

9 STEPS TO A **SERVICE CULTURE**



by John Tschohl

Never has customer service been as critical as it is today. That became apparent during the pandemic, when millions of people around the globe relied on businesses that could provide what they needed to survive—personally and professionally—and as quickly as possible.

I have been preaching the importance of customer service to clients throughout the world for several decades. In order to distinguish you and your business from your competitors, it is imperative that you create a service culture that runs throughout your company, from frontline employees to the CEO.

I have developed what I describe as the “nine principles of creating a service culture.” A service culture focuses on doing whatever it takes to satisfy the customer in order to attract new customers and retain current customers.

To create a service culture, you must take the following steps:

1. Create a relentless strategy.

A relentless strategy is a lifetime commitment to customer service. It is a propulsive, self-directed passion to continue to learn, improve, and exceed expectations in everything you do. You have to be relentless

in serving your customers; it has to be a way of life.

2. Reduce friction.

Remove stupid rules, policies, and procedures. Most rules are put in place to prevent customers from “taking advantage” of a company. What most managers and executives don’t understand is that those rules actually reduce the chance a customer will do business with you. Advertising and prices might get customers through the doors of your business once, but if they have a problem with a product or service—and if your rules don’t allow you to quickly solve it for them—they won’t be back. Make it easy to do business with you.

3. Empower employees.

Empowerment is the backbone of great service. Everyone must be empowered. If a frontline employee—your most important

employee—does not have the power to satisfy a customer on the spot—and to the customer’s satisfaction—that customer will be forced to do one of two things. He will move his complaint up the ladder, often all the way to the CEO, which costs a lot in terms of time and money, or he will simply never do business with you again.

4. Do everything with speed.

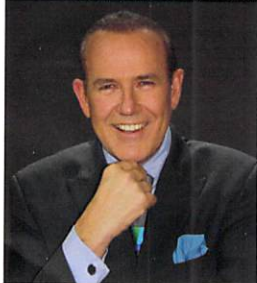
People today expect and want speed. You must drastically reduce the time for everything you do. That includes everything from answering the phone within the first ring or two and meeting or exceeding the deadline for a customer’s project. If something normally takes three weeks, do it in two. If you say you’ll get back to a customer within a week, do it within days. To focus on speed, all employees must organize, prioritize, manage their time, and look for efficiencies.

5. Train your employees.

Employees at every level of your business must be trained on customer service every few months. Ninety-nine percent of customer interaction takes place with your frontline employees and yet they are the

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He is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment and customer service in the world. John’s monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

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least trained, least empowered, and least valued, he adds. When you spend the time and money to train your employees—and do it continuously—you'll realize a return on that investment that will drive your business to new heights.

6. Remember customers' names.

The most precious things customers have are their names. Our names are precious to us. Call your customers by name whenever you interact with them. Doing so lets the customer know that you value them and their business, that you acknowledge and respect them, and that they are important to you.

7. Practice service recovery.

When you make a mistake, admit it and do whatever it takes to correct it. All employees must practice the four skills of service recovery: act quickly, take responsibility, make an empowered decision, and compensate fairly.

8. Reduce costs.

Price is critical to all customers. Service leaders are frugal and are always looking for ways to reduce costs. My research shows that service leaders are aggressive at eliminating waste and costs. When you reduce costs, you improve your bottom line. To realize even greater benefits, pass at least a portion of those savings on to your customers.

It will give you an edge over your competitors.

9. Measure results.

In order to keep management passionate about the process of creating a service culture and the financial investment and time required to do so, you must measure the results of your efforts. It's critical that you know where you came from and where you are now. When you can prove that what you are doing is having a positive impact, you will gain support throughout the company.

Serving the customer builds the bottom line and long-term growth prospects of an organization.

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