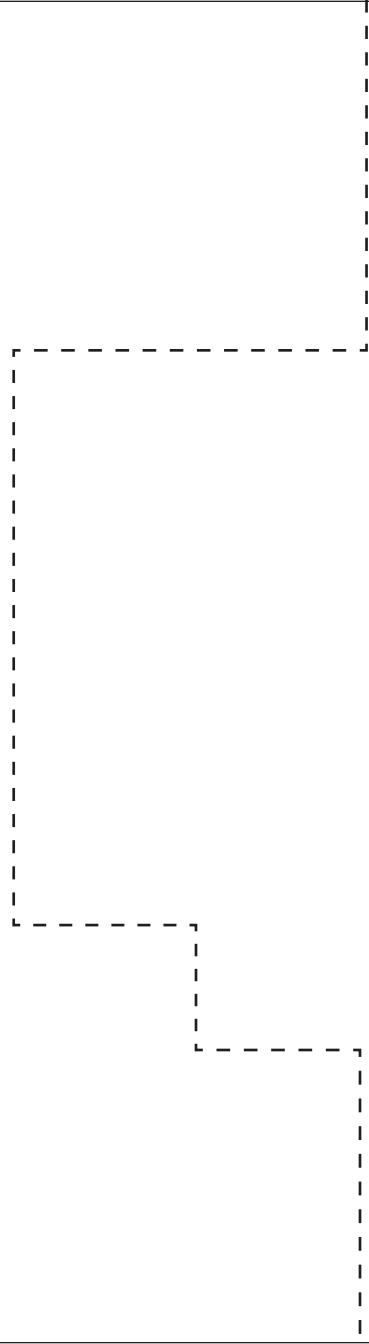
Pause before the moment: Create a break between what you've been doing and the new encounter. Don't talk on the phone with someone else right up until the moment you walk into a customer's office. Don't read an unrelated email or report on your computer screen as you are waiting for someone to pick up the phone. A momentary pause will enable you to transition to the right place to engage.

Fall into the moment: Recognize that your customer is in the middle of an action-packed day. There is a moment already in progress when you meet your customer. Pay attention to what is going on and ... jump in.

Be alert and notice the details: Every situation has the potential to be interesting and engaging. Open up your senses. You will notice many details that can serve as “hooks” to engage you in the moment.

Don’t “pay” attention, invest it: Paying attention doesn’t cost anything. As you pay attention to the situation, be aware of what that attention returns to you. What are you going to do with what you have gained—how are you going to invest it?

Observe the other person, and respond to what you observe: Notice interesting details, features and quirks of the person with whom you are engaging. Every person on earth has interesting attributes and qualities. Take a moment to notice those details. Latch onto them.



“Great Encounters Lead to Great Outcomes”

Say “Yes” to the moment: Don’t resist the moment if it isn’t going the way you want it to go. Instead of forcing the moment back on track, ride with it. You may end up going a different route, but you will be more likely to create a meaningful encounter than if you fight the direction things are going naturally.

Don’t be distracted by what you will get from the encounter: Yes, you want to be results oriented. Having too much of your “eye on the prize” can distract you from the real goal: having a great encounter. Great encounters lead to great outcomes. If you avoid focusing on what you will get from the encounter, you will be more likely to achieve it.

Inviting your customer into the moment:

- What, potentially, could prevent your customer from becoming fully engaged in the encounter with you?
- What distractions might prevent him or her from focusing 100% on you?
- Be aware of the moment your customer is already in—can you imagine how you will adapt the customer’s situation to the encounter you would like to have?

*Here are some techniques for inviting your customer into the moment. (for more on this, see pages 57 to 69 in Steve Yastrow's book **We: The Ideal Customer Relationship**)*

Be conscious of the moment your customer is already in before meeting with you: Envision your customer's situation and mindset as he or she enters the interaction. By being aware of where your customer is coming from, it will be easier to invite him or her into the moment with you. You might want to call ahead to find out what's going on with your customer before you arrive.

Your presence makes invitation possible: Remember, you are inviting your customer to join you in a moment. Your visible, tangible, alert, engaging presence gives your customer something that is easy to participate in.

Listening is inviting: Letting the other person talk, and actively listening to him or her, opens a lit pathway through which that person can join you in the moment.

Bring the future forward: Ironically, it's often easier for people to engage in the moment when thinking about the future than it is when thinking about today. Ask your customer a future outcome of the situation you are discussing. Ask them what they want things to be like at some time in the future. By bringing the future forward into today, they will find it easier to engage in what's happening now.

Using someone else's words: Often, people tell the same stories so many times that they can fall into auto-pilot mode, and not really be present in the moment. Try asking your customer to describe a situation in someone else's words. That can help them turn off auto-pilot, grab the controls, and join you in the moment.

Show empathy: Empathy is stepping outside of your experience and into the experience of another. If your customer sees you stepping into his experience, he will, most likely, step into it to and be fully engaged in the moment.

Encounter element #2:

Conversation

Your encounter depends on you and your customer becoming engaged in a fluid, collaborative dialogue. What could stand in the way?

*Here are some techniques that will help you avoid monologue and create dialogue with your customer. (for more on this, see pages 73 to 86 in Steve Yastrow's book **We: The Ideal Customer Relationship**)*

Do you have a lot of detailed information to explain? How could you explain that information without monologue, bringing your customer into a dialogue as you help the customer understand your information?

Do either you or your customer have a tendency to lapse into monologues? Are there certain times it tends to happen? Stay alert! Yes, dialogue can revert to monologue quickly, but you can also turn monologue back to dialogue quickly! Notice how well each of you is listening—it's a very accurate gauge of the quality of dialogue.

Without concern for the words you each will be using, picture yourselves in that fluid, collaborative dialogue.

Encounter element #3:

Uniqueness

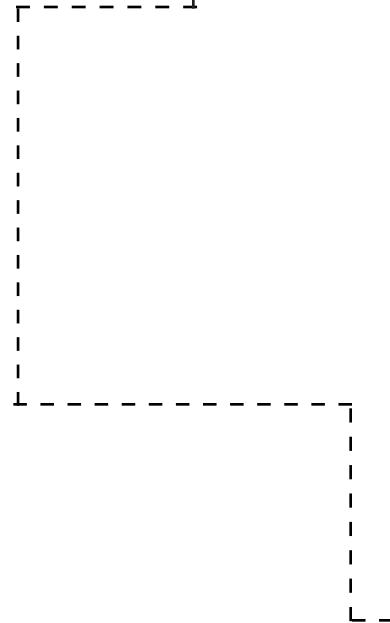
To be an encounter, this interaction needs to be a unique, authentic moment between two, unique, authentic people.

- You want to make this interaction feel like a one-of-a-kind encounter that has never, ever happened before. Be conscious of what you can do to make the encounter feel fresh, natural and unscripted.

- Consider how you can engage with your customer not as “a customer,” but as the unique person he or she is. What interesting details of your customer’s personality can you honor and engage with?

- What aspects of your uniqueness do you want present in the encounter? How can you make it easier for your customer to engage with you as you?

- New or existing customer?
 - If this is an existing customer, what do you already know about the customer from your past encounters that you would like to acknowledge? What more do you need to



learn? What does the customer already know about you from previous encounters? What more would you like him or her to learn?

- If this is a new customer, what do you each know about each other, even though you haven't had encounters yet? What are the most important things you should each learn about each other?

Here are some techniques that will help you invite your customer into the moment. (for more on this, see pages 87 to 117 in Steve Yastrow's book *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*)

You want to make this interaction feel like a one-of-a-kind encounter that has never, ever happened before. Be conscious of what you can do to make the encounter feel fresh, natural and unscripted. If you've been in similar interactions many times before, think about choosing different words, or give examples in a new order.

Consider how you can engage with your customer not as "a customer," but as the unique person he or she is. What interesting details of your customer's personality can you acknowledge, honor, and engage with?

What aspects of your uniqueness do you want present in the encounter? How can you make it easier for your customer to engage with you as you?

Final preparation:

Visualize the encounter ... what does it feel like? What are the few things you want to be focused on during the encounter?



During the Encounter

It is important during an encounter to keep your mind open, focused and fluid. Just keep the three elements of an encounter in mind:

- **Engagement in the Moment**

Are you and your customer engaged in the moment? What can you do to bring both of you deeper into the encounter?

- **Conversation**

Are you in a fluid conversation, without monologues? What can you do to make the encounter more of a genuine dialogue?

- **Uniqueness**

Is the encounter a fresh, authentic, unique moment between two unique, authentic people? What can you do to make the encounter seem more unique?

Throughout the encounter, keep monitoring the situation. Stay on track!

Follow-up:

How Was The Encounter?

You have just had an *interaction* with a customer. Was it a relationship-building encounter, or a *transaction* that didn't move your relationship forward? Make notes if this will help you evaluate your experience and move the relationship forward.

Circle which of the following best describes this interaction)

My relationship with this customer is improved after this interaction.

My relationship with this customer is the same after this interaction

My relationship with this customer is worse after this interaction

Now, while the interaction is still fresh in your mind, assess how well it followed the three elements of a relationship-building encounter.

Engagement in the moment

- How well were you engaged in the moment during the encounter?
 - Were distracted at any point in time?
 - What distracted you?
 - What worked to get you into the moment?

- How well was your customer engaged in the moment during the encounter?
 - Did you have your customer's full attention?
 - Were there times your customer was distracted?
 - What did you do to invite your customer into the moment?
What could you have done better?

Conversation

- Was this a true dialogue or a trading of monologues?
- If there was monologue, what was its effect?
- What could have made the interaction a better dialogue?

Uniqueness

- Do you think the moment seemed fresh and unscripted to your customer?
- Were you able to recognize unique things about your customer, and was that recognition evident in the way you engaged with your customer?
- Did you enable your customer to recognize what was unique about you?

Wallet Card:



www.Yastrow.com

Encounter Reminder Card

Keep the three elements of an encounter
in mind as you interact with your customer

fold

- **Engagement in the moment**
 - Be there!
 - Invite your customer to be there!
- **Conversation**
 - Avoid monologue! Create fluid dialogue
- **Uniqueness**
 - Create a fresh, unscripted moment
 - Interact not as representatives of job roles, but as two unique human beings

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To order Steve Yastrow's book *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*, please visit www.Yastrow.com.

The Ideal Customer Relationship

When thinking of their relationship with you, do your customers think “We,” or “Us & Them?”

So starts Steve Yastrow's new book, *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship*. With a fresh, provocative look at how to connect with customers, Yastrow, a leading marketing thinker and consultant, helps readers understand how to differentiate their businesses in a meaningful way.

Customers have more product and service choices than ever before, making it very difficult for customers to distinguish your business solely on the merit of your product and service offerings. What can differentiate your business in the minds of customers, however, is the relationship the customer has with you. A competitor may sell a similar product, but the relationship you have with each customer can be unique.

And what is the best kind of customer relationship? A “We” relationship, where the customer sees you not as a vendor or a provider, but as a collaborator. Through interviews, research, ideas and insights, Yastrow offers a roadmap to better results through better customer relationships. In this book, you will read about ...

- How to create relationship-building *encounters*, instead of relationship-eroding *transactions*
- How to connect multiple customer encounters into an *ongoing conversation* that creates a strong *We* relationship
- The power of *We among many* – a relationship between many people in your organization and your customers

We is both a manifesto and a how-to guide that will change the way you interact with customers ... and change the way your customers think about you.

Visit www.Yastrow.com to order



SelectBooks, 2007
ISBN: 978-1-59079-121-9
200 pages
\$21.95
Hardcover

“When Steve Yastrow writes, I pay close attention. He is at once a wonderful storyteller, a sophisticated purveyor of ideas, and an effective change agent. I think We is a superb book—and I am mesmerized in particular by Yastrow’s critical differentiation of ‘experience’ and ‘engagement.’ Bravo!”

- Tom Peters

About the Author

Steve Yastrow has acquired a singular reputation among business decision makers as an outside partner who challenges organizations to take a fresh look at themselves from the inside out. He offers clear action steps to improve business performance through Brand Harmony and ideal customer relationships.

As a consultant, speaker, and writer he encourages his clients, audiences, and readers to reinvent how they connect with customers. Steve pinpoints the make-or-break ideas that will unleash the full potential of the business other than brute-force marketing, cost cutting, and ruthless deal making. He focuses on building a strong internal alignment that creates powerful and compelling beliefs in the minds of employees and customers.

Steve is the founder of Yastrow & Company, a Chicago-based consulting firm, where he has assembled a stellar team of associates who work with him to create consulting engagements that deliver powerful results. Yastrow & Company works with a variety of companies, from the Fortune 500 level to smaller owner-managed businesses. Clients include McDonald's Corporation, The Tom Peters Company, Kimpton Hotels, The Cayman Islands Department of Tourism, Agilent Technologies, Jenny Craig International, Great Clips for Hair, Cold Stone Creamery, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, Viacord, Dental Care Partners, among others. (Click here for Yastrow & Company Consulting page and client list.)

Steve is a former vice president of resort marketing at Hyatt Hotels and Resorts. His revolutionary approach to marketing and business is based on the groundbreaking ideas found in his books, *Brand Harmony* (The Tom Peters Company Press, 2003), and *We: The Ideal Customer Relationship* (SelectBooks 2007). Steve earned an MBA from the J.L. Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

Yastrow is also author of *Brand Harmony—Achieving Dynamic Results by Orchestrating Your Customers' Total Experience* (SelectBooks 2003), www.BrandHarmony.com.

We: The Ideal Customer Relationship (SelectBooks 2008) is his latest book release.

For more information about Steve Yastrow, please visit his website at www.Yastrow.com, or call 847.686.0400.

