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Recommended Books

Customer Service

Where It All Begins by Coach Bud

Someone once said, "The customer is not always right but, they are your boss". Understanding this reality of customer service and establishing it as a fundamental principle of operating your business will insure a success that many businesses never achieve. Simple concept, right? If it's so simple why don't more businesses deliver superior customer service? Why don't we as customers have the choice of doing business with the company who delivers the *better superior service* rather than a choice of who's the least mediocre.

Delivering Superior Customer Service is the focus of this TBJ series of four articles and the March edition of our television show, *Building Your Business*, on Raleigh CTV-10. Since this is a *business journal*, our focus will be on business to business customer service, not the service we all experience in the retail marketplace. That's a whole different ballgame. We will examine how, in our highly competitive business environment where purchasers tend to view your product or service as a "commodity", your product or service can be differentiated from competitors.

When your product or service is viewed as only a commodity, the customer often uses price as a major factor in their purchasing decision. However, in a study of 10,000 people (Source: *The Customer Driven Company*

) across the country who were asked what they expected from the companies with whom they did business, price was not a factor... when their most important criteria were met. This research study indicated those customers placed most value on:

reliability

that you can deliver what you promise; assurance that your employees convey

trust

and

confidence

; physical appearance of your facility and employees (neatness does count); empathy, that you

care and understand their needs;

responsiveness

, the willingness to help them and be prompt about it. WOW! And you thought they just wanted the lowest price. Now, let's not kid ourselves into thinking that price is never an issue. The point is the emphasis on price decreases significantly when we demonstrate, by our actions, that we meet their criteria listed above.

Delivering Superior Customer Service is *exceeding* their expectations. As in any lasting relationship, you must _____ earn the trust of your customers with integrity and instill confidence in them that you possess the competency to deliver successful solutions. Let's explore further what it takes to deliver superior customer service.

It All Begins Internally

How customers perceive (remember perception is reality) your company is determined through their interaction with front-line employees. This customer service culture within an organization is established by the **actions**, not the words, of top management, and trickles down through the organization finally manifesting itself in the interaction between your employee and the customer. Top management establishes the value placed on that customer. "Whoa, you ask, if the customer's perception of my company is determined by the interaction with front-line employees, how does top management, who rarely has any direct contact with the customer, insure that superior customer service is being delivered by those front-line employees?" Bingo, you got it! Top management must recognize every employee for who they are...their **best customer**

. When management demonstrates, through consistent actions, deeds, rewards and recognition, a sincere appreciation for the value of each employee's contribution to the company's success, superior customer service is a slam dunk.

Behavioral scientists tell us that behavior rewarded will continue to repeat itself. Bottom line...the manner in which employees treat customers is in direct proportion to the way they are treated."OK, you say, in a perfect world this may work, but this sounds like a fairy tale." Speaking of fairy tales, ever wonder why Disney World has over 60,000 applications each year to work in their theme park? Why is Southwest Airlines the most profitable airlines flying today? Fairy tale? We don't think so. It results from an established culture of superior customer service. But, before you panic, realize that you don't have to be big like Disney World or Southwest Airlines to deliver superior customer service. As a matter of fact, it's easier to establish a culture of superior customer service in a smaller company.

What Walt Disney and Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest both understood is that how we "feel" about our experience with a company determines our repeat business. We buy with emotion...not logic. Someone once said, "It's not what you say to a person, it's how you make him or her *feel* that's important."

Ask yourself why you drive the car you drive, wear the clothes you wear, live in the neighborhood you live in? Are these choices made with pure logic? Probably not. The point here is not to judge the right or wrongness of your purchase decisions, but rather to support our claim that we make decisions more often based on how we "feel" about the product, service, salesperson or company. So, to deliver superior customer service, you must positively affect the way customers feel about your employees, company, product or service. That feeling is initially established and nurtured by management's attitude toward employees.

How do you do it?

You begin by creating a mindset in all levels of management that the customer is top priority. Your focus is solely on the customer's needs and exceeding their expectations. Keep in mind that your employees are your best customers. Your goal is to establish a habit of delivering superior customer service to every employee in the company and create what Ken Blanchard calls, *Raving Fans*. When you create *Raving Fans*, internally or externally, these fans become your best source for obtaining new customers. When employees are "happy campers" it is amazing how easy it is to deliver superior customer service and how easy it is to attract a more professional employee. Just ask any successful customer service driven company.

"Okay", you say, "you have convinced me that if my company delivers superior customer service we can achieve a higher level of success and have a lot more fun (now there's a concept) doing it."

"So what do I do?"

1. Start at the top. Top management must genuinely believe that exceeding the customer's expectations is the company's number one priority (remember who your best customer is).

2. The actions and words of top management determines the level of trust and confidence employees have in them. That trust and confidence will be conveyed directly to the external customers. (be sure those words are positive and consistent)

3. Through constant evaluation and customer feedback, management continues to reinforce and train employees on the priceless value of customers. Before you know it, delivering superior customer service is the culture of your company and your *journey of success* will begin taking giant steps.

Now that you know the steps, you can begin to establish or refine your company culture necessary to deliver superior customer service. Next week, we will explore how you retain and obtain loyal external customers and transform them into ***Raving Fans***.

"Coach Bud" shares 40+ years experience to help his clients Create, Develop and Grow a Successful Entrepreneurial Business. Please visit www.cogginsmarketing.com .