



This Is Your Life Podcast

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Michael Hyatt

Michele Cushatt: Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to help you win at work and succeed at life. My name is Michele Cushatt. I'm your cohost. Joining me in the conversation today is my friend Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele. So good to talk to you. It's been a while.

Michele: I know. I always enjoy chatting with you.

Michael: Yeah, me too.

Michele: Well, I have a story. You know how I love stories.

Michael: I know. You have great stories.

Michele: It's two stories. It's a story of two different hotels. This spring, I was on the road pretty much every week. It was a pretty intense travel time. At the first hotel I stayed at one weekend, I was greeted by a woman with a huge smile who said, "Welcome. We're so glad you're here." I had arrived early in the day.

It was midmorning, but I had to speak that night and I had had a long flight, so I really needed to sleep. Because I got there early, the room wasn't ready, so she told me she would call me as soon as it was ready. She apologized profusely. She comped all of my valet parking just to accommodate me for my inconvenience, which really wasn't her responsibility.

Then she showed me where a coffee shop was where I could wait until my room was ready. I wasn't at that coffee shop more than 45 minutes to an hour before my phone rang. My room was ready. When I got to my room, it was an upper room, a corner room with windows on both sides. It was just perfect. I thought, "Wow, what an amazing first impression."

Now fast forward a couple of weeks to another hotel, which will remain nameless. I arrived. I stood in line for 45 minutes just to get to the front counter. There was no place for me to park my car. There was nobody interested in helping me find a place to park my car.

Michael: Good grief.

Michele: I eventually got my room. I arrived to my room. My room smelled like somebody's leftover dinner from maybe a week before. It was bad. It was so bad. The smell was so bad I actually went back to the front desk, where I stood in line for another 30 to 45 minutes to let the front desk clerk know there was something very foul going on in my room. Do you know what the front desk clerk's response was?

Michael: I hate to guess.

Michele: He said, "Well, ma'am, sometimes hotel rooms smell."

Michael: Oh my gosh.

Michele: And that was it. I walked away pretty much stunned, because at this point I had spent about two hours trying to get settled. It was fine. It all worked out. I was thankful to have a room, but the comparison between these two hotel experiences, two established hotels, I should say, was like night and day.

I couldn't help but think of how often that happens, where you can have different vendors of whatever product it is...it doesn't matter...and one experience can be an absolutely "wow" experience, and the other experience can be just awful. They're offering the same product, but the experience is very different. It certainly impacted whether or not I go there in the future. I would imagine you've had similar experiences, Michael.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. This past weekend was our 38th anniversary.

Michele: Happy anniversary.

Michael: Thank you.

Michele: Thirty-eight.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: And you're only like 39, so how is that even...

Michael: I know. We got married very early. So I decided I really wanted to take Gail someplace really, really special, so I asked one of my daughters, who's a real foodie, "What is the best restaurant in your experience in Nashville?" She said, "Well, Dad, the one I like best right now is a restaurant called Prima." I said, "Super. That's good enough for me." So we made reservations.

Well, get this. We got there, and I expected it to be a good restaurant, because we have a lot of great restaurants in Nashville, but when we got there, they ushered us in to what they called the chef's table, which was a private room with just the two of us. Now we like quiet restaurants, because we're kind of at the age where if there's a lot of ambient noise it's hard to hear each other. We're this older couple that's like, "What? What?"

So we liked being sequestered off in this private chef table room. The thing we loved about the service... We like service that is kind of invisible, where the people are there when you need them, but they're not intrusive. Like I had lunch today with Megan, and the waitress in this other restaurant was constantly interrupting us.

I mean, every time we built up a head of steam and were in this great conversation, she would stop, and she kept asking us the same question. She says, "Is everything delicious?" First of all, I hate that question. It's kind of manipulative. At any rate, she just kept asking us that. Back at Prima, the service was perfect. I could not have asked for better service.

If your glass was empty, they just filled it up. They didn't ask you if you needed a refill. They just filled it up. The food was phenomenal. Totally exceeded our expectations. We loved it. They recommended a wine pairing that was just perfect. It was an extraordinary experience that exceeded my expectations on every front. That's really to me the essence of how I define a "wow" experience.

Michele: The bottom line for all of us who are business owners, entrepreneurs, or trying to get some kind of message we're delivering out there, the bottom line is that the marketplace is very, very crowded, so you can't afford to have any less than the "wow" experience for your client. If *you* don't deliver a "wow" experience, it's guaranteed somebody else is, and you're going to lose your customers in about two seconds flat.

Michael: And today, "wow" experiences are the new customer satisfaction. Maybe 10 years ago or so everybody was doing customer satisfaction surveys, and the goal was to have satisfied customers. I don't think that's enough. Let me explain here. Let me kind of unpack what I see as the architecture of "wow," because it's totally possible to create it, but you have to understand what causes it.

A “wow” experience, in my definition, is one of those experiences that causes your jaw to drop, where what you expected and what you got were totally different. In a “wow” experience, the expectation was exceeded by the actual experience. You thought you were buying one thing... Like five weeks ago or so, we went out west. We went to Sedona. We ended up doing this thing called a Pink Jeep Tour of Sedona.

I thought, “Okay, it’ll be a little bit of off-road experience.” It blew our minds. We went to some of the most amazing scenes I’ve ever seen anywhere in the world. I had this expectation that I was going to have an off-road, dusty, hot experience. What I did was I was able to see these amazing vistas in parts of that countryside you could never get to on foot, or at least it would be difficult. That was a “wow” experience.

On the other hand, customer satisfaction is when you get what you expect. One of the reasons people go to chain restaurants a lot is because they can count on the consistency. They get what they expect. They’re satisfied. They’re not wowed usually. Think of the last time you went to a chain. You probably weren’t wowed, but you got what you expected. You were satisfied.

I fly a lot of airlines, as you do. I fly Delta quite a bit and I fly American quite a bit. I never get on an American flight and go, “Whoa! That really exceeded my expectations.” Thankfully, I’m generally satisfied, but there’s not a lot that happens that exceeds my expectations. That occasionally happens on Delta for me, where I get my expectations exceeded. I’m not endorsing either one. I’m just trying to illustrate a point.

Disappointment happens when the expectation is greater than the experience. This happens to us a lot, where you think, “Oh my gosh, if I can just get that thing, just have that experience, just eat at that restaurant, it’s going to be amazing.” Then it’s kind of a letdown because our expectations are so high.

What we want to talk about in this episode is how to engineer those “wow” experiences so that your customer’s expectations are exceeded. That’s what gets you referral business. That’s what builds your business. That’s what makes your customers raving fans.

Michele: I was just going to say that. I’m glad you mentioned referral business, because “wow” experiences are really what get people talking. Meeting customer expectations doesn’t make customers talk, but wowing them is when they’re sitting at dinner with friends and they’re like, “Oh, you wouldn’t believe this experience I had the other day.” It’s the “wow” experiences that ignite a customer’s desire to talk about it.

Michael: That's right. If you look, whether it's Amazon on customer rankings (I could look at my own most recent book *Living Forward* as an example) or on Yelp, the things that get people talking are really bad experiences or really good experiences. If it's just customer satisfaction, nobody really takes time.

Michele: Nobody talks about it. Both of those have an impact on your business: talking about really negative or talking about really good experiences. We want to avoid the negative and enhance the good ones. So do you want to wow your customers? Michael is going to give you five questions you can ask yourself in order to engineer that "wow" experience.

It's a lot easier than you think it is. You don't have to join the circus or jump through any kind of acrobatics in order to make it happen. Michael is going to give you his process of basically asking and answering five questions to help you engineer "wow" for your customer. What is that first question?

Michael: The first one is really simple. *"What is the product or the experience I want to create or transform into a 'wow'?"* It's something you offer to the public, and you want to transform that. You've decided you're going to be deliberate about engineering the "wow" into that experience.

When I first discovered this, I had just come back from one of the Apple conferences where Steve Jobs had introduced... I don't think it was the first iPhone, but it might have been a further one down the road. I just thought that experience was so "wow," everything about it. Everything about his presentation, everything about the products was "wow." I thought, "Wow! How could I exceed people's expectations?"

I came back to Thomas Nelson. (I was the CEO there.) I said, "We're doing some remodeling. How can we engineer or recreate our lobby so that it's a 'wow' experience? Let's be deliberate about this. This is the first place where prospective customers, authors, and vendors encounter us when they walk into the lobby. I mean, we have our website and we answer the phone and all that, but the lobby is the principal place. So how can we bake the 'wow' into that?"

Recently, we've launched my *Free to Focus* productivity course. As we were looking at course software, we asked, "How can we create a web experience, an online course experience that is second to none? How can we bake the 'wow' into it?" So first of all, it just means answering the question, "What is a product or a service we want to use as a test case and really want to transform into 'wow'?"

Michele: We can get as basic as creating a "wow" experience on our websites, correct?

Michael: Totally. You could do it with a speech. You're out there speaking a lot. To say, "You know what? This is a speech..." You helped me with a speech a couple of years ago that I really wanted to be a "wow," so we identified it as that. We said, "We're going to turn this into a 'wow.'"

Michele: So for those of you listening, think outside the box. It might be a tangible product. It may be a website. It could be a consulting service you offer. It could be a presentation. There are so many different possibilities. Think through your unique business and what kind of product or experience you want to transform into a "wow." That's where we begin. So identify that so we're really clear on what we're transforming into that "wow." What is the next question you ask yourself and then answer, Michael?

Michael: The second question is, "*How will the customer or the prospect feel as a result of this experience?*" In other words, what's the specific outcome you want to create? The more you can describe this in emotional terms, the better off you'll be. For example, when I had somebody walk into my lobby at Thomas Nelson, I wanted them to feel welcomed. I wanted them to feel positive about the company.

I wanted them to feel like they were at home, like somebody had been thoughtful enough to consider what their needs would be, and it wasn't just a staging area, like a cattle chute, where we're going to put the cattle on the truck. This is going to be a place where we're making our first impression and we're taking it seriously. When we were designing the course site for *Free to Focus*, we just asked, "How do we want people to feel when they log in?"

We wanted them to feel like, "Man, aren't I smart for buying this course? This is going to be an amazing experience." We wanted to create a sense of anticipation, that we had thought through all of the details, and we really wanted to exceed their expectations. Whether it's eating the food you're serving or using the service or the product you've created, how do you want them to feel? What's the outcome?

Michele: So the first question to ask is, "What is a product or experience I want to create or transform into a 'wow'?" The second question is, "How will the customer or prospect feel as a result of the experience?" Like you said, Michael, we want you to be as specific as possible, to really use those emotional feeling words. That way you can be very specific about the outcome you want to create with that customer. What is the third question?

Michael: If that's the expectation, if that's the kind of experience we want to create, the third question is, "*What specific expectations does the customer typically bring to this experience?*" Let's just say it was a speech. Let's just say you're part of a lineup. You're going to be speaking, and

people come and say, “Okay, I expect this person to be reasonably organized, maybe have a few funny stories, and entertain me, but I’m probably not going to get that much out of it.”

If you can say, “You know, I want them to cry. I want them to laugh. I want their life to be transformed,” that’s something else different. When we were looking at the lobby at Thomas Nelson, as I got together with the operations staff, we said, “Okay, the expectation is that you’re going to come into a lobby with some furniture that’s probably kind of beat up, with some décor that’s outdated, with some magazines that are way out-of-date.

You’re probably not going to be offered any coffee. You’re probably going to have to sign in, and the receptionist is not going to know you. The receptionist might even be kind of playing the role of a security guard, looking at you askance, like, ‘What business do you have being here?’” We just tried as much as possible to define what the experience would be.

When it came to my new course, we were thinking, “What’s the typical expectation of somebody coming through the door of a new course?” Well, it’s going to be delivered on the web. There’s going to be a video. There will probably be some downloadables, but that’s probably it. It is important to know what people are coming with, because then you can begin to engineer the “wow.” In fact, the lower their expectations, the better.

Michele: That’s the truth.

Michael: The hurdle is not as high to jump when the expectation is low. That’s why there are so many businesses out there that are ripe for being taken over. I’m convinced one of the reasons Uber has been so successful is because of the experience people have come to expect from a taxi ride.

Michele: You know what? That’s actually very insightful. You’re absolutely right.

Michael: They just asked, “How could we create a better experience? How could we exceed people’s expectations and make this really a ‘wow’?” The fact that when I get an Uber, I don’t have to think about tipping...

Michele: It’s easy.

Michael: It’s easy. I don’t have to pull out my credit card. I don’t have to go through that whole rigmarole at the end of the ride. I know I’m going to get somebody who is competent in a clean vehicle who’s not going to have really bad BO. Did I just say that?

Michele: Unlike my hotel room. Is that what you're saying? It will smell better than my bad hotel room.

Michael: Jerry Seinfeld has a whole routine on taxi drivers. It's hilarious. I just listened to it.

Michele: We digress, but I'm going to have to listen to that later.

Michael: We'll get mail on that one.

Michele: This whole conversation is making me think about everything from, as writers, the books we deliver... If we really spend time thinking about the expectations of our consumer and how we can "wow" them... Sometimes we're just so caught up in what we feel we want to deliver or what we feel called to do that we don't stop to sit and go, "Let's think about the consumer. What are their expectations? How can we so anticipate their needs and meet their needs and exceed their needs in such a way that they're overcome by it?"

Michael: It's in the little things. Oprah has this saying, and I love it. She says, "Love is in the details." I think it's really true. I don't do this anymore, but back when I was a fancy CEO and I had to go to investment conferences, where we had investors as a public company, they would usually hold those in a Ritz hotel.

I remember a couple of times staying at the Ritz in New York. I would check in, and they were the first people... Not Chick-fil-A, but the Ritz were the first people to say, "It's my pleasure." I thought, "That's awesome." How many times do you go to a grocery store or a drive-through and they don't even thank you for your business? For somebody to say (I love this about Chick-fil-A too), "It's my pleasure..."

At the Ritz, when they hand you your hotel key, they would walk out from behind the counter, they would walk with you to the elevator, because trying to find the elevator is sometimes a hassle in an unfamiliar building, and then they would hand you your key and say, "It's my pleasure. Welcome."

Michele: It's so powerful. Sometimes we think creating a "wow" experience is an expensive proposition, that it's going to cost us tons of money and tons of time, so we forgo even thinking about it, because we just don't feel like we have the budget for it, whether it's financial or time. But your whole example about "It's my pleasure" is so powerful.

I actually just took my kids to Chick-fil-A the other day. We had been talking about this whole concept, because I've been listening to the audiobook by Dee Ann Turner called *It's My*

Pleasure. She's the executive at Chick-fil-A. Anyway, we go through the drive-through, and sure enough, we get the food and the gentleman who handed us the food... I said, "Thank you," and he goes, "It's my pleasure."

All three of my kids in the backseat jumped up. They're like, "He said it! He said it!" They were so excited. I thought, "What a simple thing." It didn't cost the company any more money to teach this. It didn't cost that guy any more time to say it, yet it left a significant impact on three little 9-year-old kids. I think for all of us as businesspeople, entrepreneurs, we have to get out of that stuck mindset of thinking it's going to cost us too much to go the extra mile. It doesn't.

Michael: That's right. It really starts with our intention and just thinking it through and starting with the end in mind. That's why that second question was about how you want them to feel as a result of delivering your product or service. That's really where it begins.

Michele: Absolutely. Well, Michael, we have two more questions to discuss in a moment, but before we do that, you mentioned that you have something special for those who are interested in blogging. Can you share that?

Michael: Well, as you know, I believe blogging is a really powerful tool for any leader or business owner, but a lot of folks just don't know how to get started. They either never start a blog or they don't start in the most optimal way, so I've created a resource to help solve that. And it's free.

Michele: Yes! First of all, I love the fact that you always have great resources. Even better that it's free. So what is it?

Michael: It's a set of easy-to-follow instructions and a screencast that will take you step by step, click by click, through the process of setting up your own self-hosted blog. A self-hosted blog is a foundational tool for anyone who wants to start blogging or wants to take their blog to the next level by self-hosting it.

Michele: And why is self-hosting so important, Michael?

Michael: I thought you might ask that. Self-hosting allows you to tailor your website with a lot more freedom and efficiency, and it also gives you true ownership of your site. It's not like building your house on a rented lot. It's like building your house on a lot that you own. You'll have your own domain name, which makes you look like a pro, and the screencast makes all that possible for you, because it walks you through the whole process.

Michele: So basically you're saying that even somebody like I can set it up? It's not that difficult?

Michael: Well, yeah, I think even you could do this.

Michele: You sounded skeptical there. Please reassure me.

Michael: You were the person I had in mind. I thought, "If I can make this so simple Michele can do it, I've got something."

Michele: I'm going to get called to the GEICO commercials, I know. Instead of the caveman, it's going to be, "It's so simple even Michele can do it." So it's not difficult to set up. That's what you're saying?

Michael: Yeah, you can absolutely do it in under 20 minutes. All you need to do is go to michaelhyatt.com/selfhost to learn how to do it. When you sign up for the PDF instructions, you're also going to get an email from me with a special discount on services from Bluehost, which is the company I recommend and the company that's the top number-one rated hosting service by WordPress itself.

Michele: I use Bluehost as well. With that discount, it makes it extremely affordable for a monthly self-hosted site.

Michael: Yep, it's a no-brainer.

Michele: That's michaelhyatt.com/selfhost. You and I can sign up for the free screencast and PDF instructions on self-hosting. We can get that special discount from your recommended hosting provider Bluehost. There's no reason why we shouldn't start doing that kind of blogging right away.

Michael: Absolutely. It's a no-brainer.

Michele: I believe you said it wouldn't take very long, only about 20 minutes to get it all set up. Correct?

Michael: That's correct.

Michele: All right, perfect. I hope all of you take advantage of that. Now let's get back to our conversation for today. Do you want to wow your customers? Here are five questions that

make it easy. So far, Michael has covered the first three questions you need to ask in order to engineer a “wow” experience for your customers.

The first question is, “What is a project or experience I want to create or transform into a ‘wow’?” Second, “How will the customer or prospect feel as a result of this experience?” In other words, what is a specific outcome you want to create? The third question is, “What specific expectations does a customer typically bring to this experience?” So identify what those typical expectations are. What is the fourth question, Michael?

Michael: The fourth question is, “*What does failing to meet customer expectations for this experience look like?*”

Michele: Oh, I don’t want to think about that.

Michael: I know. Well, it’s really important to think about that, I think, because you realize everything is consequential. For example, let’s say you’re writing a book and you really want that to exceed people’s expectations, but what does it look like if it doesn’t exceed people’s expectations? What if it’s boring? What if it doesn’t have enough stories in it or enough specific practical applications?

Then I try to imagine one step further and imagine them leaving a bad review on Amazon. This gets very motivational for me. When people come into my course experience, this new *Free to Focus* course, and it doesn’t meet their expectations, if I leave them disappointed, do you know what they’re going to do? They’re going to ask for a refund.

I’m always willing to give people’s money back, but I hate to do that, because I know in a way we’ve failed to deliver on the promise we made. If you’re in the restaurant business, what does a negative Yelp review look like? I’ll never forget. I was talking to Jay Baer. He has written a book called *Hug Your Haters*. One of the things he talked about is this very thing about when you disappoint people.

He said he had a restaurant owner who called him and said, “Man, I have a Yelp problem.” He said, “What’s your problem?” He said, “Well, I have all of these negative reviews on Yelp.” He said, “No, I think you have a food and service problem.” That’s really true. The problem was not Yelp. Yelp was simply reflecting what was true in this guy’s business.

So to visualize what it means to fail to meet customer expectations can be very helpful, because you and your team can realize there’s a lot at stake here and it’s worth making the effort to reengineer this product or this service so it delivers “wow.”

Michele: What you're basically doing is shining a different perspective on the criticism he received. It was actually helpful feedback.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. It was, if he had just taken it that way.

Michele: So the fourth question is, "What does failing to meet customer expectations for this experience look like?" In many ways, when you identify that, that helps you go back to the second question of identifying what you want the customer to feel as a result of the experience. When you look at that failure, it ties into, "Okay, if failure looks like *this*, *this* is how I want them to feel." They go very much together. What is question number five?

Michael: The fifth one is kind of the other side of the coin. "*What does meeting customers' expectations for this experience look like?*" For us, as we were looking at the lobby at Thomas Nelson, we asked, "What does that need to look like?" We wanted to redecorate it so that it was up-to-date. Let's start with that.

Let's start with the fact that when they walk in, there are magazines that are actually current that would be interesting to them. What if we put stacks of our new books around and invited people to take a copy? That would exceed their expectations. What would happen if when they went to the receptionist they were greeted by somebody who was glad to see them? Shocking.

Michele: Imagine that.

Michael: Or even better, somebody who was expecting them because we had a system in place to notify the receptionist who was going to be visiting so they could say something kind about that person, like, "Oh, Mr. Alder, we're so glad to have you here. John is looking so forward to seeing you." So they feel welcome. Ask them if they'd like a cup of coffee or a glass of water while they wait, or whatever it is. Just to think through the details and intentionality of that.

Michele: So what does meeting customers' expectations for this experience look like? It's good that we're ending on a positive question like that, because that helps us be motivated to create that "wow" experience.

Michael: It does, and it can get you very excited. I don't care what it is. If you're giving a speech and you're thinking about, "Man, I would love to have people blown away," where they're sitting in their seat going, "Oh my gosh, that was amazing," and they're out talking about you and sharing the experience, and other people are booking you as a result of that. You can make this as elaborate as you want.

A lot of good things happen when we bake in the “wow.” I’m sure people get tired of hearing me say this, but Apple was such a good example of this, and I think still is. I think we’ve come to take it for granted, in many ways, that they’re going to always wow us, but when Steve Jobs was the CEO, they did a phenomenal job of doing that almost every single time.

Michele: Before we go, I wanted to do a really practical example, something different than... You know, you did Thomas Nelson, when they would come in the foyer. Let’s take a blog, for example, since we were talking about blogging during the break. How might a blogger create that “wow” experience? Working through these five questions, how would you do that? Just give some practical hypothetical examples.

Michael: Let’s just say, starting with number one, we said, “Okay, I want to reengineer my blog so it’s ‘wow’.” That would be the answer to the first question. The blog is what I want to do. How will the customer or prospect feel as a result of the experience? I want the customer to feel like, “This blogger has been reading my mail. How do they know that? Have they been in my inbox? Have they been listening to my phone calls? How do they know what I’m feeling, what I’m thinking? How do they know the language I use to express myself?”

What specific expectations does the customer typically bring to this experience? You know, “Here’s one more blog post. It’s probably going to be all about the blogger. They’re probably going to miss some. Maybe it sounds interesting. I don’t know.” People have pretty low expectations online, I think. What does failing to meet the customer’s expectations for this experience look like? I can tell you on a blog what it looks like. It looks like they vanish.

Michele: Click. They go somewhere else.

Michael: Click off. Yeah, you have basically about 10 seconds to live with a blog post. If people don’t find relevance, if they’re not intrigued, if they don’t find that it’s going to meet a need they have, they’re going to bounce off of it. They’re going to go to the next interesting thing.

What does meeting customers’ expectations for this experience look like? I’ll tell you what it looks like in a blog. They subscribe to your blog updates. They share the blog post with their friends. Maybe they tweet about it. Maybe they post it on Facebook. They share it, and they begin to build trust in you as somebody they want to listen to and invite into their life on a regular basis.

Michele: So helpful, Michael. Thanks for taking a minute to do that. I think that kind of practical breaking down how you and I can create “wow” experiences even on a daily blogging basis is so powerful for us. Very practical.

If you enjoyed today's episode, you can get the show notes and the full transcript at michaelhyatt.com. Do us a favor before you go today. I promise it will only take about 30 seconds or so. Head over to iTunes and rate this podcast. It's a huge help for us in improving our rankings and keeping the show visible to others so they can discover it. So please just take that 30 seconds. We're so grateful. Thank you ahead of time. Do you have any final thoughts today, Michael, on this concept of developing "wow"?

Michael: I would just invite the listeners to identify one product or one experience or one process, even, that they want to turn into a "wow." Don't go whole hog. Test this with yourself and with your team. Convince yourself it's worth the effort and the time and maybe a little bit of expense to make it better, but just identify one and give it a shot.

This is a hugely fun team exercise to do, so if you have a team, even if it's just a small one, it's really fun to be intentional about this and create "wow" experiences. To me, nothing gets me more delighted than delighting my customers.

Michele: This is what makes what we do even that much more fun and fulfilling: when we can serve them even better. Thank you, Michael, and thank you for joining us today. Until next time, remember: your life, your one and only life, is a gift. Now go make it count.