

By Sonia Graham



Is Your Customer Service on Permanent Vacation?



Guaranteed customer service level: Absolutely outrageous, remarkable, on-the-spot, raving fanatic-creating. Sound too good to be true? Many organizations claim to offer superior customer service, yet fail to deliver. These organizations lack a real customer focus, the buzzwords echo, but the organization has little interest in, or knowledge of, how to make its claim a reality. The good news is that great customer service can be a reality, as it is for organizations committed to ensuring delivery, not just a sugary catch phrase. In this article we will share a few tips you can begin to implement now to make sure the service promise, made implicitly or explicitly to your customers, is much more than just words.

In this age where service is so important, many companies claim to provide excellent customer service. Real estate agents are one example; nearly every agent claims to provide exceptional service. When a real estate training instructor asked his class for their slogans, at least 80 percent said something about superior service.

- What defines great customer service to the service provider?
- What defines great customer service to the clients?
- What defines great customer service to you?

Please share your insights. In our next article, we will share our definition and print some of your definitions with full credit to the authors.

Unfortunately for most companies, superior service delivery is a hollow

echo, especially if no process ensures consistent and reliable, much less superior, customer service.

Service delivery can be a competitive advantage, particularly in a commoditized industry where consumers have many choices. An organization that delivers excellent service creates a strong, lasting impression with customers. If the superior service is consistent and reliable, organizations develop loyal, returning customers who are quite likely to refer friends and family members.

The first step toward becoming a service-focused organization is to develop a clear and concise mission statement that commits the organization to service as a core value. The mission statement must be about the benefit the company strives to provide for the customer, not the benefit for the company or its shareholders. Shareholder value is created through the development of a solid, customer-focused business with customers and employees - all raving fans - who are committed to the company's success.

Employee involvement is key to the development of a customer-focused organization. If your mission statement requires revision, involve your employees in the process. What are they trying to provide for your customers? Are employees' customer service efforts aligned with your perspective? Is the alignment close - or miles apart?

You may think that you are selling a particular product or service, but ultimately you are solving some client need. Identify the need and

integrate goals to meet or exceed satisfaction of that need into your mission statement.

Once you know you've got a winning mission that everyone on the team can really believe in, share it. Tell everyone - suppliers, employees, partners and customers - what your company is about. Only enlist people to help you on your mission if they believe in it as much as you do. Employees who are working for something they believe in will be much more likely to deliver the best experience they possibly can for their customers.

The next step is to discover your organization's best practices. List successes in meeting or exceeding customer needs. Understand how these successes occurred and what employees did to create the positive outcome.

Be careful when examining success. Many companies aim to reward exceptional service, but reward service recovery rather than exceptional, problem-free service. Service recovery is an organization's response to a real or perceived issue in the service delivery process. It is important to be prepared to resolve issues immediately (we'll talk more about this in a future article), but it's more important to recognize that exceptional service is most exceptional when it is not in response to a wrong.

Ask employees and customers to share instances of exceptional service. What were the circumstances? What caused the

exceptional service to occur? Determine what about that incident made it exceptional rather than expected. Exceptional service by itself won't help your organization unless it leads to repeat customers, or better yet, customers who refer their friends and family. Understand the outcome of each remarkable incident, and look for systematic features that will lead to increased employee and customer loyalty.

These are a couple of important steps to begin on your journey to develop a customer-focused organization. Remember, the key is having a mission statement that the entire team believes in and supports.

An effective mission statement unites a team, aligns efforts with the organizational aspirations and enables customer service success.

Don't forget to send in your definitions of excellent customer service to EVW@Graham-MBA.com. We look forward to your thoughts.

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