

## I. Introduction

- a. Customer service is a way of doing business, not a program:
  - i. Driven from the top of a company down through the ranks.
  - ii. Needs to be purposeful; not just clever statements.
  - iii. There are internal and external customers; more later.
  
- b. In this workshop/business topic brief we will present a process that you can use to institute a customer service culture in your business, and also give you some practical tips on how to:
  - i. Handle customer complaints.
  - ii. Cope with difficult customers.
  - iii. Communicate effectively with your customers.
  - iv. Use the telephone more effectively.
  
- c. It is that part of the marketing, salesmanship and customer service troika that creates satisfied customers and keeps them coming back.
  - i. Marketing – heightens awareness and builds interest in the target markets.
  - ii. Salesmanship – seals the deal.
  - iii. Customer service – keeps them coming back.
    - 1. Because it is cultural, customer service touches all parts of a business.
    - 2. If the above is true, why do companies have customer service departments?
  
- d. Some interesting statistics:
  - i. Only 4% of your dissatisfied customers will voice a complaint.
  - ii. 96% are never heard from again, and most of these people will never return to your business.
  - iii. Dissatisfied customers are verbal. There are a range of stats available; dissatisfied customers do talk! I have seen numbers ranging from them telling 6 to 10 people about their experience.
  - iv. The ratio of the cost to keep an existing customer versus attract a new one is about 1:10.

- e. A summary of good customer service:
  - i. Welcome them.
  - ii. Use their name.
  - iii. Take care of their needs (not your perception of their needs).
  - iv. Thank them.
  - v. Invite them back.
  
- f. Another way of looking at customer service, from a customers perspective (internal and external) can be summarized by two words – ***Follow Through and Caring***. That’s what customers want – for you to do what you say you will do, and indicate that you care about them and their issues. Also, customers want you to:
  - i. Anticipate needs.
  - ii. Take initiative
  - iii. Focus on them when they have an issue.
  - iv. Remember they are exchanging ***value for value***. ***People must perceive they are receiving a benefit from patronizing your business.***

## II. Creating a Customer Service Culture

- a. Setting the tone:
  - i. Starts with and must be driven by management.
  - ii. The critical elements of commitment by management must be:
    - 1. Creation of a business mission that is rooted in core values, one of which is customer service. Needs to specifically indicate the 3-5 strategies that the company will employ in providing customer service the two (2) levels of customers noted next.
    - 2. Recognition that there are two (2) customers that the business needs to be concerned with:
      - a. Internal (employees)
      - b. External (purchasers of products and/or services)
 The internal customers must be treated as customers before they can export the business culture to those that purchase products and/or services.
    - 3. Assertive in driving the commitment to quality customer service.
  - iii. The critical elements of commitment by the employees must be:
    - 1. Adherence to company values.
    - 2. Willingness to give feedback to management.

3. Readiness to stay focused (If you have employees you know how critical this can be).
  - iv. **Critical problem often occurs – management committed to customer service culture, but they have not developed a format whereby employees buy-in. If the employees do not participate you really do not have an effective customer service culture.**
  - v. A look at customer-driven versus cost-driven business cultures:
    1. Customer-driven:
      - a. Provide value added service.
      - b. Concentrate on quality.
      - c. Offer incentives to show you care.
      - d. Go out of your way to get needed resources.
    2. Cost-driven:
      - a. Cut back on service.
      - b. Reduce employee training.
      - c. Decrease quality.
      - d. Cut back on resources.
- b. The bedrock of establishing a customer service-driven business culture is **training**:
- i. Management to provide.
  - ii. Employees to be proactive about what training they need to accomplish the plan that management has laid out, through hopefully a process in which they participated.
  - iii. Integrated into training needs to be an effective system of measurement; that is, identifying delta points that can be used to determine the value of the training process.
- c. The successful implementation of a customer service culture requires planned courses of action. That planned course of action typically consists of five (5) parts:
- i. A business mission that is based on customer-driven values.
  - ii. Goals that need to be accomplished to see the mission achieved:
    1. Obtainable
    2. Action-oriented
    3. Leadership-driven
    4. Specific and measurable
    5. Buy-in from internal customers (employees) required).
  - iii. Strategies are those activities that will be engaged in to see the goals achieved:
    1. Usually a series of steps.
    2. Tied to dates of completion.
  - iv. Attitude of continuous improvement, as opposed to we're finally there.

- v. Commitment to action steps required to make it happen.
- d. The customer service team:
  - i. Team work is critical.
  - ii. Management driven is required.
  - iii. Internal customers must be served before they will serve the external customers.
  - iv. Three service levels in every company:
    - 1. Front-line
    - 2. Internal
    - 3. Management

### III. Some How-To's

- a. Handle customer complaints (look, listen and learn):
  - i. Don't interrupt.
  - ii. Be attentive.
  - iii. Use feedback.
  - iv. Apologize.
  - v. Discuss alternatives.
  - vi. Get customer confirmation.
  - vii. Say thank you.
  - viii. When it's all said and done, take a break.
- b. Cope with difficult customers:
  - i. Stay calm (this is a learned behavior; nothing natural about it).
  - ii. Control your breathing.
  - iii. Listen for the real message.
  - iv. Stay focused on what you can do for the customer, not what you can't do.
  - v. Be aware of body language.
  - vi. Beware of voice tone.
  - vii. Don't interrupt or disagree.
  - viii. Feedback what you heard them say.
  - ix. Acknowledge complaint.
  - x. Arrive at a solution.
  - xi. Note: empower employees to solve problems, not call for management whenever there is an issue.
  - xii. Another note: people often care more about how they are treated than price.
- c. Communicate effectively with customers:
  - i. Words: use words effectively.

- ii. Voice tone: non-defensive and energetic.
- iii. Body language: maintain contact; be at same physical level.
- iv. Listen: spend more than 50% of the time listening.
- v. Attitude: maintain a good one; even when firmness is required.

d. Use the telephone more effectively:

- i. Some issues:
  - 1. Slow to answer.
  - 2. Improper or unclear announcement.
  - 3. Incorrect transfers.
  - 4. Use of poor grammar.
  - 5. Leave on hold.
  - 6. Improper close.
  - 7. Inappropriate use of phone by employees.
  - 8. No sales effort.

- ii. Do's
  - 1. Be professional.
  - 2. Smile
  - 3. Be prepared.
  - 4. Enunciate clearly.
  - 5. Be aware of voice tone
  - 6. Identify yourself and your department.
  - 7. Answer within three (3) rings.
  - 8. Get caller's name, and use it.
  - 9. Take clear messages.

- iii. Don'ts
  - 1. Interrupt.
  - 2. Eat or drink while on the phone.
  - 3. Argue with customer.
  - 4. Have a side conversation in process.
  - 5. Give out information that should not be released.
  - 6. Lie
  - 7. Keep person on hold (no more than 20 seconds).
  - 8. Promise caller that party they are calling will call them back; say instead, I will give \_\_\_\_\_ the message.

- iv. Voice mail:
  - 1. Use sparingly.
  - 2. It can encourage lack of voice-to-voice, or face-to-face interaction.
  - 3. Little opportunity for selling to take place.

#### **IV. In Conclusion:**

- a. Fire preventing not fire fighting.
- b. Getting employee input not telling them what to do.
- c. Teamwork not independence.
- d. Focus on the customer not the task.
- e. Creative solutions not one correct approach.
- f. Gather data not shoot from the hip.