

WRITING A “KNOCK YOUR SOCKS OFF” SERVICE CULTURE PLAN

One of the rocks that causes organizations to stumble is when top management forgets to implement a solid service strategy. They forget that a long-term plan for providing superior service is a monster truck that can easily straddle all obstacles when it comes to building market share...and dominance.

Walmart founder Sam Walton built one of the world's great retailing powerhouses based on a solid service model. Nowadays, Walmart is primarily known for its low prices, and its reputation for delivering great service has slipped.

That's unfortunate – by losing its focus on customer service, the company's long-term prospects have been significantly downgraded.

I have trouble understanding why the new management would eliminate customer experience as a primary factor in its business plan. They're ignoring a timeless truth of marketing, which says that customer service builds customer loyalty, and loyalty breeds success.

When your organization knows what's important to its customers, and when you're ready to fix the shortcomings of your current service policies, you're ready to start writing a service plan that will not only raise you out of mediocrity but take you to the heights.

Along came Amazon. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is the world's richest person as of November 2017. Bezos' company has become far and away the most trusted and well-liked brand on the planet – even more so than smart-home rivals Apple and Google, per a joint survey by The Verge with consulting firm Reticle Research. Today, Walmart is a speck in Amazon's rear-view mirror.

Consumers trust Amazon so completely that they freely share the personal details behind their purchasing decisions and data about their interests. Above all, Amazon's customers say it has THE BEST service of any company they've dealt with. It's routine for Amazon customers to say that the company over-delivers on its promise of service – they only have to explain half the problem for Amazon to solve 200%.

Bezos has been responsible for creating 100,000-plus new full-time jobs for the American economy in the last year, and he's on schedule to create even more with the new ventures he's developing. Ask yourself – how has Jeff Bezos' service plan worked for him so far? Can you adopt the same service model, scaled to the size of your business?

Why not? Consider adopting these guidelines for deciding the features of your service plan:

1. Under-promise, over-deliver. Set realistic customer expectations. McGraw-Hill defines a service strategy of “under promise and over deliver” as one where the service provider strives for customer satisfaction by doing way more than they promise. Over-deliver on

your promises, don't make promises you can't keep, and keep the ones you do make.

2. Only the customer knows what he or she wants.

- a. Make it easy to do business with your company.
- b. Customers want speed of service.
- c. Customers want to talk to a live person.
- d. Return phone calls *immediately*.
- e. Always deliver on your promises.

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate! Realize that not every customer who buys the same service or product will have the same service needs. Be like Amazon, and have a relentless focus on customer service with regular communication, and make sure you can deliver on their individual needs.

4. Continue to drive the plan strategically. Jeff Bezos says, “Focus on the things that don't change.” According to Inc.com (Nov. 6, 2017), Bezos built Amazon around the factors he knew would be stable over time. He then invested heavily to ensure that Amazon would be able to provide those factors and continuously improve its delivery.

Your company's management must drive its customer service programs by continuous training for all employees, by rewarding high-performing service employees, and by setting service standards that aren't just nice-sounding words but are regularly enforced.

When management commits to customer service in word and deed, the result is an organizational culture that attracts success at every level.

In my book *Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service*, I say that implementing a long-term strategy takes hardheaded analysis, talented people-management skills, intense concentration, commitment, and serious spending.

Never mind the importance of strategies, objectives and support systems, your company's service program will surely wilt without a solid corporate culture to sustain it and a CEO who's as committed to customer satisfaction as he is to keeping the stockholders happy. For a good example, we need look no farther than Jeff Bezos. **RO**

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