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"The best book on leadership by a CEO."

—John Naisbitt, author of Megatrends

# MOMENTS OF TRUTH

New Strategies for Today's Customer-Driven Economy



## JAN CARLZON

FOREWORD BY
TOM PETERS

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Moments of Truth is Carlzon's story of how, under his leadership as president and CEO, Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) emerged from deficits to profitability, improved services, and enhanced its market position by becoming a customer-oriented company organized for change. His strategiesa focus on the customer, encouraging risk-taking, delegating more authority to front-line employees, and eliminating vertical levels of hierarchy for a more horizontal organizationbear the hallmarks of entrepreneurial management and the pursuit of excellence. Reportedly a Scandinavian bestseller, Carlzon's book has a universal message and deserves attention for its clear illustration of these strategies in action. Recommended for business collections. Elin B. Christianson, Library Consultant, Hobart, Ind. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

#### Review

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About the Author

Jan Carlzon was born in Nykoping, Sweden, in 1941. After receiving his M.B.A. from the Stockholm School of Economics in 1967, he joined Vingresor, Sweden's largest tour operator, first as product manager and later as head of marketing. In 1974, when the package-tour business was in a tailspin because of the first energy crisis, he was named managing director of Vingresor at the age of 32 and soon reversed that company's economic decline. In 1978 he became managing director of Linjeflyg, Sweden's major domestic airline, and in 1981 he took command as resident and chief executive officer of SAS, the consortium of the national airlines of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. At both Linjeflyg and SAS his leadership turned heavy economic losses into healthy profits within a year. Mr. Carlzon is frequently invited to give talks and interviews worldwide on leadership and customer-oriented business strategies.

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The president and CEO of Scandinavia Airlines (SAS) shows how to adapt to the new customer-driven economy.

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Both enlightening and witty

By Pierre Weydert

In "Moments of Truth" Jan Carlzon, the then president of Scandinavian Airlines System, tells the extraordinary story of turning a lacklustre state-run airline into a profitable business that consistently won passenger preference surveys. The central element of Carlzon's line of reasoning is the "moment of truth", a concept that was first formulated by Richard Normann in 1984 and which comprises the notion that a service company's overall performance is the sum of countless interactions between customers and employees, the so-called moments of truth that either help to retain a customer or send him to the competition. As Carlzon does emphasize, the implementation of the idea behind this concept is hardly an easy task to accomplish, especially so because it implies the transition from a production-oriented to a market-oriented approach within the company. The measures to be taken in order to make this strategic realignment possible include flattening the organizational pyramid, making sure everyone knows about the company's vision and, last but not least, empowering "front line" employees. Once these changes have been successfully implemented and are being pursued with perseverance, chances are that the outcome will be, as Carlzon puts it, "millions of satisfied customers and thousands of motivated employees".

"Moments of Truth" can be considered a prime example of how to explain a business strategy on very few pages and in an entertaining way. Although the book is written in an anecdotal style and can easily be read within a couple of hours, its contents are of interest and potential value to every manager in the service industry. Congratulations to Mr. Carlzon on a book that is both enlightening and very witty!

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

The Model of Management for the New Industrial Age

By Miguel Hidalgo

Jan Carlzon is a business leader who learned how to diversify his strengths and fortify his weaknesses. He is one of the few CEO's (before Jack Welch:) who had the boldness, bordering on foolishness, to take huge risks. He had 'safer' options available to him but he earned his salary by pioneering the expansion of product-service development beyond aircraft; maneuvering past the notion that market share is everything; and shifting emphasis to a value organization nurturing the best customer service in the world for the business traveler under extremely competitive conditions. Surprisingly, he made SAS profitable over and above everyone's expectations, including his own!

Carlzon presented a clearly defined strategy and it was effectively communicated to the stakeholders and employees, focused internally and externally, in equal portions. Carlzon took the innovative step of training his workforce to take responsibility for reaching goals, directing managers to support and encourage "frontline" employees to make decisions normally reserved, and maintain a steady work environment that was flexible enough to immediately respond to pursuing quality customer service.

At the time Carlzon wrote this book, the timing was before the rapid expansion of powerhouse Southwest Airlines. He focused on the best technology, concentrated on the type of aircraft, upgraded systems at the airport and improved distribution systems, which were key elements towards a profitable company. On the technology side, Robert Crandall, former CEO at American Airlines proved technology was related to profitability when he introduced the Sabre yield/reservations system.

Among the legends of aviation, Jan Carlzon, Robert Crandall and Herb Kelleher propelled the airline industry into a future that remains obscure. However, with the right dose of courage, discipline (wisdom) and imagination, the search for corporate excellence is not restricted to the little 'blue'-suited (I really mean green) men sitting in the Ivory Towers.

One final point. I truly appreciate the fact that Jan Carlzon wrote this book for us. He represents the best of Denmark, the culture of the Scandinavian countries and the 'individual' way they do business.

Consider reading "Unique, Now or Never," by Jesper Kunde and then read "Moments of Truth." Carlzon's leadership was before his time and he is still absolutely SPECTACULAR!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

What an Airline CEO Should Be!

By Robert I. Hedges

In this short book, Jan Carlzon relates how he righted three travel companies as CEO by listening to the knowledge accumulated by frontline employees and helping them do their jobs, rather than the other way around. Mr. Carlzon was spectacular in turning around the fortunes of Vingresor, Linjeflyg, and finally SAS. As head of SAS he was able to dispense with business as usual by listening more to the frontline employees, and scrupulously insisting on removing 'yes-men' from his inner circle, a policy that has also served Southwest amazingly well over the years. Although his tenure was not totally without controversy, Carlzon talks frankly about unions (he looks on them as partners and long-term stakeholders), and tough decisions, such as sticking with the trusted DC-9 when other airlines were buying newer planes merely for the sake of having newer planes, despite negative balance sheet implications.

This is a book that should be read by every business major, MBA, and airline employee about what is possible by working together. Sadly in recent US history most airline executives have been self-centered boors who don't care about the airline business, and have no long term stake in the company. Largely they have stayed around a couple of years, raked in millions (in some cases hundreds of millions) of dollars and then left a bankrupt or weak carrier in the lurch. Carlzon makes it clear that he is a capitalist, but a capitalist that realizes that if management and employees work together, solutions can be reached that will benefit all over the long term.

To the Boards of Directors of any airline anywhere I say this: read this book, learn how it should be done, and go out and get a Carlzon-school thinker for every executive position in your company. The long term results will amaze you. I could not recommend this book any more highly.

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