

CUSTOMER SERVICES

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In order to outperform your competition and gain a competitive edge, organizations need to provide not good but exceptional customer service-

In order to understand what exceptional customer service is, we need to understand what it is not. First of all Exceptional Customer Service is not lip service nor it is an individual or a department. There are basically five categories of customer service. We need to check out in what category does our organization fall.

Miserable Customer Services

This is where the employee actually goes out of his way to irritate the customer and makes the buying experience pathetically unforgettable.

Careless and Unconcerned Customer Services

The employee is indifferent to the customer's need. He couldn't care either way whether the customer buys or not. Here the attitude represents - take it or leave it !

Anticipated Customer Service

The customer gets what's expected - no more - no less. Every customer when he goes to purchase has some expectations of quality of product / service, courtesy and price. Based on the treatment a customer gets, the organization gets labelled. The question is, is it good to get labelled? Absolutely, if the labeled is good.

Competent Customer Service

In order to understand what is competent customer service, we must understand the difference between skill and competence. These two words are interchangeable and are used frequently.

The way I see it, **SKILL is ABILITY ONLY**

Whereas **COMPETENCE is ABILITY PLUS POSITIVE ATTITUDE,**

That means along with ability we have the desire to serve the customer. It is not uncommon to see many organizations train their staff in customer service skills, such as :

1. teaching them how to greet customers
2. shake hands
3. say please and thank you
4. smile and so on.

I feel that all these attributes are very important. But unless we have the desire to serve the customer how long can a person keep a fake smile on his face. Besides, people can see through people. If the smile is not sincere, it is irritating. **There has to be substance over form, not form over substance.**

Exceptional Customer Service

Exceptional Customer Service is an organization's responsibility. It is a mutually profitable relationship. It is an organisational commitment to do whatever it takes, to make the buying experience delightful for the customer by providing value added product or service. It is the delightful experience that brings the customer back. Any experience that is enjoyable a customer likes to repeat. It is the value added that breeds loyalty.

COMPETENT customer service believes in inspection and correction whereas **EXCEPTIONAL** customer service believes in prevention.

Exceptional customer service comprises of competence and courtesy. When a customer purchases, he has actually purchased the right to be treated with courtesy and be provided with competent service. Please note he has actually purchased the right so we are not doing him a favour.

Customers do not just purchase product, price or people - they purchase the **WHOLE PACKAGE** and in the package, **PEOPLE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT.**

In order to understand exceptional customer service, we need to put ourselves in the customers shoes. Let's face it we are all customers of somebody, aren't we ? We patronize particular shops, why do we do that? We get our vehicles repaired from a particular shop which may be a few miles away and on the way I pass a number of other repair shops. Why is it that I go to a particular one, bypassing the others? The major reason is that he is able to inspire confidence that I am dealing with the right person.

The store manager told his boss, "Too bad John lost his hearing, I guess he won't be working for the company much longer." The boss replied, "That's ridiculous, we're going to transfer him to the customer service department."

Exaggeration - not at all. The above story represents the attitude of most organizations, including some of the ones who claim to be customer focused.

When we provide exceptional customer service, we need to be very cautious because there are dangers involved. The biggest one is that the customer not only compares the value received against our competitors but is comparing us to our past performance.

In order to provide exceptional customer service we must recognize customer's needs and expectations. There is a difference between customer service and customer satisfaction. Customer service is from the provider point of view whereas satisfaction is from the customer's point of view. Of course, exceptional customer service from the provider's point of view may not be from the recipients point of view. Whenever there is a difference between reality and perception, what prevails ~ Always, perception. Our objective as an exceptional customer service provider is to bring reality and perception together.

Customer focused organizations don't happen. They are created by creating the culture in the organization. Culture always goes top down not bottom up.

Major Organizations all over the world such as Disney , Ford , American Express, believe and invest in training their people. People can be your greatest assets or liabilities. We don't have business problems, we have people problems.

When we solve our people problems, our business problems are automatically solved.

If you want to build a reputation that values customers, get your priorities right.

You need to do three things :

Hire the right people

Character and attitude are more important than degrees.

Invest in your people

Train, Train, Train. As a benchmark, invest about 1% of your gross sales into training. In order to see results, train everyone in your organization rather than training piece-meal. Train right from the CEO to every team member because your bottom line starts from the top.

Create a service oriented culture in your organization.

In an organization where individuals and departments internally are not being treated with respect and dignity, one can be pretty certain that their external customers are not being treated with respect and dignity either. Employers, employees, department and vendors are all customers to each other.

If you make a commitment and invest in your people, the rewards will be many fold, both in employee and customer loyalty and Increased profits*
