

Service Excellence- A business Growth Strategy

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Have you found that your customers are more demanding than ever and at the same time the pressure is increasing to reduce costs and prices. So when looking to improve customer service, you need to invest your money wisely. Most companies however spend most of their money to attract new customers and virtually nothing to keep them. 40% of customers who leave you will be because of bad or indifferent service and only 16% because of price or product! Given the competitiveness of the global and local market and the increasing parity of products and prices, customer service is fast becoming the key factor that differentiates and defines successful organisations. You need to get more customers and keep them!

Creating a culture of service directly impacts your bottom line which can and should measurably increase performance in critical areas of your organization. Implementing a service strategy has been the most successful marketing secret of leading organisations for the past two decades. It has been more effective at increasing sales and profit than marketing campaigns, promotions or advertising. A 5% increase in customer service can result in a 25% increase in profit. Service as a strategy is as powerful as marketing and as potent as quality improvement in the ongoing effort to realise the full potential of an organisation. Organisations that have focused on improving customer service skills have realised that the cost of retaining their customers is more than fifteen times less than the cost of getting new ones. Having a Service Strategy and Plan is an organisation's roadmap and action plan that details the sequences of events to be followed in an attempt to gain market share through a focused and committed workforce. The importance of service must be recognised and addressed by everyone within an organisation and proper training for each and every employee must be provided coupled with an empowered work force with customer friendly systems and procedures. Holistic and integrated approach to customer satisfaction and service supremacy. Great customer service and customer satisfaction requires an integration and alignment of various elements, systems and processes such as business strategy and objectives, recruitment and retention, performance management, recognition and reward, alignment of policies and procedures and training. These are all influential factors and mastering these aspects means becoming more competitive in today's marketplace.

Sustainable service excellence cannot be an adhoc-isolated intervention. You will be wasting your time and money. It is also imperative that the desired outcomes of the business are identified, aligned and measured such as sales, profit, market share, customer count, customer satisfaction, employee teamwork and employee turnover so that the affects of your efforts can be seen. Habits of Highly Successful Service Leaders They drive superior customer service strategically. That means the CEO walks the talk and all levels of management reinforce the importance of customer service. They make sure their policies, procedures and systems are customer friendly. This could range from the hours their businesses are open to the rules governing customer payments. Service leaders eliminate policies and procedures that get in the way of providing superior service. They hire good people and treat them well. Service leaders spend 30% to 50% of their time selecting, coaching and managing people. Leaders place great value on their employees. They empower their employees. They give them the authority to bend and break the rules, to use their common sense to take care of the customer. Empowerment is the backbone of service recovery. They train every employee in the art of service, using new materials at least every 6 months. Too many companies train their employees once right after they're hired or only every 12 to 18 months and expect them to be customer service stars for the rest of their lives. Common approach Usually, what happens in an organisation is we buy some kind of training programme - everyone gets excited, service may improve but typically in 6 months - it dies or goes back to where it was. Companies then wait for about 2 to 5 years, because they don't want to do something too soon, before they then create or buy some new training programme - everyone is excited, they are going to change the business, motivation goes up, performance goes up, but after 6 months it starts to die, ever seen this happen?

Training
Training

That is what we call "Training"- which is an option and 95% of organisations are doing this. There is another option... Develop a Culture to Achieve Customer Satisfaction Having a good customer service and customer satisfaction requires the commitment of management, supervisors and front-line employees to create and maintain a strong business philosophy. These are all influential factors of any business. Mastering these aspects means becoming more competitive in the marketplace today. Maximum impact and high customer retention demands that you keep employees constantly motivated and that service excellence is constantly front of mind. Also, just as top companies spend lots of money on advertising and know the importance of changing their commercials and print ads constantly in order to capture audience interest, service leaders know the importance of changing their training programmes at least every six months to ensure employees will be interested and, therefore, involved. Success Criteria 1. Include everyone To build a culture of quality service and excellence all staff need to be included from the CEO to the guard at the gate. Service excellence requires the commitment of management, supervisors and front-line employees to create and maintain a strong service quality culture. Every employee, without exception, must be trained. 2. Programmes must be new and engaging

All the programmes introduced should be new, different and reinforce the message learnt in the other programmes to be effective and hold the interest. (Advertisers don't run the same ads again and again - they change their commercials regularly so as to change the mindset - so why should training be any different?)

3. Frequency of events ensures momentum and sustainability

To build on the momentum of the previous intervention, minimise down-turn in motivation, reinforce skills and create habits of behaviour, you need to introduce something new every 4 to 6 months. (The most successful golfer, Tiger Woods, practices the basics repeatedly and regularly).

“We are what we repeatedly do, excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit”. Aristotle

Create a Service Culture so that you don't just compete but become the provider of choice and achieve service supremacy. Dave Goddard is an experienced entrepreneur and business consultant. He has vast international exposure and worked with leading service companies such as The Disney Institute (USA), Service Quality Institute (USA) and Service Quality Centre (Singapore), he is a Service Strategist and Business Development Consultant. He can be contacted at dave@tpcg.co.za