

## **Great customer experience – People are the key!**

People are at the core of business success and providing a great customer experience! I suspect when I talk about people I'm talking about means customers.

My question is why would you think people only relates to customers?

No, this is not a dumb question and yes it's obvious that all businesses require customers to make money and every business with an intention to grow or succeed requires a steady flow of customers through their door.

## **A great customer experience is about people connecting with people!**

From the work I've done helping many businesses grow and develop, I've found the majority of business owners spend most of their time:

- Thinking and planning about how to generate more sales
- Generate more cash flow
- Increase profits

But very few think and plan HOW they are going to improve their people relationships and through this the customer experience.

This is the very reason I invite you to stop for a moment to ponder what a good friend of mine thinks about business – *'business is purely about people connecting with people'* and think about whether the focus for your business is about:

- Transactions and money
- OR about building stronger and more powerful relationships with the people connected to your business?
- Or about providing a great customer experience

Typically the response to this question is business is ALL about profitability and cash flow.

So I ask a simple second question – where would your profitability and cash flow be without people supporting you or buying from you? If these people are not fully engaged with the business, what sort of customer experience are you in fact providing?

## **We are problem solvers - not sellers of products or services**

You see the whole reason for being in a business is to provide goods and services which offer solutions to a customer's problem.

That's right, we are problem solvers not (despite the views of many) sellers of products and services, managers or administrators.

Yet in my experience many business owners and their staff often see the people they serve as interruptions to their work not their best, but often least respected business assets! When this occurs the customer experience is not what it should be which translates to lower sales and a smaller bottom line!

The other thing I have noticed when discussing people with small business owners is the focus is nearly always put on customers. Seldom is consideration given to the many other people within the business environment – for example:

- Staff
- Suppliers
- Delivery drivers
- Neighbouring traders
- Strategic partners
- And any other people their business interacts with

### **The 3 most important people groups needed to provide a great customer experience**

So let's consider what's most required by the three most important people groups to any business and how you can build positive, mutually supportive relationships with them.

#### **Customers**

Yes, it is an unequivocal truth that customers and the serving of them is the most important function of any business.

It is customers who pay your wages; it is customers who are the reason you're in business. Importantly, it is through provision of a great customer experience, you are able to guarantee your future success with some sense of predictability.

However, it is critical to remember the provision of a great customer experience is not the sole purvey of your sales team.

Every person in your business **MUST** understand, respect and act as a "Customer Service Agent" at all times. Every task, function and role must consider the customer experience first and the systems for doing business second!

Systems can be changed, adapted and/or improved – customers can't.

So here are a few tips to improve the customer experience:

- Smile, it shows friendliness
- Make feel customers welcome, greet them by saying welcome instead of – ' you right?
- Treat them as if they are guests in your home
- Ask how you can help them today
- Create discussions about solving customer issues rather than sales pitches - ask questions to understand
- Maintain your smile
- Show and maintain your friendliness and eagerness to help solve problem

- Watch your body language, make sure you stay open, attentive and friendly
- Stay helpful in both attitude and action
- Thank customers for visiting and invite them to come again

Many staff members, particularly from non-sales functions often feel uncomfortable or self-conscious when asked to display these behaviours. Either because they are not natural to the individual or, because they fear the repercussions of getting 'it wrong'.

This is why we highly recommend taking time to work with those staff to allay their fears and to:

- Show them through using games & role plays
- Behaviour reinforcement/confidence building tools

How to work with customers so friendly enthusiasm becomes their natural style, rather than an awkward behaviour.

The benefits for creating the same sense of friendly enthusiasm throughout your whole staff network is imperative if you choose to have a great working environment. Want low staff turnover and many other tangible cost saving benefits like diminished absenteeism.

I am constantly in awe of the businesses who master this aspect of the customer experience and resultant satisfaction in the faces of customers who react positively and come back for more.

## **Staff**

One of the most disturbing, although not really surprising findings from working as an employee and from many discussions with many small business owners, is how many share a misconception that the use of punishment as a driver, rather than reward as an incentive benefits their business.

Almost every animal trainer understands and supports the concept of using rewards to gain obedience and achievement in place of punishment. It is well proven that reward rather than punishment applies to humans also, so why then do so many bosses exploit, abuse, berate and use punishment tools with the expectation of creating improvement?

If staff are always looking over their shoulder or are fearful of punishment - what sort of customer experience will they provide?

Nearly everybody I know responds well to rewards, acknowledgment, praise, encouragement and gratitude for what's been done.

The power of these 'other rewards' is clearly demonstrated in a great YouTube video by RSA animate entitled "[Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us](#)".

The video clearly shows the impact, or lack thereof, of using financial rewards as a sole motivator for staff.

In the video we quickly see how monetary rewards only work at the lowest levels of mechanical tasks. When seeking greater levels of involvement in and/or commitment to the direction of a business, we see how MORE is achieved when business owners use trust, acknowledgement and provide staff with the freedom to express their unique abilities!

When they do this - the customer experience is enhanced!

## Suppliers, delivery drivers and contractors - a key to a great customer experience

Have you noticed how many people in such roles are treated as second-class citizens?

In one of my past roles, I was manager of a wholesale/distribution business where we had many suppliers and handled many deliveries (both in and out) on a daily basis. We got to see a wide variety of attitudes and interactions. The most common were:

- Anger, frustration
- Abuse – verbal usually, but sometimes physical
- Blame and excuses

We spent some time analysing the triggers for these behaviours and quickly realized they all came down to two simple things:

1. They felt pressured to meet unrealistic demands
2. They felt undervalued

So did we change it? Yes we did!

First we brought all of our people together and through discussion and walking in each other's shoes, helped them see and understand the intrinsic importance of each role and recognise how reliant they were upon each other. There was no point in one part of the business providing a great customer experience only to be let down by others involved.

We next showed the many benefits and importance of working together and how cooperation saved everyone time, money and angst.

Lastly, we showed we valued them by:

- Treating them with respect
- Showing our gratitude for what went well
- Providing encouragement to do better when things went off the rails

I know some of you may consider this to be 'airy-fairy' but the results clearly showed something different:

- Productivity went up by 38%
- Errors dropped by 47%
- Absenteeism dropped by 44%
- Customer satisfaction went up by 59%

All because our people started to value, support and acknowledge each other - and providing a great customer experience became everyone's responsibility!

## Summary

In conclusion, I ask you to consider what motivates YOU to do well?

Is it the fear of punishment, the promise of reward OR the satisfaction of being acknowledged by those important to you?

Now look at how you treat those around you and answer the question – are you getting the results you desire OR the results you deserve?

Is how you engage with people associated with the business, setting the right foundation for a great customer experience?

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