

Valuing the Customer

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The obvious reason that most organizations are in business is to make money. Generally, the more work that employees accomplish; the higher the profit made. However, when managers and workers lose sight of the fact that it is the customers who drive their profit service often breaks down. In effect, customers are not valued for what they are – the purpose of the business.

Examining the Problem

How many times have you stood in line at a restaurant or other business will a service provider tries to figure out how to use the cash register functions or give the correct change when the computer fails? How often have you arrived thirty or more minutes early for a doctor appointment because it was required, only to wait a half an hour or more to be taken to an examination room where you continued to wait for the doctor? When was the last time a repair person arrived when they said they would? All these situations have one thing in common – the service provider has lost sight of who pays the bills and does not value their customers. By virtue of their actions (or inactions) they are saying, “Our time is more valuable than yours” or “We have more important things than you Mr. or Ms. Customer.”

Simple Service Solutions

Many times there are simple fixes for the situations alluded to above. For example, effectively training employees to use equipment and tools before putting them in front of customer or on the telephone can eliminate a lot of problems. Having backup systems in place that immediately kick in when things break down is also a good idea.

In the doctor’s office example above, simply sending out required forms in advance to be filled out and brought to the appointment can eliminate the unnecessary wait time before an appointment. Then, having adequate staff to process and treat patients is common sense. If there are shortages, be realistic about how many patients can be seen in a business day and do not take the airline approach of overbooking just in case there are no shows.

If you are in the repair or installation business, plan your customer appointments geographically, realistically estimate the time required to do a job and do not cram appointment too closely together. You can then give a more accurate range of time when the technician will arrive and not a three to four hour spread.

Admittedly, all service problems are not easily anticipated and resolved. Equipment does break down and periodically need to be updated, unforeseen emergencies do occur, good help is sometimes hard to find, and things do not always go as planned. There is still no excuse for poor service, especially when there are so many competitors out there waiting to take your customers. Don’t forget the classic studies done by TARP

that found that of the customers who leave, many of them do not tell you why, they simply go away. For that reason, you may never get the chance to identify and correct a problem costing you money. This is why you should periodically ask customers how you are doing.

Alternative Solutions

What can you do if the suggested fixes above are not available or practical to show that you value your customers? Go back to the basics of relationship building. Be courteous and conscientious when dealing with everyone. Practice displaying your concern and respect for your customers by following words that are some of the most important ones in the English language regularly when dealing with customer. They will go a long way to show that you really do value your customers.

I'm sorry
You're right
I apologize
I made a mistake
Please
Thank you
Yes we can...

Use these words as often as necessary and appropriate with customers. Also, update your customers when you know there will be a delay or that something cannot be done or delivered as promised. In the three examples earlier, you could offer compensation for customer inconvenience (known as service recovery). For example, give a discount or coupon toward future service or products, reduce or refund deductibles or partial deductibles for a doctor's office visit when there is an excessive delay, or provide a discount off the hourly rate or service call for any delay.

A final thought on how to effectively value your customer - remind yourself regularly that everyone you come into contact with is either a customer or potential customer. Treat them as a VIP and you can't go wrong.

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