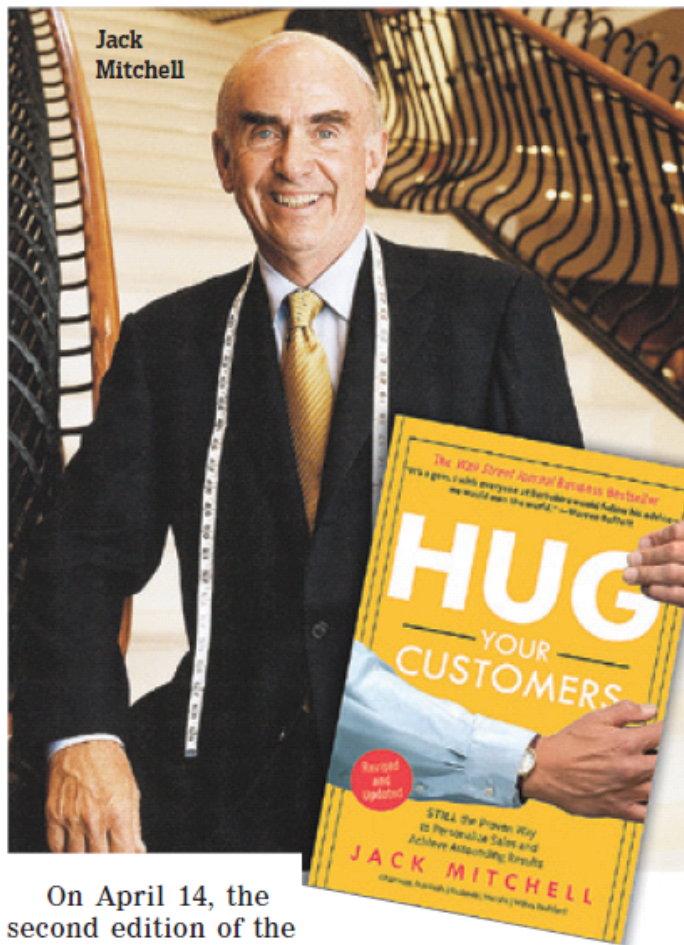


# Jack Mitchell's New Bear Hug

JACK MITCHELL'S arms must be tired — the chairman of Mitchells Family of Stores has been hugging customers for over a decade already.

His book on personalizing sales — “Hug Your Customers” — was first published in 2003 and has sold more than 275,000 copies globally. Since its publication, Mitchell has appeared on the “Today” show and has done more than 215 motivational speeches around the country to corporations and groups as varied as Nike, Pitney Bowes and Wesleyan University sharing his philosophy for providing extraordinary customer service.



On April 14, the second edition of the book will be published by Hachette Book Group.

“It continues to sell and I’m really proud of it,” Mitchell said. “[Hachette] called last January and asked if I would like to revise and update it.”

So while the “heart of the book is the same,” Mitchell updated the preface and added several new sections. As he writes in the preface: “The most significant changes have been the quickened

pace of technology and the growth of Internet sales for all industries.” As a result, Mitchell added a section on technology, talking about the company’s new Web site. “We didn’t even launch e-commerce until October 2014,” he said. “We’re trying to replicate the in-store shopping experience online, and we offer 80 to 90 percent of our sku’s [stockkeeping units] online so customers can see what store has what item and the price.”

But it’s not just technology that has changed in the past 12 years. “We’re different, too,” he writes. “A decade ago, we consisted of two Connecticut stores. Now we have five stores, including one on Long Island, N.Y., and two new stores situated on the West Coast.” So Mitchell added a section on the company’s acquisition of Marshs in 2005, or “how we hugged our way through Long Island,” he said, as well as details on the acquisition of the Wilkes Bashford stores in California out of bankruptcy in 2009, “when the whole world fell apart,” as well as how the company survived the Great Recession. Mitchell referred to this as “how we hugged during the worst of times.”

The second edition, which sports a “revised and updated” button on the cover, is 317 pages and includes pages of acknowledgements to the company’s hundreds of associates at the end. The book starts with an array of quotes from notables in the apparel industry and business community weighing in on the first edition. These range from Jim Nantz of CBS Sports and R. Glenn Hubbard of the Graduate School of Business at Columbia University, to Gildo Zegna, chief executive officer of Ermenegildo Zegna.

But while a lot has changed, the core concept of how to attract and retain customers remains the same.

As Mitchell writes: “One thing that has not changed one bit is our core philosophy of building relationships and delivering personalized customer service.”

Mitchell’s pet peeve is also consistent: “Nothing continues to aggravate me more than businesses — small and large — that deliver very little, if any, customer service. In this fast-moving age of Internet shopping and depersonalized exchanges, I’m convinced that people more than ever yearn for at least a smile and a thank you from an actual human being.”

Or a big hug.

— J.E.P.