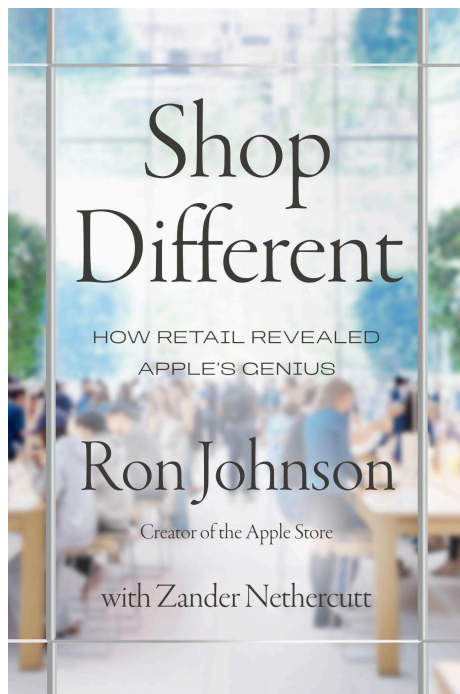

SHOP DIFFERENT

How Retail Revealed Apple's Genius

by **Ron Johnson, Apple Store creator & former CEO of J.C. Penney**



Every day, business leaders search for the next big innovation, the hidden formula to unlocking *genius* in design, sales, and technology.

Apple Store creator Ron Johnson discovered that genius can be revealed by the customer experience. From developing a vision for the Apple Stores, to building a world-class retail team, to launching game-changing innovations like the Genius Bar, Johnson helped create the most respected and profitable retail stores in the world. In the process, he redefined the purpose of a brick-and-mortar store and helped Apple become America's best retailer.

In his new book, [*Shop Different: How Retail Revealed Apple's Genius*](#) (September 22, 2026 / Harper Collins), Johnson reveals how he did it, sharing timeless lessons on innovation, leadership, design, and building winning cultures rooted in love, kindness, and the power of relationships. From his early career as a merchant leader at Target, to his time working alongside

Steve Jobs at Apple, to his tenure as CEO of J.C. Penney, Johnson shares lessons to build a customer experience grounded in human connection rather than transactions.

Growing up near the world's first indoor shopping mall, Johnson's life has always been shaped by stores. Early experiences in malls, combined with his time at Harvard, led him to realize that Armani suits and Rolexes didn't quench his desire for significance. Significance comes from enriching people's lives. He turned down a fifty-floors-up career path at Goldman Sachs to pursue on-the-ground work in retail that felt 100x more meaningful, and he never looked back.

In *Shop Different*, readers will learn:

- 3 ways “personal geographies” create environments where people can innovate and thrive
- Why choosing kindness is the most important decision people can make in business
- The secrets behind Apple’s distinctive retail culture and the idea that “the most important person is the one in front of you”
- How leaders can use the “Launching, Deepening, and Restoring” framework to love both employees and customers
- Why “presence is powerful” and how to use it to create memorable moments with customers
- The case for physical retail: it’s not disappearing, but becoming more important
- How retailers of tomorrow can stay competitive amidst new, transformative technology like AI

Shop Different is a must-read guide to success as we learn to navigate the technological developments shaping our world. It’s about not just succeeding, but creating a better world - now and in the years to come.

About the Author

Apple Store creator Ron Johnson is a sought-after speaker, board member, and author of [*Shop Different: How Retail Revealed Apple’s Genius*](#) (September 22, 2026 / Harper



Collins). He also founded Enjoy, the first mobile retail store, and served as the CEO of J.C. Penney. He is best known for creating the Apple Stores, working directly for Steve Jobs while serving as a member of Apple's executive team. Prior to his time at Apple, Ron was highly regarded for the work he did with Michael Graves to bring good design to all as a merchant leader at Target; their collaboration set the stage for the brand's hundreds of later design partnerships and cemented Target as America's premier upscale discount retailer. Ron lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

SHOP DIFFERENT

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Advance Praise for *SHOP DIFFERENT*

"When Steve Jobs hired Ron Johnson, history had made its point: Computer stores fail. Yet the Apple Stores brought in \$1 billion a year faster than any chain in history. And in this beautifully written book, Ron explains why: Because they weren't just stores, but hangouts, theaters, schools, and summer camps. Because they bucked every shred of conventional wisdom. And because they treated us not as walking credit cards, but, as Ron puts it, "meaning-seeking creatures seeking meaning." - David Pogue: "CBS Sunday Morning" "Apple: The First 50 Years"

"Ron's moving book is not simply about retail, but about care, intention and building in a way that truly serves people. Apple's focus on human connection changed stores and how people relate to technology. SHOP DIFFERENT is about the relationships and sense of community that physical spaces can inspire."
- Laurene Powell: Founder, Emerson Collective

"I spent years outside Apple Stores on launch days - counting lines, talking to customers and trying to understand what was driving Apple's momentum. The answer kept coming back to the stores. They weren't just selling products - they were shaping the entire Apple experience. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the decade that transformed Apple into the most admired and valuable company in the world."
- Gene Munster: Deepwater Asset Management

"When Steve returned to Apple, we moved quickly to stabilize the company and deliver great products, like the iMac. A few years later, Steve made the bold decision to open our own retail stores to substantially improve advocacy at point of sale and increase Apple's market share. This was an idea many questioned but I believed had real potential. He searched for a young, creative merchant and hired Ron Johnson to lead the effort. This book tells the inside story of how that conviction, paired with disciplined execution, created the most successful retail model in the world. It's a thoughtful, personal and engaging account of a pivotal chapter in Apple's history."
- Fred Anderson: Former Apple CFO and Board Member

"In a world that often separates performance from purpose, Ron Johnson shows they are inseparable. SHOP DIFFERENT isn't just a fascinating look inside the beginning of Apple Retail - it also shows how leading with love, kindness, and values is a powerful model for building teams, serving customers, and creating lasting impact."
- Pat Gelsinger: Executive chair and head of technology at Gloo, general partner at Playground Global, former CEO of Intel

Q&A with Ron Johnson, author of *SHOP DIFFERENT*

- **Share a brief background about your time leading retail strategy at Apple, ultimately designing the iconic Apple Store.**

The background of my time leading Apple is really the background of both Steve and Apple and me and Target as of 1999.

Steve had returned to Apple in 1997 after twelve years away. A year later, he had launched the iMac—“i” for “internet”—with the goal of creating a computer that would get the world online. A year or so later, it had sold reasonably well, but mostly to Apple’s existing customers. Steve believed that the problem was his go-to-market strategy. The employees at resellers like CompUSA, Ingram, and Sears (yes, Sears) were not incentivized to explain the premium features of Apple’s higher-priced products. Some CEOs might have adapted their go-to-market strategy. Steve decided to take complete ownership of it—and that led to his hiring me from Target.

I got Steve’s attention because I shared his passion for design (and the egg-shaped iMac was very design-forward), and I had been working for a few years (1997-1998) on bringing great, affordable design to all Americans at Target. Steve had initially spoken about wanting a store to double his market share and reach consumers with creative interests, but as he described the world’s move online (at the time, ~50 percent of Americans were using PCs), I wondered why we wouldn’t just build a store that would get the *world* online. Coming from bringing great design to everyone at Target, this felt like the next natural thing. I told Steve I would only come to Apple to create a store for all Americans. And that’s the background for everything we did in the Apple Store.

- **You’ve said “every meaningful moment” in your life was tied to a store. What did stores give you that nothing else did?**

I’ve always said that a great store can change someone’s life. I do believe that. A store is a place where you can explore a new version of yourself—you can be a person who creates amazing photos or videos in an Apple Store. You can feel yourself as an amazing runner in a Hoka store, or an incredible athlete in a Nike store. Stores are places where you go to build relationships with a brand, yes, but also where you go to explore what you can do and who you can be. I was lucky to grow up near some of the greatest stores in the world—specifically, the Dayton’s department store in downtown Minneapolis. I have great memories there, like getting fit for my first suit or getting my hair cut. Then at sporting goods stores, I got to get geared up for sports seasons. I always loved the rituals associated with stores. To me, visiting a store always felt like a beginning—of a season, or a new part of my life—and I love beginnings. There is so much opportunity in them. With the Apple Store, we created a place where people could explore products they’d never seen and do things they’d never done.

- **You've spoken about the idea of "significance" as it pertains to work. How might you encourage those wondering about their future to figure out what feels "significant" to them? And why does this matter so much now, in the age of AI?**

In the book, I write about how my dad used to talk to me about the opportunity I had to do something significant with my life. I also talk about how I didn't really know what that meant, so I looked it up, and found that the dictionary definition of "significance" was "has meaning." Then I looked up "meaning," and the definition was "significance." The point, as I write in the book, is that every person is their own source of meaning. Each of us has to define it for ourselves. And the way we define it, I believe, is through paying close attention to what we feel when we are doing certain things. For me, stores were a place where I always just felt alive. And I really credit the quality of my attention for the ability to notice that. I think that in the age of AI, it is going to become critically important that people pay attention to how they feel in certain environments such that they can understand what is truly significant to them. And part of why this matters is because when you pay close attention to what is going on around you, you can see opportunities to serve the world. And now, with AI, the cost of addressing someone's needs is going to go way down, but the value of the solution still exists. So, I really think there are great opportunities that will reveal themselves to people if they pay close attention to the world around them, which they can then capitalize on using AI. And I think that leads to significance—something that "has meaning" for someone else, and as a result, for you, too.

- **You speak at length in the book about your upbringing - your family, your being raised to believe in the importance of service, etc. - and how this shaped an intuition that led you throughout your life. What would you say to parents who are wondering about how to raise their children in an age of rapid technological change?**

I don't want to get too preachy about this, but I had such a privileged upbringing—not necessarily in terms of financial wealth, but just in terms of intellectual and emotional safety. My first memory is my mom telling me, after I blew a question in an interview to start school a year ahead of plan, that I was loved no matter what I did. Every memory I have of my dad is his being there for me, encouraging me, asking me questions to stress-test the quality of my thinking. And no matter what I did, my parents said, they would always love me and support me. It may sound trite, but I do believe that unconditional love is the most powerful thing a child can receive. It is so incredibly liberating to know that you are loved no matter what you do. And it doesn't have to be this super emotional thing, either. Agape love, as it's defined, is an act of securing the good of another and willing their success. And that, coupled with my parents' demonstrating the importance of serving our community and encouraging us to do so, shaped my intuition. My gut instinct is always to serve others. And I think the world would be a brighter place if more people were capable of defaulting to looking at the world as something they can give back to. But I know that my upbringing influenced my ability to do that, and so my hope is for parents raising children that they would attempt (knowing it's hard) to give their kids unconditional love, care, and attention, and also emphasize the importance of looking for ways to serve their community and the people around them, no matter how small. Little things add up.

- **What specifically led you to walk away from a high-status Harvard track and an opportunity at Goldman Sachs in favor of retail?**

It's hard to say exactly. I think it was a number of things. One of them was the desire to do something significant. I believed that to do that, I needed to pick an industry I loved and could commit to working in for a lifetime, and I just didn't think that was finance (or consulting). Truthfully, I think I also knew that I would be unique in retail. There weren't a lot of MBAs going into it at the time. So, it was a combination of those two things, I think—it was an industry I loved, and it was also a place where I could see myself rising up quickly.

- **Skepticism gets in the way of creativity. What are your tips to balance critique without killing bold ideas too early?**

I think a lot of one's ability to do this well is tied to picking something that really lights them on fire. I talk a lot in the book about the idea of one's personal geography—where they've lived, who they've met, what they've learned—shaping their mindset. And I think when someone brings you an idea and you're not an expert on the thing, the best thing you can do is just pick a few things you like about it and talk about those. But if you are an expert, I think you'll have an intuitive sense for when something isn't what it could be. In those cases, as a leader, I think it's your responsibility to gently nudge by offering a positive diagnosis of what you like and encouragement to keep refining. Or to ask someone questions, like “What do you think about it?” or “Do you love it?” And just wait for the answer. If you ask these questions and you remain silent, you let the person face their own thinking. And often, they will have been thinking critically about the same parts of what they're creating that you might have been wondering about. And people are always better at listening to themselves than they are at listening to someone else. So I think giving people space to critique themselves while encouraging them to keep refining is a great way to balance the need to refine an idea with the need to keep developing it.

- **You talk a lot in your book about Genius being a team game and that most breakthrough ideas are revealed through conversations. Can you expand on this?**

Absolutely. If you look at what was going on at Apple in 1999 and 2000, you can get a really good idea of the power of conversation. Steve hired people that he could talk to forever, all the time. He'd call at 1:00 a.m. sometimes. Anyway, the point is that as of early 2000, when we started designing the store, he was positioning the iMac as the computer that would get the world online. It was much simpler than other PCs and had an approachable, easy-to-understand design that other computers didn't. But then in April 2000, the dot-com bubble burst, and it was unclear that the internet was going to be a big needle-mover in terms of selling the iMac. And again, we were all just talking about designing the store during this time. And I was traveling back and forth from Cupertino to Minneapolis. And I also wasn't a computer guy. But I had a Mac that Steve had sent me back in Minneapolis, and I had been talking to my wife about using it for her photos, but she was pushing back, liking the idea of scrapbooking in the sort of analog world of Minneapolis. One day in October 2000, I told Steve that I thought the Mac was the center of my *digital* life

amidst a broadly analog life. He asked me to send an email on it, and I did. And then the next Monday he came into our executive team meeting and said he had the future of the PC and that it was going to be the digital hub. And then several months after *that*, he unveiled the future of the Mac as the digital hub at Macworld 2001. And that strategy shaped Apple from 2001 to 2011. So it was really one of those things that didn't come out in some formal strategy meeting. It was just one idea that I had that I happened to share with Steve, and it ended up helping him come up with a way to frame the Mac and guide Apple through its formative years. I think constant conversation is what reveals the way the world has shifted that the world itself hasn't recognized yet. No one was really talking about there being an analog and digital world at that time but the idea just came out through conversation and action and thinking. And the beauty of conversation is that it presents optionality—a lot of things that make no sense emerge in conversation, but so do a few things that can completely change the way you look at something. And that's where genius gets discovered.

- **You convinced Steve Jobs to build a store based on love. The Apple Store shows how love works as a business strategy. How can companies incorporate love into the workplace?**

I want to be clear about this: I think love worked as a business strategy for Apple Retail precisely because it guided Apple itself. I really do believe that Steve's love for humanity guided how much he cared about designing great user experiences. And so love as a service strategy in the Apple Store really felt like it was downstream of that. But as a business, love really just means to secure the good of another and will their success. And I think it's pretty clear as a business when you're thinking about your products in terms of their ability to secure people's good, and when you're thinking about your products in terms of their ability to increase your bottom line. You obviously have to make money as a business. But a great brand is one that people believe has their best interests at heart. So I think the best lesson is for new founders or new leaders trying to create a great company. They are the ones who can envision their company based on a desire to secure the good of a certain customer—be it a business or a consumer. And you can ask simple questions like “Is this improving our customer's experience?” or “Is it making their life better/easier?” I think financial success follows that.

- **There is no such thing as an overnight success. How does one stick to their vision during the difficult early stages of launching a product?**

I think it's important to reframe this question. Dogmatically sticking to a vision is not necessarily the way to succeed. I did it at Apple with the store with no *individual* commissions for salespeople and it eventually worked. But in some ways, I also didn't—at one point, I did allow us to shift to a *store-wide* commission sales model, whereby stores got bonuses based on total sales. I kind of forgot about that. Also, I stuck to my vision at JCPenney with no discounts, and we failed. So, I think as a leader there's no real playbook for this. You really have to be in it and be paying attention and have the humility to admit when something isn't working. And this gets back to the power of conversations. It's like when you're in a relationship with someone and you're trying to make it work, but you keep having arguments about the same thing, and you try and try and try, but eventually you just come to feel like it isn't going to help no matter what you

do. And I think in my life I've been helped by my belief that things will work, but I've been hurt a bit by it, too. Sometimes you do have to cut your losses. But again, no one can tell when this moment comes. You just have to pay close attention, talk with your people a lot, and understand the situation. A lot of times people around you will have perspectives that can help you see things in a new way, like I did with Steve.

- **You've said pursuing big, bold ideas frequently has a higher chance of success than more modest ambitions. This seems counterintuitive. Can you expand on this?**

Yeah, here my point is that one of the most important parts of success in business is garnering support. And throughout my life, I found that it was often easier to drum up support from people if you presented them with a big, bold vision—like that we were going to bring design to everyone at Target—than by saying, hey, let's test a few designer products on a back end cap. People don't get as excited by tests. They want to do big things! And if they don't, well, that's fine, they can do something else. I guess what I really believe is that it's very hard to generate enthusiasm among other people if you are not first enthused, and for me, I was always more enthusiastic about doing something big and hard than doing something small. So it became easier for me to get support if I let my imagination run wild, and I always did that by dreaming of big, bold outcomes. I return to the intellectual safety of my childhood here. I was never told that my dreams were too big. I was always encouraged to imagine and dream bigger. And I knew that it was loved no matter how those things turned out. So it was easy to dream big!

- **The most important conversation we have is the one we have with ourselves. In the age of AI is this more or less important?**

More important. I return to what I said earlier about the cost of creating a solution to a problem now being incredibly low relative to what it's been historically. If you think about where ideas actually come from, they start in the imagination. Often, they start as questions. Like, with Newton and gravity, the way that idea would've started in his imagination was by seeing an apple fall from a tree, and feeling the question happen in his mind, "Why did it do that?" And then that question creates space for an answer, which Newton would then have wanted to fill. And I believe that when we pay attention to the world around us, questions about why things are the way they are begin to reveal themselves to us. And those questions emerge in our minds, in our conversations with ourselves, if only we have the space to listen. AI is then one tool we can use to answer those questions. In an ideal world, I like the idea that people pay attention to the world around them, observe something, have a question, attempt to answer it themselves, then perhaps bring the answer and question to AI and use it to stress-test their thinking. A lot of this returns to my thinking that it's important to instill a mindset of service in young people, because when our frame for the world is something we exist to improve, the questions that emerge in our mind become creative, and AI becomes a tool to help us create. And it also might help reveal what—or who—we need to help us create. Like think about it with Steve—the iMac launched, didn't sell quite as well as he'd hoped, and then he asked the question—why? And that led to the thinking that his go-to-market strategy wasn't good enough, which then led to the question of how to improve it, which then led to improvements. But then those weren't good enough, which led to the

question of, well, what if I had my own store? How would I do that? Do I need a retailer? What retailers are out there who care about design? And again, Steve didn't have AI. But all I'm saying is that AI could be a path to helping someone map their own thinking that would lead them to real-world relationships to help them achieve what they want to achieve, or figure out that maybe they want something different than they thought.

- **At Target, you thought you were dreaming big; then Steve Jobs changed that. What can you share about that mindset shift?**

Honestly, I think Steve and I thought similarly. But what I loved about Steve was just this belief he had. It was invigorating to be around him. He had such passion for his products and it was driven by this belief that he was actually creating something great for people. The real mindset shift for me was going from Target, where I had control over a few gondolas, to Apple, where I could create an entire store, including picking where we'd locate it, who we'd hire to work in it, etc. It was really the scale of what I was hired to create that encouraged me to dream bigger than I ever had. And at Target, everyone was always telling me my ideas were too much. But then I proposed a store that would serve all Americans to Steve and he got really excited. And that was such a relief—and then a realization that I really had the opportunity to do something bold if I went to work with him, that he would take my big ideas and, instead of shrinking them, actually make them even bigger.

- **What did “Think Different” actually look like operationally inside Apple, day to day?**

It's funny, at the end of the “Think Different” ad copy, Steve writes: “Those who think they are crazy enough to change the world are the ones who do.” And I think most people read that line and they think that it means that people THINK about changing the world first, and THEN they go out and change it. But I think the opposite is true, actually. I think that belief—i.e., thinking—follows action. And that is kind of implicit in the line I referenced above: that “the ones who do” are the ones who BECOME crazy enough to think they can change the world. So, action reveals different thinking, which then becomes different action. And again, this returns to the design of the Apple Store really being a revelatory process. We didn't map this thing out on paper and then just build it. We tested different ways of doing it in a warehouse and spoke about it every day and thought about it all the time. And the store revealed everything it could be through that action, and that allowed us to pick and choose what we thought it should be. Again, if you're trying to map someone's thinking, you always end up in this sort of infinite regression. Like, okay, we did this thing, but why? Well, it's because of this thing. And if you go back and back and back, you do kind of end up in this deterministic spiral where you realize everything you've done is really just a decision you made based on information you had at that moment, which you only had because of everything you'd done before that... etc., etc. And so I think that “Think Different” is actually really not about thinking at all, but rather encouraging action, which then reveals thinking, which then turns into more action.

- **You've said “people first, products second.” How does that show up in real business decisions?**

At Apple, it showed up in terms of the managers we hired for each store. Part of what I intuited about computers based on my own experience was that they were intimidating. And this was very much an outsider perspective at Apple, where the supposed power of our computers was that they were easy to use. And they were, subjectively. But most Americans didn't believe that. And especially those coming from Windows machines. Apple was a new language. And so the problem we were solving was really how to make Apple's computers feel approachable. And in that way we really tried to create an environment in which people felt comfortable, and people feel comfortable around people who feel comfortable. And so we needed managers who cared about people first, because managers would make employees feel comfortable, and then customers would feel that employees felt comfortable when they came into the store.

- **What can companies learn from your experience at Target, Apple, and J.C. Penney that can help inform their design of the customer experience?**

I think what I wrote above is instructive here. As a retailer, so much of what you're trying to overcome is a customer's fear, and I think part of how people overcome their fear is through action. We saw this in the Apple Store with designing the customer experience on rides. When people walk into a store, they love knowing that right away, there is something they can do. You can see this in clothing stores when people walk around and touch clothes, try them on, etc. Action shrinks fear. People like to feel like they're going somewhere, like they're making progress. With design at Target, we created boxes people could open and encouraged them to touch the products, and we also gave them things they could read. So, it became an art exhibit that people felt they could approach. At JCPenney, we did something similar with the Town Square. We wanted to have events there. Obviously it didn't work out in the end, but I think there is real power in designing an experience around action. People like doing things.

- **The Genius Bar came from a hotel model - what did retail leaders misunderstand about service before that?**

What I think a lot of retailers get wrong is that their job is to sell. And for CompUSA, if you were thinking about selling computers as your goal, you wouldn't want to create a place for support, because you'd basically be taking an intimidating concept in a computer and admitting, by sticking support out, that the intimidating thing was intimidating because it could break. But that's poor thinking. The reality is that when people are intimidated by something, they won't be less intimidated if you try to hide a reason they should be intimidated. Even if you trick people in the short-term, eventually, they will figure it out and be frustrated and will talk poorly about your brand behind your back which then hurts your business in a way you can't see, because it's impossible to see the customers who chose not to shop you with "data." So, for us, we thought it was better to be honest about computers and say, with the Genius Bar, yes, computers can be intimidating and they can break, but if OURS broke, we had a place where people could come get support. The reality is that most people just have way more questions about things than you could ever possibly imagine. Like, how many times have you heard a relative complain about customer service and being on hold? How many times have they said "I just want to speak to a person!"

There's just something about knowing that there's a human you can connect with. And conversations are revelatory. Rarely was a conversation at the Genius Bar as simple as someone asking one question, getting an answer, and leaving. Often, the answer they got might reveal a new question, which would reveal a new answer, which might be a new product. And so there was a real dynamism to focusing on service both in terms of enriching the customer's experience with Apple, but also in terms of selling. That, I think, is the power of service—that it is both the best way to do right by the customer and by the business itself.

- **You've said "the most important person is the one in front of you" - how can businesses scale that mindset?**

My team in retail deserves credit for everything it took to scale this mindset. It was all about hiring great people, training them well, making sure they were paid adequately, etc. I think if you want to scale an organization's ability to really focus on the people in front of them, you have to make them feel as if they are both supported and empowered. This is why we eventually extended full-time benefits to part-time employees. It's why we focused so intently on hiring fearless, kind people—those who could go toe-to-toe with Steve Jobs but also get hired to work at the Ritz. There really isn't a secret to it other than to think really hard about who you want/need in the stores, what it will take to hire them, and what is the best way to support them as they do their work. You can't plan for everything in advance either. You have to have the humility to understand that you'll make mistakes and learn and grow from them. Time will reveal new and better ways to help your people serve customers.

- **Why did you hire early Apple Store employees from bookstores instead of electronics retailers?**

We needed people who understood technology AND could talk to people. And we found that people from bookstores tended to be tech-y and liked to read, especially fiction, and that reading fiction was a really good way to understand people well and be able to connect with them. Again, we were doing what I don't think most electronics retailers were doing in the late 1990s, which was trying to go after the people who didn't know how to use computers, or didn't yet have one. And so it was really important to be able to build a human connection immediately, because that human connection would reveal what the customer might be nervous about. And I think people who understand people often understand that arguably the worst way to convince someone they don't need to be worried about something is to tell them they don't need to be worried about it. Rather, it's to have empathy and explain that yeah, computers can be intimidating, and yeah, you might run into issues, but hey, we're here, and we can help you on this journey, and oh by the way, do you like to take photos, etc. So the people we hired really helped us execute on this thinking that selling someone something is as much about showing them what they can do with it as it is about recognizing and validating the reasons why they might be concerned. You have to do both. And obviously every customer interaction was different but our people were empowered to recognize each person as their own unique thing and act on what they needed versus coming in with some script. And readers/writers were really good at that, we found. But so was everyone we

hired—teachers, firefighters, etc. It was not just bookstore people.

- **You describe relationships as launching, deepening, or restoring - which is hardest for companies to get right and why?**

I think it depends on the company. If you're a B2B company, launching is probably the hardest, it is very hard to acquire a new customer. If you're a restaurant, restoring relationships is difficult, because people might just drop in, have a bad experience, and then you never hear from them again. Obviously with Apple, once people had a Mac, if it broke, they weren't just immediately going to abandon us for a PC. Anyway, I think the power of the framework is that you can really map it to your specific customer, recognize where the issues are, and then once you've diagnosed them, go about addressing them. Overall, I think a lot of companies struggle with the restoration piece. It's hard to restore a customer's relationship with your company because often you don't control everything needed to do it. But again, that's the power of a service-oriented company. And I think there's something innately very powerful in a customer revealing to a brand a way in which they felt shorted, and then seeing the brand react to that and develop a solution in response. It's like any relationship. If someone tells you something you did wrong, that's an opportunity for you to do better in the future. And when you do, the person you wronged will notice it, and they will come to believe that you truly care about them. There is immense power in admitting, hey, we got this wrong, and here's what we did about it. And most companies don't do that. So it's a real gift to get feedback. Great brands take it, digest it, and iterate on it to improve their customers' experience.

- **When it comes to a strong team, what does “enriching the soil” look like in practice?**

Honestly I think that cultures of organizations tend to echo the traits of their leaders. And I'm not saying it's impossible, if you're, say, a neurotic person, to create a very relaxed organization, but I do think that culture tends to flow naturally from the leader down. And I've just always been a pretty open, kind person. I care about people. I love people! And so it was actually pretty easy for me to create a culture based on those things because I just was who I was. Enriching the soil in practice is just every interaction you have with your team. Every time you treat someone with kindness, that enriches the soil. Every action enriches the soil. People mimic the behavior of those around them. You notice this when someone treats you with kindness, right? The whole rest of the day, you just want to be kind to other people. The opposite is true if someone's nasty to you. So, anyway, I think enriching the soil is about acting the way you want others to act. I believed that a culture of love and kindness would reveal novel ways to serve our customers and innovate on our behalf, and so I tried to model those behaviors through my interactions with everyone—leaders and store employees alike. I also think it's important to understand who you are as a person and what your strengths are so that the behaviors you model come across as authentic. People don't just model others' behavior; they do it when the behavior they see feels real to them and not staged.

- **The Net Promoter Score showed fixing a bad experience matters more than delivering a good one. What's the first step a company can take to implement this mindset?**

I think it starts with the leader. The leader sets the tone for the organization. And to me it's really about emphasizing the importance of relationships with customers. If you care about those relationships, you'll want to secure the good of your customers, which creates strong relationships, and then you'll naturally care when those relationships are broken, and you'll want to fix them. And I think it's also the leader's job to explain very clearly how a relationship was repaired and what the result was.

- **What was your biggest lesson from your time at J.C. Penney?**

That I should have stayed at Apple. (Laughs.) No, I'm kidding. My biggest learning is that speed kills. Action is inherently revelatory. The world adapts based on what you do, and when you move too fast towards a vision, you lose sight of the opportunities that naturally present themselves along the way. For instance, Steve never wanted the iPod to be compatible with Windows. Never. But, he was open to shifting gears as the world shifted, and he eventually did, and that arguably saved Apple. At JCPenney, I think I could've gone slower. And if I had, I think I would've seen opportunities that I didn't otherwise see because I was so focused on getting to where I believed we needed to go.

- **You believe brick-and-mortar stores aren't dying, so what are most analysts getting wrong about the future of retail?**

I think some brick-and-mortar stores are dying. My point is just that physical retail is never going to go away. Oftentimes I think the world sees things shifting in one direction and believes that that shift will be permanent. Like, when you see the world using AI, it's easy to think that everything will just be AI now. But that's not true. Some brands are now shifting towards almost child-like drawings for their marketing in an effort to prove that they're NOT using AI. The world works more or less like a pendulum. Things swing one way, then they swing back. For instance Casper went online with mattresses and people said physical retail was dead. But then a dozen other mattress companies did the same and with acquisition costs for customers online now way up, Casper opened a store. Also, after a while, I think people got sick of online shopping. They *wanted* to feel the products. And now we're seeing Gen Z and Gen Alpha ushering digitally native brands back into malls. But who knows, in a decade, maybe we're all back online again. My point is just that the pendulum always swings. But my strong sense is that physical retail, which has been around for literally thousands of years, will always have a place somewhere on that pendulum. Humans are innately social and stores are as much a response to economic necessity (selling products) as they are to the human desire to see what others are doing, to socialize, etc.