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Issue 39
June 2008

Customer Service Test yourself before you point fingers!

There were times when customer service training and focus on customer satisfaction were often heard of items. Nowadays you still read the words: **'service excellence'** or: **'our customers are our most valuable...'** on **mission statements** of many organisations. These statements are often posted on the walls and written on glossy posters.

The question is: has customer service lost its importance to other matters such as safety, equal

employment, worker rights, bottom line earnings, seven habits of?

I do agree that you still often find exceptional customer treatment here and there. Sometimes it is so surprising that it spurs you to heights of emotion and you find yourself writing letters to the manager, **complementing** him or her who did this special thing for you!

Perhaps we should do a **quick test**. See how many **'yes' answers** you get. Maybe you already meet all the criteria of exceptional service excellence and do not have to bother that much about the issue. (If you feel that some questions do not relate to your kind of business, I am sure that you can replace some words in

the question to make it fit!)

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Customer Service Questionnaire

1. When **the phone rings** in your organisation's open office, do your employees compete to answer it (or rather hope that someone else will do so)?
2. If you have to be a customer to your own organisation and read your own emails, would you be pleased and **impressed**?
3. If you ask your staff who pays their salaries, will they say: **"our customers"** (or "my boss")?
4. When a customer pays you, for example, at the till, does your staff member say: "thank you for your business" (or is it the customer that mostly has to **say thank you**)?
5. If you ask your staff what their most important activity is: will they say "To **please our customers**" (or will they say: "to do my job" or will they recite something from the mission statement on the wall)?
6. Do you and/or your staff answer all emails and messages before you go home for the day, or even from at home on the **same day**?
7. Do you pay your suppliers exactly as **per contracted agreement** (or do you always have excuses about something and pay them much later)?
8. Do you and/or your staff make an all out attempt to **please unhappy and angry** customers (or do you mostly do nothing first, hoping that the problem will go away)?
9. Was: "Our customer Service" on top of a **staff agenda** at least once during the last 6 months?
10. When a customer talks to one of your staff and the **phone rings**, will your staff member first attend to the customer before answering the phone?

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More than 7: You do not have to bother about customer service training for at least one month!
Between 4 and 7: Bother! If you sleep peacefully tonight you may as well call your lawyer to start the liquidation process.

Less than 4: Try and send your CV to the South Pole. There are no customers and nothing to buy and sell anyway.

To influence and impress customers, so that

they talk favourably about you, is a **delicate** form of **negotiation**. It involves all aspects of negotiation; from creating a proper first impression, to talking with respect and persuading customers with concern and empathy.

Here follows **seven key steps** towards being perceived as having exceptional customer service.

Although these steps are quite simple; I suppose, like all things, to have your employees act and 'live' it, could be another matter.

1. **Treat everybody with extreme respect and dignity!**

Customer service is about influence and **changing perceptions**. Sometimes you just need to improve the wording of a message to avoid a court case! E.g. 'Dear Mr Kutala, we sincerely regret the inconvenience.'

This has two implications. The first is that you have to live up to your apology and to **do as promised** on the **time** promised!

The second implication is that you are now committing your organisation. So, if not everyone is practising and living customer service, the customer could end up even

Analyses: **How Many "yes" answers?**

unhappier than before.

Your maintenance staff, your accounting office and your engineering staff should all realise that they, when in contact with the public, become the company and that **'the company's' image** will be **merged** with your image!

2. ***Do the 'unexpected extra'!***

By doing the unexpected; the small favour that is not part of the 'job description' can have immense effect. For example a while ago a shop assistant packed all my paper bags into a transparent plastic bag and folded away the ugly corners of the bag when it suddenly started to rain (nobody said that she **had** to do it!). Then she tied rope handles to the bag so as to make it easy to carry.

I'll never forget it. In fact in future I'll go out of my way to shop there again.

4. ***Take the blame***

A while ago I purchased a double cab truck with a so-called fancy diff-lock. Needless to say, when I tried it out, it did not work. I was upset and phoned the dealership. They were obviously trained in dealing with angry customers and the lady whom I talked to responded immediately **"I am so sorry sir,** we obviously forgot to configure the digital switch that activates the diff-lock."

She did not blame the service department or pass my call from desk to desk. She took the **blame herself** "We made a mistake". I ended up impressed by the service! Would any other company have solved my problem in such a way? Probably not!

5. ***Memorize special phrases***

If you complain to a restaurant owner about a rude waiter, he may become defensive. Even angry. He could even say: "If you don't like it here, why bother" (which will cause the customer never to return and to tell everyone else about his/her bad experience!)

It's easy to get caught up in the emotional heat of the moment when someone is complaining.

The solution is to memorize some key phrases, and practice saying them, so that when the emotional moment arrives (and it will), you are ready with a 'standard phrase' and in control of the situation.

"Tell me **how we can make up** for the mistake and we'll do it immediately"

"I'm sorry; I can't accept your money. The meal's on me."

"That's terrible; please tell me what happened so I can make sure it **never happens again.**"

One more point. You may think that admitting fault is a strict no-no that can get you sued. This is not true. The way to avoid getting sued is not to have people who are mad at you.

6. ***Make your employees 'act as customers' and then tell their stories to their co-workers back!***

Customers are seldom angry at you; they're angry at your business. They have a problem. So, solve it!

When the customer says, "I am not going to leave this here you will hear from me or my lawyer again!" You can, by focussing on his/her problem, respond with something like "I'm sorry. It's my fault." Figure out what to make the customer do that will make them happy and **stop taking it so personally.**

7. ***Give a prize 'customer service employee of the month'!***

Promote your staff who does some of the points mentioned above. **Reward them** visibly. Perhaps you can send them on courses to great places; make them lead group discussions on 'how we can service our customers even better, and you, as the boss let them see you behave in an exemplary way!

Manie Spoelstra