

THE MOST RELIABLE WAY TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

In today's fiercely competitive world companies spend millions on the land, building the store, and stocking it full of product, all for one thing—the customer. But, when the customer actually appears, they fall down on the job. All that time, thought, and money is wasted if the customer walks out, never to return.

Sale prices, advertising, merchandising, location, products, and services attract customers only once. The quality of personal relationships is what brings them back.

There is a direct connection between customer service, or lack thereof, and money made and lost. Do not lose money because you did not invest in developing superior customer service skills for your entire workforce and building a customer driven organization. You cannot just sit around and hope the next big thing will work magic. Not today, and especially if you have not been building a culture of customer service.

A Harris interactive study found that the #1 time when customers recommend a company is after they had an outstanding service experience. Of perhaps greater interest is the news that 86 percent of customers claim they would pay more for a better service experience.

On the other hand, and even more staggering is that 89 percent of customers stop doing business after one bad experience. Sadly, 79 percent of customers who shared complaints online had their complaints ignored. If the complaint gains visibility...or worse, goes viral—it can impact thousands of potential customers, diminish future revenue, and tarnish the value of the brand.

To determine the right customer service goals it's important to conduct a self-assessment so you can understand where you are and where you need to be. Keep in mind, the experience you have at Costco—where customers push giant carts through huge aisles stacked high with value-priced products—is very different from the experience at an Apple store, where customers see a much smaller selection of pricey products and get expert assistance with picking the right one. Costco's customer experience ties in with their strategy to be a cost leader; while Apple's strategy is innovation.

Companies like Disney, Zappos, Southwest Airlines, Ritz-Carlton, and FedEx all point to their customer-centric cultures as key to their success. That's because this discipline turns customer experience excellence into a habit and makes future change easier by creating a system that's receptive to customer experience improvement efforts. Amazon has done an excellent job of creating a culture of shared values and behaviors that focus employees on delivering a great customer

experience...every time. These top companies have built such an outstanding culture that not only do people love to work there, they also love to shop there. They are their own best customers. They are the best "advertisements" for their companies.

Each of these companies have a set of practices that helps them manage customer experiences in a proactive and disciplined way. They get rid of stupid rules and practices and hold people accountable for their role in customer experience practices. It helps keep bad experiences from getting out the door and helps employees assist in creating new and innovative approaches that will have a profound impact on the customer experience.

- **Know your customer**—knowing your customer's purchase and support history can help you solve problems and identify sales opportunities. Very few employees leverage the CRM technology in place. Virtually no one uses a customer's name when it is right in front of them.
- **Speed**—taking too much time to solve problems can lead to frustrated customers. The shorter the time to resolution, the happier the customer.
- **Personalize the experience**—customers love convenient and personalized responses to their problems and questions. If they are getting generic information they are more likely to become frustrated ex-customers.
- **If you say you'll do it—Do it!** By not delivering what you said you would at the time you said you could, can cost your organization long-term business.

You're not going to succeed through manufacturing, distribution or information power—those have all been commoditized. If you want to succeed, roll up your sleeves and do the work of building your customer experience. Don't become irrelevant to your customers, which is what will happen if you don't take action.

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