

Roll Up Your Sleeves and Become Relevant to Your Customer

by John Tschohl

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.

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.

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.

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!

Not delivering what you said you would, at the time you said you could, can cost your organization long-term business.

Focus, focus on your customers. Every business, small or large—should understand what skills their customer-facing employees need and should know how to speak to customers in order to foster a positive and long-standing relationship. Put yourself in the customer's shoes: Do things

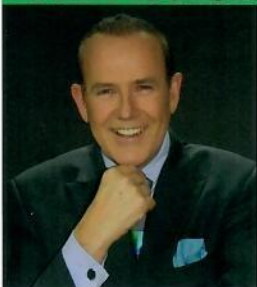
FOCUS, FOCUS ON YOUR CUSTOMERS. EVERY BUSINESS, SMALL OR LARGE—SHOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT SKILLS THEIR CUSTOMER-FACING EMPLOYEES NEED AND SHOULD KNOW HOW TO SPEAK TO CUSTOMERS IN ORDER TO FOSTER A POSITIVE AND LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP.

for them the way that you would want to have done for you. Give them an amazing customer experience, and encourage your customers to think of themselves as partners in your business. Like I've said before, the organization chart at your business should show the customer at the top.

- Put in place a set of practices that helps you manage customer experiences in a proactive and disciplined way.
- Get rid of stupid rules and practices, and hold people accountable for their role in customer experience practices.

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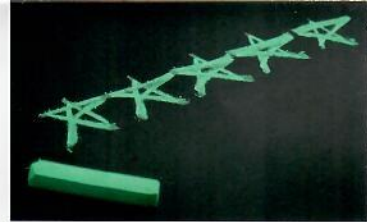
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John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. He is the president and founder of Service Quality Institute (the global leader in customer service) with operations in more than 40 countries. John is a self-made millionaire, traveling and speaking more than 50 times each year. 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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- Keep bad experiences from getting out the door.
- Help employees by helping to create new and innovative approaches that will have a profound impact on the customer experience.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE CUSTOMER'S SHOES: DO THINGS FOR THEM THE WAY THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO HAVE DONE FOR YOU. GIVE THEM AN AMAZING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Most companies have a mission statement—an easy-to-remember sentence or paragraph illustrating the business's goals and purpose. Disney's mission statement says, "To make people happy." Boeing's says, "To push the leading edge of aviation, taking huge challenges doing what others cannot do." 3M's says, "To solve unsolved problems innovatively." Note that these companies' missions are not to make a profit; profit is the outcome of, and reward for, fulfilling the mission. Now that's what I'm talking about!

Marketing brings a customer in; customer service keeps them coming back.

Your customer service marketing strategy must focus on delivering processes, experiences, and intangibles to customers rather

than physical goods and transactions. It involves integrating a focus on the customer throughout the firm and across all functions starting with social media.

- Repeat customers spend 33 percent more than new customers.
- Referrals among repeat customers are 107 percent greater.

Remember, customers will reciprocate your helpful actions. When you resolve situations quickly and effectively, and then respond to their need, most customers will pay you back with continued or increased loyalty, goodwill and even repurchasing. Keep in mind, there's nobody more valuable than the customer.

Top companies like Southwest Airlines, Apple and Amazon have known for years that great customer service doesn't cost...it pays! ■

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