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[WEEKLY](#) » [Business Times](#) » Q and A : Investing in human resource is key to improving service delivery -- Customer Service expert

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Recently, John Tschohl the President of Service Quality Institute, a US based institute with over 30 years experience in customer service was in the country to train over 400 people in a Customer Care. During a seminar was organized by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) in conjunction with the Private Sector Federation (PSF) and Service Quality Institute under the theme: "Achieving Excellence through Customer Service." In an exclusive interview with **Business Times'** Berna Namata he talks about improving customer service. Below are the excerpts;

On the On the Frontier Group (OTF) and the Institute of Political Analysis and Research (IPAR) says that Rwanda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could increase to \$40 million per year by 2012 if services are improved. How?

Most companies in Rwanda have probably done something over the last decade may be 2 or 3 hours training. People need to reduce costs, create customer friendly systems, policies and also train their employees about service delivery at least after every four to five months.

You have to introduce something new to the work force- teach them customer service skills.

Everybody in Rwanda knows that taking care of a customer is important, but they do not do it.

And this is true

around the world, not just Rwanda. You have to get inside the heart of the person, build self image and self esteem. You have to ignite a fire within an individual to get them to believe in themselves.

Most companies and institutions emphasize investment in capital not human resource. What is it critical to invest in human resource?

This has been a mistake for years – put more money in new computers, machines, etc yet if you are in the service business you are totally dependent on people.

The face of your company is your employee and you can pay a wages like you putting gasoline in car, but if you are not changing oil- the car can get mechanical problems and stop moving.

The same is true for human resource; you have to put some 'additive' into the employee, give them some skills to be more effective. It is not realistic to expect the education system to provide

a totally disciplined, high performing individual for you.

As an organization, if you want high performing employees you have to develop those people.

And paying them more money is not going to improve performance – you have to ask yourself whether you want high performing employees or you just want employees. High performing employees will make you a lot of money.

From your experience what are some of the myths about customer service?

The first one is that if you have more employees, you have better customer service – most companies in Africa have 25 percent more employees than they need. You do not need all those employees, you just need high performing employees; having many people has nothing to do with customer service. You need fewer employees but need more high performing employees.

The second is that the reason people do not work hard is the reason that you are not paying them enough-if you double everybody's salary, you will only improve performance by one percent and then next 30-60 days, you will be out of business!

What drives employees is recognition – they want to be loved, appreciated, they want to be valued and in most cases they are not.

But I also believe that the less you pay the employee, management tends to have less respect for that employee. As an employer if you know you are paying an employee a lot of money, you want to keep them.

The other myth is that everybody is empowered BUT as an employer you have got to empower, train people and empower them because without them you will never have empowerment.

What is your final message to service providers in Rwanda?

Service providers in this country have to appreciate the fact that they are competing in Rwanda with other companies not only in Rwanda and all over the world.

If you want to dramatically increase your revenue, if you want incredible success beyond your wildest dreams having service strategy is the most effective way.

Currently Rwanda is competing with a lot of countries in East Africa and Africa, but the question is - why should somebody come to Rwanda for tourism and why should I come back? I believe it is the customer experience in all.

If you understand the customer experience; you can provide an awesome incredible superior customer experience, you will end up with more revenue.

The other thing is that good customer service does not get you into the game – most of the people just think that okay- we are going to offer good services this is not enough; you have to create customer loyalty.

You have to provide remarkable customer service every day, every transaction with every customer. If you do that it is possible to own the market- the question for Rwanda –both government and private sector is how badly do you want to dominate Africa?

How badly do you want to be the most successful business? And those who understand the service strategy will have incredible growth.

Ends
