

SALES AND SERVICE Excellence

THE MAGAZINE OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

JANUARY 2008

Stop Making
**Hiring
Mistakes**

Big Sales
Make Them Often

**Relationship
Resolution**

**Do a Service
Reality Check**

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Reality Check

Customers should feel served.



by Joan Fox

WE TALK PASSIONATELY about customer satisfaction and invest to achieve it. We see it as a critical success factor in our strategic plan. It is the reason we say we come to work—an elusive target we long to hit. It affects bonus structures, performance reviews, and raises. It haunts us when we fail to achieve it and causes us to celebrate when we improve it.

But, who cares? Is the satisfaction of your customers the worthwhile goal you espouse it to be? At first, you would likely say *yes*. But take a second look.

Many mediocre companies satisfy their customers every day. They deliver a product or service without painful snags, and yet their customers exit by door, phone or internet, having been served. Customers get what they want with reasonable ease and courtesy, and go on with their life—not dissatisfied and not “wowed.”

Your *satisfied* customer today is likely to be *dissatisfied* tomorrow. Why? Because you can’t ensure a “no-fail” experience for the customer consistently. Something will eventually go wrong. Leaders and service providers are human beings who are riddled with imperfections and implement imperfect ideas. Human beings make mistakes, and in a service scenario, the customer will experience the mistake and become dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction leads the customer out the door to look for another company to do business with. And the cycle continues.

And since customer satisfaction is a precarious mixture of ever-changing customer expectations and perceptions, the formula is destined for disaster.

Customer satisfaction is the wrong goal for companies striving to grow their customer share. Although there is value in measuring customer satisfaction, to grow your business you need to make changes that improve the customer experience. Customer satisfaction is not an indicator of customer loyalty. A customer can be satisfied with their experience, but it doesn’t mean they will come back. And isn’t the customer’s return visit your goal? If you rely on

satisfaction to grow a loyal customer base, you’re relying on a house of straw that will get blown away.

Three Ways to Feel Served

So if customer satisfaction is not the goal, what is? First, you need to understand the difference between “getting served” and “feeling served.” Customers can “get served” anywhere. “Getting served” is the outcome of a transaction. Robots transact. Smart organizations that understand how to make a customer “feel served” will



build loyal customers, grow their business, and become market leaders.

Here are three ways to make customers feel served. Omit any of them, and you will lose precious customers.

1. Listen. The first requisite is to “listen big” and “listen small” to the customer. *Listening big* means putting proactive processes in place to capture customer feedback and then using it to make recognizable changes. This requires an understanding of who the customer is and customizing the listening mechanism accordingly. Too often *listening big* is a survey designed to produce falsely positive results, a stack of cards on a counter, or a phone number for complaints. *Listening big* needs to be a strategic, ongoing process, not a single isolated event.

Listening small means face-to-face interaction. When one person actually hears another, magic occurs. Some people have no idea what an effective interpersonal interaction looks like, but their job requires one. The many touchpoints that include an interpersonal interface with the customer must be staffed by good listeners—people who can hear the message and respond with understanding and empathy.

Your customers can be insightful consultants. You can ignore them or listen to them and act on what they tell you.

2. Begin inside-out. You can’t give excellent external customer service when the internal culture is characterized by poor attitudes, angst, distrust and disrespect. The DNA of the culture shows on the outside. I’m amused by the mission, vision, and values documents created by companies that are staffed by employees and leaders who are miserable. It is standard to find a statement about *excellent service*.

Creating a true service culture inside spills over to the outside. This culture change is a tough one. Years of old habits and unchecked poor behaviors must fall to the wayside. When successful, it is characterized by a responsive, caring, accurate and reliable internal environment. Changing into this culture must be inspired and modeled by the leadership. When a company is deemed by the employees to be a great place to spend their day, there is positive flow.

3. Build relationships. Build relationships where respect, trust, communication and having the other person’s best interest in mind are evident. In a positive relationship, caring is demonstrated. It shows in the interpersonal interaction, in thoughtfulness, and in communication. It means you go out of your way once in a while to do something for another individual. It goes beyond words—into behaviors that leave no doubt that you value them.

Relationship building or blocking is evidenced in the processes and policies at customer touch points as well as the people at the touch points. Policies that inconvenience the customer and processes that make the customer wait too long are relationship blockers.

Study your policies, processes and procedures as they relate to the customer’s experience. Are they relationship builders or relationship blockers?

When you listen, begin inside out and build relationships with your customers, they will feel served. And when customers feel served, even if temporarily dissatisfied, they will give you a second chance. This is an earned outcome. It reflects an investment in time, training, and other resources. This investment will serve you well in the long run. Again, I ask. Customer satisfaction: Who cares? **SSE**

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ACTION: Make your customers feel served.