

SUCCESS IS STARING YOU RIGHT IN THE FACE

The most successful companies are in constant competition for business, like everyone else. What sets them apart often boils down to one factor: outstanding customer service.

I've spent 44 years focused on customer service. I've written hundreds of articles and books on the subject. I've been interviewed on television and radio and I've presented to thousands of customers in seminars worldwide. No matter what business you're in, here's some advice I highly recommend you consider.

Most firms across the world today believe they're providing awesome service. They are addicted to advertising and marketing on expensive media. The biggest issue I see is that they have no idea how inconsistent and weak their service actually is. Most firms believe they don't need help, yet their employee turnover is unnecessarily high. The solution is staring them in the face – it's overcoming their reluctance to invest in their people and develop a customer-driven workforce.

- **First, you've got to understand that you're in the service business.** Most companies think they are in manufacturing and retail; even most airlines don't know they are in the service business. Southwest Airlines is successful because they understand that they are a customer service company – and they just happen to be an airline. Customer service is a critical piece of your business, and you should fine-tune it as much as you can.
- **Second, you have to look at all the policies, procedures and systems you have in place that are making life miserable for your customers.** You could have the nicest people in the world, but you could have stupid hours, stupid rules and stupid procedures that are just ticking your customers off. When you make it difficult for customers to patronize you, they'll find someone else who's more accommodating. Your customers can do quite a few things much better than you can, and if your business isn't embracing this by viewing customer service as a branch of your marketing department that offers tremendous ROI, you're doing yourself and your customers a disservice.
- **Third, you have to have empowerment and speed.** Every single person has to be able to make fast, empowered decisions on the spot, and those decisions better be in favor of the customers. Employee empowerment may be the most underutilized tool of all in customer service. Intellectually, employees know what to do, but they need to be authorized and empowered by upper

management to take action. No one should have to go "higher up" to get permission to help a customer.

- **Fourth, you have to be more careful who you hire.** Service leaders hire one person out of 50 interviewed, sometimes just one in 100, because they're very, very careful. Look for the cream of the crop – the A players – instead of bringing on B and C players. Identify several people in your organization you wish you could clone. Write down their characteristics and create your own benchmark for the right person for each position.
- **Fifth, educate and train the entire staff on the art of customer service with something new and fresh every four to six months.** Let's say you want to create a service culture. It doesn't matter if you have a hundred or a thousand employees, you'd better have something new and fresh so it'll be constantly in front of them, and when they wake up and go to work every morning they'll be saying, "Fantastic! I'm taking care of customers." When management is committed to customer service by daily word and deed, the result is an infrastructure that facilitates free communication internally and yields a successful organizational culture.
- **Finally, measure the results financially so that you know the impact it's making on revenue, sales, profits and market share.** Everything you do should be built around the concept of creating an incredible customer experience. Perhaps the simplest way of creating a service culture is a variation on the golden rule: "Treat your customers as you wish to be treated yourself."

"MAKE your customers excited that you're in business. MAKE them grateful that they have the opportunity to buy your services or products. MAKE them feel like they are your most important customer. MAKE your service so outstanding that they wouldn't think of doing business with anyone else. And then... find a way to MAKE your service even better!" **RO**

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