

BETTER MAKE IT REAL

Creating Authenticity
in an Increasingly
Fake World



JILL J. MORIN

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Creating Authenticity in an Increasingly Fake World

Jill J. Morin



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This book is printed on acid-free paper 

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To my friends and colleagues at
Kahler Slater, whose passion, dedication,
and talent inspire me each and every day.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been in the making for many years. It began with the notion that someone should document the ideas and innovations our firm, Kahler Slater®, was in the process of discovering as we started down the path of our own organizational transformation. As the only person in the firm with a journalism degree among a group of mostly architects at the time, I became the most likely “volunteer” to become the author. But it wasn’t until, after mostly talking about this book for ten years, a Kahler Slater colleague of mine at the time, who had pestered me for years with numerous emails as well as lunchtime and cocktail chats about the project, sent me an email titled “The Challenge.” In this most beautiful of messages, the sender quoted William James and John Milton in his plea to get me to stop talking and start writing. Thank you, Joe. I finally took your advice.

A perhaps less eloquent, but nonetheless effective, verbal shove came from author Peter Block, who asked me, in his typically direct way, “What in the hell are you waiting for? Write the book!” Thanks to Peter, and to my first editor, Judy Bridges of Redbird Studio, the first draft of this book was completed in a year, in between my day job at Kahler Slater and my even more important job as a wife and mother. My husband, Kent, and my two children, Kelsey and Nicholas, spent many hours tiptoeing around the house while I wrote, offering me a calm oasis as well as unending and unconditional support. For this and for so much more, I can never thank them enough.

So many people contributed to this effort—reading draft chapters, helping me to organize my thoughts, giving me a push when I needed one, conducting research, and simply listening to me whine about how much harder it is to write a book than I ever thought it would be. So, special thanks go to Kimberly Rosby (executive assistant extraordinaire), Kelly Gaglione, Kurt Thieding, Dean Amhaus, Robert Deahl, Lyn Geboy, Rich Teerlink, Chic Thompson, Felicity Librie, Gretchen Pfahler, Jeff Neidorfler, Carla Minsky, Mike Brown, Pat Foran, Nicole Fermanian, Karen Vernal, Wendy Heintz-Joehnk, Janet Slater, and Mary Louise Dean.

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Thanks to all of our clients who entrust us with their hopes and dreams. And thanks especially to those who were so gracious to allow us to share their stories in this book.

And finally, it's obvious that this book would not have come to be had it not been for the people, past and present, who are Kahler Slater. From David Kahler and Mac Slater, who had the vision and tenacity to guide and grow a small midwestern architecture firm toward a bigger playing field, to my fellow executive officers, George Meyer and Jim Rasche, who picked up the slack at the office while I was at home, pounding the keyboard. This book simply would not have happened without the insight, support, and leadership of George and Jim. Thanks guys.

And thanks to all of the staff at Kahler Slater. This book seeks to capture and illuminate the magic that you work, day in and day out, guiding clients toward their authentic transformations, and designing total experiences that make them manifest. Your work is transforming the design profession about which you all care so deeply, as you seek to enhance life through artful design. I hope that providing readers with this brief glimpse into your world continues to inspire you and the clients whom you serve, now and in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The words printed here are concepts. You must go through the experiences.

Saint Augustine

Most choices in life usually present us with the chance for a do-over. A car purchase, for instance. You'll most likely do that more than once. Don't like the coffee or service you got at yesterday's café? Go to a different one today. Are your instincts flashing Code Red in the back of your mind while talking with a potential business partner, employer, or employee? Cut the conversation short and usher that person out the door. Sure, there's a disappointment, but that's nothing compared with the worry, loss of energy and money, and unrecoverable waste of time that a star-crossed commitment would have represented.

Other choices in life don't leave much room for reconsideration. Marriage, for instance, is at least *supposed* to be a one-time only event. Consequently, one's 25th wedding anniversary is probably going to happen only once in a person's life. Another choice that really can't be changed in, shall we say, mid-stream, is a luxury cruise. When you're long into a cruise and you realize you've made a big mistake, chances are you're stuck with that decision, at least until you reach the next port—or you have the kind of budget that can easily absorb a rescue helicopter.

So, when you combine the two—25th anniversary and luxury cruise—you're a customer with high expectations and much at stake. There's a lot invested in your choice. So naturally, everything has to be perfect down to the last detail.

When my husband, Kent, and I started thinking of ways to celebrate our 25th anniversary, we decided on that luxury cruise—but with some trepidation. What if we put our money down, got into the middle of the ocean, only to discover that we wanted nothing more than to get the heck off *right now*? But we followed a trusted friend's advice and selected SeaDream Yacht Club

for our big event. And everything was just as it was advertised—and reputed—to be. The personal and customized service, the champagne and caviar reception, the fresh flowers and the Belgian linens, food that looked like a Renaissance still-life painting and tasted divine, everything perfect down to the last, most minute detail.

Until the first night. Around 2:00 A.M., Kent and I woke up to the sound of alarms, bells, and whistles. It stopped pretty quickly, so we went back to sleep. The next morning a glance out the window told us we were still out to sea when we should have been portside in Valencia, the first stop on our itinerary. We found a note slipped under our door. It was from the captain, telling us that one of the engines had caught fire overnight. Nothing to worry about, really. We're just limping along on one engine, and the first order of business is to get that engine repaired—which meant that our itinerary was blown to smithereens. We would not be seeing the port of Ibiza. And we'd be waylaid in Valencia for a day or two while waiting for the repairs to be completed.

For those passengers counting on sticking to that particular itinerary, I'm sure it must have been a terrible disappointment to be forced to miss those ports of call. But I was plenty happy with what I could see from the deck, reclining on my *Balinese Dream Bed*, a cold beverage in hand. From my perspective as a CEO obsessed with how companies live out their brand proposition by the way they treat their customers and clients, I could see plenty as a luxuriating passenger watching the ship's values in action from the deck. (No matter how relaxing the vacation, the business hat really never does come off, does it?) And what I saw was more interesting than even the views of Valencia:

- The ship's engineers, who had been immediately flown to Spain from their station in Germany to work on the problem, which they did around the clock until the engine was fixed.
- The ship's director of entertainment, who hired local Flamenco dancers to entertain us, and set up a huge screen on deck, allowing for an impromptu outdoor rock concert video to be shown under the stars to prevent us from getting bored as we waited for the repairs to be completed.
- The ship's owner, who happened to be aboard the yacht during the trip, personally apologizing to all of his guests, and offering us complimentary massages in the ship's spa, a full rebate on the days we were stuck in port, as well as waiving all land excursion fees, and offering a generous discount on future bookings, which a number of the 100 guests took full advantage of before the cruise ended.

For cruises run by other companies, we on the mainland know that things have gone awry by watching disgruntled (or sick or scared) passengers talking into cameras on CNN, swearing they'll never sail again. And on this cruise, there were disappointments, to be sure. But the net result of those unplanned scenarios was that more passengers signed up for additional cruises before leaving the ship than is typical for the cruise line. And Kent and I said to each other: "If we ever go on another cruise, we will only go on a SeaDream Yacht Club cruise."

Pay attention to how we worded this agreement: not only would we use SeaDream Yacht Club again, we would *only* use SeaDream Yacht Club—to the exclusion of all other lines in the luxury cruise space. This is one do-over we'd happily do over again, exactly the same way.

The reason: because of the way in which this cruise line extended its value promise to its clients and then lived out that value proposition, regardless of unexpected circumstances, it has made itself a company that is so integrally self-possessed in what it does, stands for, offers to its clients, and treats its own people, it doesn't have to compete with its competitors. At least in the opinion of these two customers.

Any cruise line can serve up a chilled lobster salad on deck, and keep the drinks cold and coming. But what the SeaDream Yacht Club did to secure our loyalty to the company was the authentic experience it provided: the way it walked its talk. Sure, we shared their frustration in their inability to get us back out to sea as quickly as we had all hoped. The engine part that was needed to get us going again was not readily available. And the generator they rented from a local source stopped working in the middle of the night, leading to temperatures hovering around 80 uncomfortable degrees in the cabins. So, they made up extra beds on deck (those Balinese beds really came in handy!) as well as in the much-cooler library. And they did so with such genuine care, concern, and good humor that the whole thing ended up feeling like a group slumber party.

Stuff happens, and it happens to even the best of companies. The way in which the SeaDream staff handled this particular stuff actually provided an opportunity for them to shine in the face of adversity. They passed this particular test with flying colors, which resulted in increased customer admiration and loyalty, despite the mishaps and flaws of this particular trip.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This is not a book about executing a business strategy flawlessly. This book is about creating authentic total experiences that express an organization's core vision and values so integrally and seamlessly governed by an authentic,

core vision that you truly set yourself apart from everyone else in your space. Customers want to do business with you, regardless of the price. Employees want to work for you because of your high performance standards and your vision of what your company offers to the world. All your stakeholders want to work with you because of what you stand for, and because you consistently and dependably deliver on your value proposition.

You will own your place in the market not by how well you execute your strategy but by how well you live out your authenticity in the expression of total experiences that touch your customers, your employees, your community, your vendors—any and all who come into contact with your organization. Those customers who demand a do-over will be coming back to you because they want more of what you have to offer. You'll have no problem delivering it—and this book will show you exactly how to make that happen.

In this book I will introduce you to a tried and true process for creating (or reimaging) an enterprise that delivers precisely the authentic set of experiences that set you apart from everyone else. Here's a rundown:

Chapter 1: Authenticity. This chapter explores the competitive and operational advantages associated with establishing your own authentic enterprise, specifically in keeping with the unique vision you share with all your stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Experience Matters. No matter what the nature of your organization might be, your authenticity is expressed through the experiences of all the people who come into contact with it. This chapter outlines the 10 rules of great experiences and how they show up to your stakeholders.

Chapter 3: What Is Total Experience Design™? When you look at your organization's offerings in terms of a total framework of experiences in the realm of the 4P Model™ (Perception, People, Products and Services, Place), you are able to see how they interlock with each other to create what is known as *total experience design*.

Chapter 4: Go Big or Don't Bother. The pursuit of authenticity and total experience design demands a full-out commitment from the leadership so that all the stakeholders feel supported as they embark on this adventure. This chapter challenges you to double-check your true readiness in this endeavor.

Chapter 5: Discover. This chapter launches the 5D Process™ (Discover, Dream, Define, Design, Deliver) that is designed to help you and your team visualize the same ideal and authentic organization and take action to get there. The first D, Discover, shows you how to assess your current situation before you start taking action toward your ideal future.

Chapter 6: Dream. This is the chance to fully explore your organizational creativity and innovation. By following the exercises outlined in this chapter, you and your stakeholders build a shared, vivid, multisensory idea of what your enterprise will be, what it will stand for, and who it will serve. This shared vision will powerfully carry your team forward during the energetic, even uncertain times ahead.

Chapter 7: Define. Now that you know where you are, what your current conditions are, and where you want to go, it is time to identify all the gaps and conditions that keep you from realizing your dream right this very minute. Don't be dismayed by the number of gaps you and your team might identify. It means that you have set the bar high, so your ultimately transformed organization will be an inspiring example of what you are capable of when you establish your authentic dream and achieve it.

Chapter 8: Design. Every enterprise and organization undergoing its authentic transformation will have its own design process to initiate. Still, there are common leadership considerations around supporting your people as they begin designing all the ways to close those gaps that they discovered in the Define phase.

Chapter 9: Deliver. At last! Completion is in sight. Still, you need to track your progress, measure your results, and understand how to continue to lead your people as they are finding their footing in this new environment. And, by the way: completion may be in sight, but don't think you are finished yet. Your journey to authenticity never really ends.

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PROLOGUE: A TALE OF TWO DOCTORS

THE OFFICE OF DR. GREGORY LARSON

“As I said, ma’am, Dr. Larson is a busy man,” said the harried nurse on the other end of the line. “I understand that this is your first time, but he can’t see you until three weeks from Tuesday, and that’s only if I juggle a few things on his calendar. . . .” The ad that led Barbara Evans to make this call had described Dr. Gregory Larson and his staff as the top OB/GYN practice in the area, with the newest and best-equipped women’s clinic in the city. It also proclaimed in large, bold type that Dr. Larson was “welcoming new patients.”

Three weeks later, Barbara sets out for her first prenatal appointment with Dr. Larson. The receptionist has provided sketchy directions to the center, and after two wrong turns, Barbara finally spots the large, modern medical office building with a huge parking garage. After crawling through the full lower levels, looking for a parking spot, Barbara finally finds a space on the sixth level on the side of the garage farthest away from the medical building’s entrance. Glancing at her watch, Barbara realizes that she’s seconds away from being late. She sprints toward the building entry.

Inside the clinic’s brightly lit lobby, Barbara’s eyes adjust to the glare of light bouncing off of the highly polished marble, which seems to cover every surface. Between the harried office workers scurrying to and fro, Barbara spies a sour-faced woman sitting behind an imposing reception desk in the center of the grand space. As Barbara approaches the desk, but before she can open her mouth, the woman jabs a finger in the air, brusquely pointing Barbara to a bank of elevators. The elevator that Barbara boards is playing the same piped-in, canned music that she heard in the lobby, only this time too loudly.

Entering Dr. Larson’s fifth-floor waiting room, Barbara sees rows of uncomfortable, straight-back chairs lining the walls and arranged back-to-back in the

center of the room. After signing in and reassuring the clinic receptionist that, yes, she has insurance, she joins the 15 other patients, resigning herself to the fact that she's in for a wait—and wondering how comfortable these chairs will be in six months or so.

Forty-five minutes later, Barbara hears her name called, and she follows a nurse to a small, sterile exam room that smells of antiseptic. The nurse thrusts a folded, pink paper square into Barbara's hands and says, "Everything off. It ties in the back. Doctor will be in to see you shortly." As the door shuts behind the nurse, Barbara stares down at the paper gown in her hands and sighs to herself, "So, this is what it's like. . . ."

THE OFFICE OF DR. EMILY MALLOY AND ASSOCIATES

Across town that same morning, Lisa Cambridge, one month pregnant with her first child, checks in with the receptionist at Dr. Emily Malloy's office. Lisa had heard a radio commercial describing Dr. Malloy's patient-centered approach to caregiving, so she called for an appointment. The nurse who took Lisa's initial call patiently answered all her questions, gave clear directions to the office, and told her what to expect during her first visit. Dr. Malloy's office manager followed up a few days later by sending Lisa a welcome packet with a personal letter of introduction from Dr. Malloy, including instructions repeating the details of what Lisa could expect. The packet also provided clear directions, information on where to park, and a friendly, open invitation to call with any other questions.

It turns out that Lisa doesn't need the parking information, because upon reaching her destination, Lisa decides to let a valet park her car at no charge. The building's lobby features a small, glass-tiled fountain at its center, and the bubbling water offers a pleasant and soothing sound. Any nervousness Lisa feels begins to dissipate as she walks deeper into the lobby, in part due to the soft strains of violin music filling the air, along with the smell of freshly ground and brewed coffee. Lisa realizes the source of both is a café next to a bank of elevators. The café opens out onto a lovely garden, where office workers seem to be enjoying a morning cup before heading to work.

As Lisa moves on, a smiling woman in front of a small desk adjacent to the elevators says, "Good morning. How may I help you?" With the gracious demeanor of a concierge at a fine hotel, the receptionist welcomes Lisa, confirms that she is headed in the right direction, and invites her to visit the well-stocked resource center just off the lobby after her visit.

A receiving nurse greets Lisa warmly upon her arrival to Dr. Malloy's office, and immediately leads her to a pleasant, warm exam room filled with diffused, natural light. There is an overstuffed chair nestled in a corner of the

room, with a small table bearing a vase of tulips and the latest issue of a parenting magazine. After changing into a soft cotton robe the nurse had given her, Lisa settles into the comfortable chair and smiles to herself as she thinks, “So, this is what it’s like!”