the G-spot

Less is more…. but more is hard

Leidy Klotz, a Professor of Science and Design at University of Washington was playing Lego with his 3-year-old son Ezra. They were building a simple bridge structure. Leidy and his son realised that the two support towers underpinning the bridge were of different heights so the bridge wasn't balanced. Leidy reached behind to get another piece of Lego to add to the shorter tower. When he turned back to the structure, he realised that his young son had solved the problem already by simply removing the brick from the taller tower. Leidy at once marvelled at his son's obvious problem-solving skills whilst also realising that his own first instinct to solving the problem was to add rather than remove something.

Leidy went onto conduct further research to see if his instinct was similar to others – and indeed found that many of us, like Leidy, believe more is better. As Leidy explains 'the problem is that we neglect subtraction. Compared to changes that add, those that subtract are harder to think of. Even when we do manage to think of it, subtracting can be harder to implement'.

These days there is more and more focus on 'subtraction' in product development. The Balance Bike is a brilliant example and my personal favourite is the new tubeless toilet roll which now has 360 sheets rather than 180 because they can be packed without the supporting tube. (Cue Blue Peter fans quietly sobbing into things they made earlier.)

But when designing customer experiences, there is still a tendency to load things up particularly for VIP customers. I remember working with an Asian airline to design their First Class check-in experience many years ago. They cordoned off the area and placed beautiful leather seats in it. We advised moving these seats out because all they did was draw attention to the fact that people might have to be hanging around there. In reality, all a First Class passenger needs at that point

in the journey is actually speed and efficiency (and ideally more speed and more efficiency than anyone else).

Luxury service experiences are also often wary of offering 'self-service' solutions because these seem to not be 'premium' enough. We worked with one high end domestic appliance manufacturer who were constantly urprised by customers who wanted to know how to repair simple things themselves rather than have a 'concierge service' who would fix their issue in (an admittedly fast but not fast enough) 24 hours.

What I am talking about is not really the same as 'frictionless' experiences. This is about designing experiences that add value – and recognising that value very often can come from doing less. This comes by understanding that if the desire for delight exceeds the need for ease, then stop and ask yourself, can less actually be more?

Take action by:
◊ Knowing your customer in depth and understanding what they actually value.
◊ Consider what can be 'subtracted' from the experience and enhance genuine delighters.
◊ Dropping us at line at hello@signal.cx. We'd love to bounce some ideas around with you.