

1001
WAYS
TO
WOW
YOUR
CUSTOMERS!

Volume One

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Introduction

1001 Ways to Wow Your Customers was created to invite and share “stories” of great customer service. “Stories” are the medium to best describe “what great performance looks like” and “feels like” and customer service stories can entertain, illuminate and inspire. We’ve moved from a space on “Blogspot” to a home at www.refresh.com and have now captured the work in this first volume as an eBook.

1001 Ways to Wow Your Customers will hopefully take you on an adventure to “get” what’s possible when customer service becomes strategic to your success. It can, as the editors and contributors know and have experienced, create a sustainable competitive advantage for you and your enterprise. Aside from simply being the “right thing to do” in the sense that being “of service” is a virtue and reward in itself, “wowing” your customers – creating positive, memorable and emotional experiences for your customers – will create superior returns on all financial performance dimensions. Loyal, raving fans and advocates of your product (service, offering) are your most profitable customers today. Having more of them will serve you well.

The adventure begins with a most “unreasonable” preoccupation with customer service. Customer “obsession” goes beyond ‘lip service’ to customer service to a deeply rooted and shared value of creating exceptionally satisfied and extremely loyal customers.

Customer service becomes customer obsession when it becomes an essential and vital element of your business strategy to differentiate yourself, compete effectively and win.

Customer obsession is not for the faint of heart. It is an 'over the edge' yes, 'obsession' with customer service that leads you into the uncharted waters and adventure of the WOW factor, amazing service recovery, no sale is ever final and an utter disdain for the pitiful service provided by most enterprises today. It can be a strategic breakthrough. It will energize your enterprise, and rock your marketplace.

Who will bring that to life and make it real? Your people, and especially your front-most customer-facing people, everyday. And it won't happen with a wish, a directive, a set of management controls, service scripts, service audits or customer satisfaction surveys. It will only happen when you can engage, align, inspire and unleash the creativity of your people to be "of service."

So there's no easy way. This is not a "program." You can't "do" customer service or "wowing" your customers. This is about who you **are**, your values, ethics, ideals, integrity, and what you stand for in business and in life. This adventure will hopefully unleash your creativity to serve your customers, and your people, and then ultimately create your culture and legacy.

Thank you for your interest and we hope you enjoy the articles and stories. We hope you will be inspired to engage your people to create your unique 1001 ways to wow your customers and achieve your breakthrough in performance.

Enjoy!

Rick Sidorowicz

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Going Beyond Customer Service

by Rick Sidorowicz

From the offices on high we hear the missions and mantras of *customer service, customer driven, exceeding our customers' expectations, customer care, the customer comes first*, and so on. I think it's safe to say that most enterprises get it - where the 'it' is an awareness that customers somehow matter in their business model. Customers *matter* in the words and rhetoric, but for most businesses, most of the time, customer service is abysmal. It's bunk! It's bull! It's a sham and it's a lie! Customer service for most businesses, most of the time, is at best - lip service.

How many truly memorable shopping or purchasing experiences have you had last week, or last month, or in the last year? I'll bet it's no more than 'a few' or 'several' at best. I'm sure you will admit that in terms of the potential number of service encounters a memorable experience is indeed a very rare occurrence. The batting average on service delivery for most enterprises would bounce them out to the minor leagues. What a shame given the research, the rhetoric and the investment most organizations make to *intend to serve* their customers.

There are some exceptions some of the time. Occasionally, a specific individual will provide an incredible experience, through their extra care, attention to detail, perhaps a courageous solution to your dilemma, possibly going beyond your expectations to ensure your needs are satisfied, or perhaps just a smile and sincere appreciation for choosing them.

At my local Home Depot I always wait in line for Margaret. She has turned cashiering into a memorable encounter and never fails to

engage you in a conversation of what you're up to with what you've bought today. Faith and Anna at The Keg have a lot of that too - they seem to take a sincere interest in you while providing impeccable and attentive service for your party. A young man at Dell provided outstanding technical advice and follow-up on my last purchase. Most recently a wonderful young lady at Gap Kids took the time to help my daughter coordinate little outfits for the twins - and even took a shirt off a display to make it work.

In most enterprises it's rare and I suspect these exceptional individuals are just exceptional - they somehow just enjoy serving others, having an interesting conversation, and making a difference in the lives of others. They are also likely the highest performers in their organizations and are unfortunately the exceptions to the rule. They have somehow 'broken the mold' or at least have avoided being broken *by* the mold. The trouble is - they are the exceptions, and the rest is lip service.

In some enterprises on the other hand, most of the time, the service is outstanding and memorable. Every time I've been in a Delta hotel the service has been phenomenal. The check-in is very fast and accurate - the associates are superb - they're into service, they smile, they are sincere and I like it! I have never had a bad experience with Delta. And more importantly, I have always had a very positive experience there - and obviously I do tell others. Also with WestJet - Canada's answer to Southwest Airlines. I will always book them first. The price is right, but the ride is an adventure. I like the extremely efficient check-in, the smiles, the casual and kooky style, and the lightness that they add to my traveling day. I am very happy they are doing very well and expanding their routes. I like it when the best win.

So the point of this article is that for most enterprises most of the time customer service is lip service, aside from a few very special people who go beyond because that's who they are. The best these organizations will ever be able to do is to attempt to recruit more of these special people and hope it transfers to others. This will always be a significant challenge as the best or special individuals will always be attracted to environments where they can unleash their talent. The reality is, unfortunately, that in most organizations memorable customer service will always be a rare occurrence.

But for some enterprises most of the time the service is memorable and ... please listen slowly to this one ... memorable customer service has become a distinct differentiating factor and a competitive advantage. That is where we are going. Beyond lip service to customer service - to *real* customer service and beyond. We call it **customer obsession** - where providing memorable customer service is strategic and 'cultural' and provides a significant competitive advantage.

Why memorable?

'Good' - is the price of admission, whether it applies to quality, service, order fulfillment or any measure of satisfaction and performance delivery. You have to be 'good' to be in the game today. So anyone in the game is at least 'good' or going out of business. But if the price of admission is 'good' in terms of customer service, it cannot be a differentiating or 'strategic' factor if it's the same. Good is merely adequate. Meeting expectations is 'expected.' And 'sameness' is not strategic - it doesn't make a difference in terms of influencing the decision of a customer.

How many people have you told about having a good or acceptable shopping experience? Perhaps one or two. More likely only if asked specifically for a referral. Why would you tell anyone if the experience just met your expectations? You had a need, your need was met, and life goes on. Loyalty - perhaps, it depends - on your needs, interests, curiosity, whatever.

On the other hand, think back to the most memorable experiences you've had. How many people have you told about them. Perhaps a dozen, or more? I tell the stories all the time to thousands of people because it is so rare to experience truly memorable service. The point is that exceeding expectations, or in other words, providing a memorable experience, results in more than a ten-fold word of mouth positive referral for your enterprise. It's free marketing - and it's valuable and deep marketing as it comes from 'more than satisfied' customers - something like 'raving fans' - positive and credible testimonials from people you know and trust. Loyalty - you bet! And it's a self reinforcing upwards spiral of memorable experiences and positive referrals that can be very very powerful.

We all want to differentiate ourselves, add value and avoid the commodity game. But most of us most of the time have competitors that can, if they choose, match our quality, match our convenience, match or beat our prices, or otherwise preempt us on the *tangibles*. That is why we invest to build brands and the 'share of mind' to move to compete in the realm of the *intangible*. It is the *intangible* appeal that ultimately is strategic. True competitive advantage exists only in that magical realm of the *intangible*.

Going beyond customer service to create a memorable experience creates an *intangible* in the minds of customers. It is an experience,

and the feelings one has about that experience. It is indeed powerful, because ... no one can take that away. It cannot be pre-empted - it has happened. And it lives long in the mind and greatly influences the behaviour of an individual and their network of associates. It is strategic - as it establishes the magical and *intangible* connection between your customer and your enterprise. Going beyond customer service to **customer obsession** is very strategic and will provide your enterprise a distinct and unique competitive advantage, if you get it right.

As we attempt to differentiate ourselves from our competitors we must first acknowledge that it is the entire experience the customer has that is significant, not just the brand or the product or the facility or the interaction. All elements are vital - the product has to be right from the customer's point of view, the environment has to be comfortable for the customer, the value has to ring true to the customer, your people have to be knowledgeable - it all has to work to be effective. To go beyond customer service for strategic advantage however, you will have to embrace new concepts and new values - and go over the edge and challenge everything you do.

It's a powerful and empowering concept - and it will be an adventure. Stay tuned.

So ... what do you think of this so far? ... lip service, ... being "of service" ... customer obsession! ... when service becomes strategic! ... intangible and perhaps magical!

Hold on to your hats – we may end up miles from here!

No Sale is Ever Final

by Rick Sidorowicz

In **Going Beyond Customer Service** we introduced a concept of **Customer Obsession** - that describes a 'strategic' and 'cultural' outlook that can take an enterprise beyond customer service - where providing a 'memorable' shopping experience becomes a competitive advantage. The assertion was - that for most businesses, most of the time, customer service is at best - lip service. There are 'memorable' exceptions some of the time, but these are the result of the behaviours of a very limited number of 'exceptional' people that have somehow found a way to unleash their talent within a structured environment of adequacy and mediocrity. In some enterprises however, most of the time, customer service is outstanding and memorable. In these organizations memorable customer service has become a distinct differentiating factor and a competitive advantage. In these enterprises outstanding and memorable customer service has become 'strategic' and 'cultural' - and a fundamental element of their business model, core values, and operating strategy.

Why memorable service?

It's about more than ten-fold word of mouth positive referrals, loyalty, 'raving fans' and a self reinforcing very powerful upwards spiral of growth. It is also 'strategic' in establishing a magical and *intangible* connection between your customer and your enterprise.

It's a long term and again 'strategic' view of the enterprise and it is fundamental - just because you say so and want it to be. (It's caught up in your values, core beliefs and ethics.)

Over the edge

To go beyond customer service for strategic advantage you will have to embrace new concepts and new values and challenge everything you do from the fundamental position, value, belief and ethic of **Customer Obsession**. Let's start with one.

No Sale is Ever Final

How can any sale ... of any product or any service ... to any customer or client or consumer ... ever be ... final? How many times have you seen the return and exchange policy of an enterprise posted (or in fine print) that dictates that you need a receipt and that you have only so many days to return a product, and then, only in certain specified circumstances will you be able to exchange the item, get a credit, or in very limited circumstances get a refund? Why is that?

Why would I need a receipt? I know I purchased it from you. You know I purchased it from you. It's your brand isn't it? Or a brand that you carry isn't it? Don't you stand behind your products to do what you said they would? I expected that the product would be what you said it would be, and stand up to normal wearing or whatever I expected when I bought it. I expected that the equipment would do what I told you I needed it to do. I expected it would arrive on time. That's why I bought it from you. And you need the receipt for me to prove that I bought it from you? Why is that? Do you think I would come back to get my money back from you if I bought it somewhere else? Why would I waste my time and do that? Do you think I'm dishonest? You didn't think so (or didn't care) when you took my money. Why do you think that now?

Do you need a receipt to know what I paid for the item? I know what I paid. You also do if I told you when I bought it. Why does it matter what you can prove I paid for it? I know or at least have a reasonable idea of what I paid for it. Don't you trust what I'm saying?

Why would the length of time matter? So it's 16 days since I bought it. Or 50 days. Or 365 days. I don't care. I don't wear or use this thing everyday but when I used it a few times it didn't work. Just perhaps I took it home and it sat around and after a month or so I concluded that it just didn't fit. And I didn't really check the fine print of your 'every sale is final' policy when I bought it - because I thought you somehow wanted me to be satisfied with the purchase. I thought the deal was that I pay you money and I get a product or service that works for me.

I don't know if I want an exchange. If the item I bought didn't work I don't trust that you have anything else that will work for me. A credit also won't do me any good if what I bought in the first place has gotten me so wired up that I can't trust in your products to work for me. I think I just want my money back. You sold me something that was supposed to meet my needs and it didn't. I don't care if it fits within your policy. It didn't work, or perhaps my wife didn't like it, which also means that it didn't work for me. I can't live with it now. I am now unhappy with what I purchased from you.

How can any sale ever be final?

Groceries - average spend about \$150 per week. That makes me a \$150 x 52 x about 10 years at least or about a \$78,000 customer.
Menswear - average spend about \$2000 per season x 2 x 10 years or about a \$40,000 customer, excluding referrals.

PCs - leasing at about \$160 monthly x 12 x forever or at least a \$30,000 customer. Figure it out: Any product or service = average spend x days, weeks, months x years of loyalty and repeat purchases plus word of mouth referral factor = true value of customer. Life insurance - estimate \$40,000. Automobile - estimate \$200,000. Books - estimate \$25,000. Music - estimate \$30,000. Software - estimate \$30,000. Business travel - airline, hotels, meals estimate \$250,000. Coffee - daily tall latte with room to go estimate \$6,000 - Wow! Bottom line = customers and their loyalty and repeat business and referrals are very important.

Here is what I mean by embracing a new concept of **Customer Obsession** and challenging the fundamentals of everything you do.

Customer Obsession Rule #1 - No Sale is Ever Final

Repeat - **No Sale is Ever Final!** Embrace it. Look at the words and think about what it would mean to have that as your one and only return policy. Then do it, now!

You must change your return, exchange, refund policy today to the only customer obsessed policy that makes sense - **No Sale is Ever Final!** It requires a complete and total abandonment of the bullshit specifications and fine print of the past. Take the old refund and return POP signs - Destroy them! Burn them! Celebrate their annihilation! Let them go - make the leap - go over the edge!

To clarify - if for any reason a customer is not 100% satisfied with my (our) product or service we will make it right (to their 100% satisfaction) or we will give their money back, no hassles, no problems, no nonsense. When you (valued customer) choose to spend your money with us we will guarantee you will be satisfied,

no matter what. Sit with this for a moment - examine it carefully. It is very empowering.

If we are honest, if we are ethical, if we believe in the value of our products and services, if we believe in being of service - how can we not act otherwise? Anything less is lip service to customer service. Anything less is ... dishonest, unethical and a disservice to our customers and our own enterprise. Anything less ... and please think strategically for a moment ... means that you do not believe that your product or service is of sufficient quality or utility or value to stand up in the marketplace. If that is true you had better fix it fast or you will soon be out of business.

To repeat - **No Sale is Ever Final**. If you think you can get away with anything less you are under an illusion that you can fool most people most of the time. Fortunately, or unfortunately, customers are indeed intelligent and at some point what goes around comes around, perhaps very indirectly and insidiously as you 'wonder' why on earth your daily bread and butter keeps slipping away.

Trouble is if I have to try to convince you that **No Sale is Ever Final** is the only viable and meaningful strategy for competitive advantage you don't get it. I suggest you go back through **Going Beyond Customer Service** to get clarity on why it's important. But on the other hand it's not so hard to 'get' intellectually. It's usually a lot harder to 'make it so' and make it 'real.'

Making it So

Change your policy to **No Sale is Ever Final**. Celebrate the change and ensure that all POP and marketing material boldly proclaim your new commitment to genuine customer service. Add the words to your signing and promotional material. Add the words to sales

receipts. Add the words to your e-mails. Add the words to your business cards. Add the words to your invoices, and packing slips, and receivable collection letters, and paint or etch the words on your bulkhead for all customers and all associates to see everyday. Put it out there for everyone to see all of the time.

Communicate to your front line why it is important and that it is a value and a fundamental ethic of your enterprise. Communicate also that it is 'strategic' - it is a fundamental element of your strategy to win vis a vis your competitors. Reinforce that it is 100% supported with no exceptions - it is important - it is vital.

The greatest resistance will come from within - your management and front line who don't believe it. They will continue to 'protect' the assets of the company from evil customers whose only interest is to steal, lie, and return goods fraudulently. (Perhaps all would be perfect and 'in control' if all customers just stopped showing up.) Lesser resistance will come from your customers - more of a disbelief that you will live up to your 'claim' ... so make it a 'promise.' But there is a catch - you have to live up to it.

The initial resistance, disbelief and curiosity of associates and customers require a significant role modeling, coaching, over communicating and performance management equal to or greater than any of the fundamental and strategic aspects of your operating strategy. You have to live it and 'walk the talk' visibly and consistently.

Immediately implement a return measurement tracking system (accolades if you have one already, most don't have a serious system.) You will find a short term blip in returns and it will then settle back to your normal numbers, and then, over time it will drift

below your historical return rate (fewer returns - wow!) Why? Your true commitment to **Customer Obsession** and **No Sale is Ever Final** at the front line will transfer upstream to quality initiatives and full accountability at all levels. As soon as your front line 'gets it' and is sincere, committed and passionately proud to execute it every day with every customer - they will demand it from all supporting systems and structures.

There is another interesting side effect. Sales go up! **No Sale is Ever Final** - what a closer! Imagine ... if for any reason at any time you are not completely satisfied with the product/service we have provided to you we will either make it right, provide an exchange, or a refund or whatever you want to be 100% satisfied. Imagine the impact on associates ... we are honest, we are ethical, we believe in the value of our products and services, and we believe in being of service to our customers - no exceptions, none, ever! It's powerful in action - it inspires confidence, it inspires trust, it inspires loyalty ... and sales will go up.

Customer Obsession - to go beyond lip service to customer service you have to take the leap. **No Sale is Ever Final** - it is the only position to take that matters and makes a meaningful difference. Strategic and competitive - just because you say so and want it to be.

Stay tuned for more.

What Else Do You Want?

by Darlene Pineda

Monday I was in a little diner, and the waitress came over and asked me if I was ready to order. I told her I hadn't seen a menu yet. She sighed, then strolled over to the counter, grabbed a menu, and strolled on back. After handing it to me, she stood there, waiting. I mentioned that I might need a minute to make a decision. She said, "Oh, take your time." She then continued to stand there, tapping her pen against her leg.

I ordered a grilled cheese sandwich, with a diet coke. She came back with a regular coke. I asked her to change it for diet. She sighed, looked back at the kitchen, looked back down at the glass, looked back towards the kitchen... she picked up the glass and said, "Oh, alright." She came back with my diet coke.

I was left alone for 10 minutes, then she appeared with my grilled cheese sandwich. She dropped it on the table with a thump, and wandered back off. I caught her eye a few minutes later and asked if I could have a napkin and some silverware. She asked, "Why do you need silverware to eat a sandwich?" I admit I was stumped for a moment! I stared at her, she stared at me, then she sighed, again, and strolled over to the counter, coming back with a napkin and a fork.

As I sat there, eating my sandwich and shaking my head in amazement, the waitress again came by, dropped the check on the table, and said, "Hope everything was good. Have a nice day." Hope everything was good?

Needless to say, I left a very small tip. As I was leaving, the waitress approached me, and asked why I didn't leave her a bigger tip! As I told her how her service was, well, 'distracted', she insisted that she was a good waitress, after all, didn't I get everything I had asked for? In fact, she said, "You got your sandwich, you got your drink, what else do you want?"

Good question! What else does a customer want? A smile, a thank you, that's what many of us consider standard. An apology when things go wrong, asking if everything is okay, offering extra services or products (Can I carry that for you? Would you like a matching lotion?). A customer knows when you're THERE, when you are fully engaged in the interaction, just as they know when you're really thinking about lunch, or your car payment, or the movie you saw last night. You CHOOSE what you're bringing to work each day

What do your customers say about you?

Moments of Truth, Misery and Magic **by Shep Hyken**

In 1986 Jan Carlzon, the former president of Scandinavian Airlines wrote a book, Moments of Truth. In his book, Carlzon defines the moment of truth in business as this:

“Anytime a customer comes into contact with any aspect of a business, however remote, is an opportunity to form an impression.”

From this simple concept, Jan Carlzon took an airline that was failing and turned it around to be one of the most respected airlines in the industry.

Some examples of moments of truth in Jan Carlzon’s airline business are:

- when you call to make a reservation to take a flight,
- when you arrive at the airport and check your bags curbside,
- when you go inside and pick up your ticket at the ticket counter,
- when you are greeted at the gate,
- when you are taken care of by the flight attendants onboard the aircraft, and
- when you are greeted at your destination.

All of these are main moments of truth, and notice that they are all controlled by people. There are many moments of truth that are not controlled by people, such as advertisements (radio, television,

billboards, newspapers, etc.). The emphasis of this article is on the moments of truth that we, as people, have control over. These are the points of contact that our customers and clients have directly with us and our organization.

Mentioned above are a number of the main moments of truth, not just at Jan Carlzon's airline, but in virtually all commercial airlines. These are the *main* ones. And while these may be the most important, there are lots of small ones as well. For example, you might be walking toward your gate at the airport and walk by a couple of Scandinavian employees. They look up and smile at you. Now that may be a small moment of truth, but it is an important one. It adds to the total experience of the customer.

Disney has taken the small moments of truth to an even higher level. They understand the importance that these small moments of truth have on their customers. They train their cast members (Disney's term for employees) to acknowledge the guest (Disney's term for a customer) with a smile or facial expression if within ten feet. If the cast member gets within five feet of the guest, they are to acknowledge them verbally. All of the little moments of truth, combined with the major ones, with the addition of the product or service your organization is selling, add up to the overall level of a customer's satisfaction.

Jan Carlzon said there are good moments of truth and bad moments of truth. I believe there is a third type - average moments of truth. Average is middle-of-the-road - simply acceptable, but not great. I have a term for the good and bad ones. The bad ones are referred to as *moments of misery*, and the good ones are referred to as *moments of magic*.

Our goal should be to create all great moments of magic, even if they start out to be moments of misery. Sometimes a customer may have a legitimate complaint. We not only need to fix problems and complaints, we also need to give customers a reason to want to come back and continue to do business with us again and again. Even if we fix a problem, it doesn't mean the customer is coming back. For example, if you own a restaurant and one of your guest's meals is over cooked, don't simply fix it or take it off of the bill. Consider giving the guest a business card with a note that gives him or her a round of drinks or a free appetizer the *next time* they come back.

At times these moments of misery may not even be our fault. The customer may just be having a terrible day. For example, a customer may be checking into a hotel. This person may have had three flights delayed and he or she is in a very bad mood. It is not the hotel's fault the customer is unhappy due to the airline's delayed flights. But, it is the person who is checking in this irate customer who has the opportunity to start to turn the customer's mood around. It is an opportunity to take someone else's moment of misery and turn it into the hotel's moment of magic.

So, manage your moments of truth. Seize every one of them, even if they are moments of misery, as opportunities to show how good you and your organization are. This will go a long way in building long-term customer loyalty and total customer satisfaction.

Seven Ways to Wow Your Customers

by Rick Sidorowicz

Here is a recap to get a start on your “1001 Ways” from the first few contributions to the book.

1. It all starts with a good look in the mirror.

What are your personal values and ethics about being ‘of service’? We’re talking about an ‘ethic’ of service that permeates all you do, all you stand for, and all of the processes that your enterprise crafts for your customers’ experience. It all starts with you and what you stand for and create. And *you can’t fake it.*

2. Customer obsession - when service becomes strategic!

For some enterprises most of the time the service is memorable and ... memorable customer service has become a distinct differentiating factor and a competitive advantage. We need a strong word like obsession to break the lip-service and scripting mindset to go beyond. Providing memorable customer service is strategic and ‘cultural’ and *can provide a significant and sustainable competitive advantage.*

3. Create the experience that creates a magical connection!

Going beyond customer service to customer obsession creates a memorable experience that creates an intangible in the minds of customers. It is an experience, and the feelings one has about that experience. It cannot be pre-empted. It is strategic - as it establishes the magical and intangible connection between your customer, your brand and your enterprise. *Create the experience that creates the intangible connection.*

4. Calculate the benefit of a life time customer.

Typical purchase x regular frequency x number of weeks x the number of years = potential revenue from a life time customer. Groceries = over \$200,000, Autos = \$400,000 +, electronics = \$250,000 +, daily tall latte with room to go = \$10,000. What is your life time loyal customer worth? Then what about their positive referrals. Do the math and then you can see your \$150.00 customer as a \$150,000.00 customer, and *then treat her that way.*

5. No sale is ever final!

To clarify - if for any reason a customer is not 100% satisfied with my (our) product or service we will make it right (to their 100% satisfaction) or we will give their money back, no hassles, no problems, no nonsense. When you (valued customer) choose to spend your money with us *we will guarantee you will be satisfied, no matter what.*

6. What else does a customer want?

A smile, a thank you, that's what many of us consider standard. An apology when things go wrong, asking if everything is okay, offering extra services or products. A customer knows when you're THERE, when you are fully engaged in the interaction, just as they know when you're really thinking about lunch, or your car payment, or the movie you saw last night. You CHOOSE what you're bringing to work each day.

Engage, care, be considerate, *choose to show up and be there!*

Cucumbers

by Darlene Pineda

Cucumbers. You find them in salads and sandwiches, usually not in the middle of customer service story. Unless you're me, of course! I was in a chain sandwich shop, ordering lunch. I asked for a deli sandwich on wheat, and when we got to the toppings, I asked for mustard and cucumbers and green peppers and tomatoes and lettuce ... but the sales person behind the counter was shaking her head at me. "I'm sorry," she says, "but we don't put cucumbers on deli sandwiches."

"Excuse me?"

"We don't put cucumbers on deli sandwiches."

When I asked why, she had no answer. At this point three other employees strolled over, including the manager. "Can anyone tell me," I asked, "why I can't get cucumbers on my sandwich?" The manager broke into a long tale of how they just can't. Won't. Not allowed. No cucumbers. No exceptions. None at all.

"Did the cucumbers and the deli meats have an argument?" I asked, "Do they fight with the bread? Why, of the multitude of condiments you offer, do you disallow the cucumber? Have cucumber prices risen dramatically? Is there a shortage?"

The young man who had also wandered over quietly reached for a handful of cucumbers, piled them next to my sandwich, and wrapped the whole thing up before anyone could notice. Two customers behind me in line started asking if they could get

cucumbers with their sandwiches. The manager's face was now red with frustration as he kept insisting that he simply could not put cucumbers on a deli sandwich. When I asked for the corporate number, he turned even redder. I paid for my sandwich (with the cucumbers hidden on the side), and as I walked away several customers stopped me to tell me how ridiculous the cucumber policy was.

Of course, when I called their corporate customer service number, they denied any knowledge of the cucumber embargo, apologized, and swore they would investigate.

In their stubborn insistence to save the cucumber, they lost not one customer, me, but all the other customers standing in line with me. They created trouble for themselves with their head office. They got themselves all upset and bothered. For what? Two slices of cucumber? Wasn't that worth an exception?

Sometimes when a customer asks for something a little out of the ordinary we can dig our heels in and insist, "We just can't do that." But before you say no, ask yourself, "Is this just a cucumber?"

The “Wow!” Factor

by Shep Hyken

You may have recently noticed a number of books and articles about a concept called the “Wow” factor. Many consultants and business experts have been talking about this for years, but it was probably Tom Peters who really brought it to the forefront.

The “Wow!” factor boils down to one thing; exceeding the expectations of the customer. It goes past great customer service. In short, the basic idea is to bring the element of surprise into your business. The concept of *Wow!* yells out, “Surprise! Aren’t you glad you bought from me, decided to do business with our company, etc.!”

There are many ways you and your organization can do it. Here are a few examples to illustrate the *Wow!* factor.

Last year I bought my wife a new car. Normally the quest for purchasing a new car is not one I look forward to, and this time was no exception. However, to my surprise, the experience was great, and the follow-up even greater. The owner of the dealership knew I was surprising my wife with the car. He called the next day, on a Sunday, to see how she liked the surprise. *Wow! Wow!* A few days later we received a thank you note and a fruit basket.

Recently my wife and I went out to eat at a nice restaurant. Even though we had ordered a salad and main course, the waiter thought we should have an appetizer. He brought us each a sample of three different appetizers. He said they were so good, that he didn’t want us to miss the opportunity to at least try what the chef is really

good at doing. *Wow!* By the way, guess what we will order when we go back to his restaurant? And, guess who got a big tip?

Kellogg Business School professor and marketing guru Dr. Lou Stern talks about his recent purchase of a new car. On his way home he turned on the stereo system. *Wow!* He couldn't believe how great it sounded. All he wanted was a nice car, good service and a luxuriously smooth ride. He knew the radio/stereo system would be good, but he didn't think it would "blow him away." This was simply a surprise bonus.

Bill Gates, multi-billionaire and chairman of Microsoft, recently wrote a book on the future of technology, *The Road Ahead*. Surprise! The book included a CD with the entire book and more on it to be popped into your nearest computer. He predicts that books on CD ROM will be the norm in the future. And shouldn't his book "practice what it preaches." If you travel with a laptop computer that has a CD ROM drive you don't have to even take the book with you. Just take the disk and read from the screen. *Wow!*

Last year I bought a fruit basket for someone from Harry and David. They are a high end catalog retailer that sells food through the mail; fruit baskets, "Pasta of the Month," etc. One day the mail came and I was surprised to find a gift box from Harry and David. I couldn't wait to open it to find out who sent me this delicious box of chocolate truffles. Surprise! It was a gift from Harry and David saying thank you for doing business with them. *Wow!*

The list of examples can go on and on. The "Wow" comes from, "Surprise! You weren't expecting this, were you?" How can you build this into your product or service? It doesn't always have to be

something tangible that might cost a lot of money. It can be a follow up phone call or a simple thank you note. It is meant to make the customer feel good about doing business with you. I remember getting a phone call from a restaurant that some friends and I had been to the night before. I wondered why they would be calling me. Did I leave my credit card there? No, they just wanted to follow up with me to make sure I had a great meal and experience at their restaurant. That's all. *Wow!*

Putting *Wow!* into what you do and sell isn't very hard, but it is extremely effective. And I guarantee that for the receiver, it is a *MOMENT OF MAGIC!*

Peanuts

by Rick Sidorowicz

If you travel often you might appreciate my need. I wanted peanuts. Sure the snack mix is good but when I sit in the seat I need real peanuts to be comfortable. Maybe it's just something I've developed over the years. So I say to the young lady, "The snack mix is OK and I don't need a drink - but I must have peanuts!" A few minutes later she brings me cashews (wow!) that she was able to 'swipe' from first class. What a memorable experience! She did that for me and made my day! Yes I'm a simple man - but little things do make a difference.

(A little learning here if I may. I paid hundreds of serious \$US dollars for the flight and the 'wow' factor is a couple of packages of cashews. Sounds rather insignificant. But then again, if the stats for this site are correct the two packages of peanuts will have led me to tell about 30,000 people this month about the wonderful experience I had flying American Airlines. Gotta chew on that one for a bit.)

(A little more learning. So the young lady had to 'sort of' break the rules to satisfy and inadvertently 'wow' a customer. Gotta think about them rules. I hope she doesn't get into trouble because from now on American will always be my first or second choice - right up there anyway. Have to let that one sink in a bit - have to break the rules to wow a customer ... hmmm.)

Another Seven Ways to Wow Your Customers

by Rick Sidorowicz

1. Make exceptions to satisfy customers, and make satisfying customers the rule

“We don’t put cucumbers on deli sandwiches.” “Can’t. Won’t. Not allowed. No cucumbers. No exceptions. None at all.”

“Did the cucumbers and the deli meats have an argument?” “Do they fight with the bread? Why, of the multitude of condiments you offer, do you disallow the cucumber? Have cucumber prices risen dramatically? Is there a shortage?”

How ridiculous!

When a customer asks for something a little out of the ordinary we can dig our heels in and insist, “We just can’t do that.” But before you say no, ask yourself, “Is this just a cucumber?”

2. Break the rules to satisfy your customers

Encourage your customer-facing associates to break the rules to create a most positive and memorable experience for your customers, and then celebrate them as your heroes.

Give your economy class passengers a little taste of First Class and they will love you! If your rules say “peanuts” offer them “cashews.” You will create raving fans.

3. Then eliminate all of the other stupid rules

Identify and eliminate all of the stupid and mindless rules and policies that prevent your front line associates from creating a unique and memorable experience for your customers.

Remove these blockages and allow the creativity and talent of your people to thrive!

4. Introduce an element of “surprise” and the “wow factor”

The most powerful way to exceed customers’ expectations is to provide the element of the “unexpected” or “surprise.” This creates a most positive and extremely memorable experience.

Examples: follow up service calls; thank you note and gift; sampling; unexpected secondary features of exceptional quality; CDs and USBs as gifts; chocolates.

Putting “Wow” into what you do and sell isn’t very hard, but it is extremely effective. For the receiver, it creates a MOMENT OF MAGIC!

5. Do follow up service calls

A follow up call to your customer demonstrates your honest commitment to their satisfaction and your sincere appreciation for doing business with you. You will create an intangible loyalty factor and an incredible number of word-of-mouth referrals.

6. Send thank you notes and gifts

As above it demonstrates your honest commitment to their satisfaction and your sincere appreciation for doing business with you. It's easy to accept for large purchases and commitments however, recognize that it is much more powerful for less expensive purchases and experiences. Think about creating customers for life and you will.

7. Give “neat” stuff away for free

You can create the element of “surprise” by empowering your front-line associates to provide samples, taste tests, special information, gadgets, gifts, chocolates, whatever they can think of - to demonstrate your sincere appreciation for doing business with you and your most fundamental desire to create a most positive and memorable experience. Your customers will be “wowed” and your people will love “wowing” your customers. This can create a most powerful formula for success and superior returns for your business.

Thank You For Your Outstanding Service!

by Rick Sidorowicz

This story is from the late 90s and I'm still telling it as an example of impeccable service. Wow!

I had the pleasure to stay at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel and Resort in Banff, Alberta, Canada and to discover that outstanding service is indeed alive and well in the brisk and fresh air of the Canadian Rockies. I value great service and I know it's rare, and when I encounter it and experience it, I have to acknowledge and celebrate it. To all of the associates of the Banff Springs Hotel I say thank you for your great service. I enjoyed my stay. Your attention to detail, your warmth and efficiency made my stay very relaxing, pleasurable and memorable. I will definitely return, and I will tell everyone I know about your commitment to incredible service. (I am telling everyone I can about you!)

It wasn't a very challenging trip but one that I needed to tack on a weekend in the mountains for inspiration. Toronto to Calgary, dinner with a client, then off to Edmonton for some business and a evening with a friend. Early morning back to Calgary, business in the afternoon, re-union with friends in the evening, and then Saturday morning off for the drive into the mountains.

The trip wasn't such a big deal, but the 'context' was - a few 'major' things going on and I was not in any mood for any aggravations. I needed the weekend get-a-way and looked forward to being in the mountains again - to feel insignificant. Hey - I may be insignificant - but it's another thing to truly know you are insignificant. The

mountains do that for me, and in a strange way it inspires and energizes me to be more significant.

The reservation was painless - very efficient. Checked the website and made one call and that was it. I liked that! I want to be there Saturday evening, standard stuff, and it was done. And everything worked, first time, no problems. I didn't even think about it again until I arrived. I like having that kind of confidence when I'm traveling.

So ... here I am driving up in an 88 Olds borrowed from my pal in Calgary, wearing bluejeans and boots and looking a bit like a dot com type who's lost his way and I pull into the arrivals area - valet parking I presume. First impressions are lasting impressions, and this very friendly character pops out of nowhere as I open the door with a great welcome to the Banff Springs! He's smiling - and seems incredibly 'in' to what he's doing. In a flash he's advising me of where to go, where he will put my car ("a classic," he says), how to get my car in the morning, where to check in, how to get my bags in - I feel very welcomed. Off with the bags and then into this incredibly beautiful lobby. I can feel the history. I like it.

Check in - extremely painless. No more than 30 seconds and I'm in - Wow! And my attendant is smiling. She seems happy. I'm happy. I know where to go and she told me about breakfast and the speedy checkout! What a lovely young lady! It's almost like she likes working here - wow! So far all I've met is happy, smiling people who seem to like working here - makes me feel very good that I'm staying here.

The room - perfect. The bed - wonderful. Room service - impeccable. An open window with the cool mountain breeze made everything truly outstanding. The only thing I could even dream to complain about was the elevator - it was slow - but only once. (They're under renovation and a few elevators seem to be out of service.) But with the frame of mind I was in that just gave me a few more moments to reflect on what an incredible service experience I was having.

Breakfast - a smiling face at about 7:30 was great, and the wonderful young lady led me to a table with the best view of the mountains and outlined the intricate details of the amazing buffet and stayed to chat for a while. Hey - she didn't even think about putting me behind the pillar, she wanted me to have the best view, which I appreciated very much. And you could see she liked her job. She enjoyed her work. She was my tour guide. She seemed to be sincerely and genuinely interested in my enjoyment of the food, the hotel facilities and the view. She made my day. The other servers were wonderful - attentive, talkative, efficient - breakfast was fine - and life seemed to be unfolding as it should.

Check out - fast, very fast and efficient, with smiles, and thank yous, and come-agains. A call for the car - and it's on the way. A few minutes to wait but that's no problem because it provides a few more minutes to take in the view and the fresh mountain air. I get my keys and a smile and a thank you - to complete a wonderful and very memorable experience.

Wow! I am very impressed with the consistent and absolutely wonderful attitude and execution of service. And here's a kicker. There's no doubt that I paid more than compared to a few

alternatives in the area but you know ... it doesn't even enter into the picture! I wanted the best and my expectations were exceeded! The service delivery was superb in every respect!

A week later I get a call at home in Toronto, from a very professional and courteous lady to do a follow up survey. I hate telemarketing calls, but she is very careful and considerate and sensitive to the time of day and my availability. She is so very pleasant. Of course I agree. The survey is very thorough. The questions relate to every service encounter - valet parking, check-in, the room, room service, specific restaurants, check-out - every aspect that a customer would ever encounter in a stay at the hotel. I answer every question with excellent, excellent, excellent! Will I return? Most definitely! Will I recommend the hotel? No doubt - to everyone! Overall rating? Outstanding! I value customer service and I will acknowledge it and celebrate it wherever I encounter it! Now I'm double wowed! I was absolutely wowed by the experience and again wowed by the survey! What an incredible commitment to service!

Overall? An absolutely perfect service encounter! Impeccable! Outstanding! Superb!

To the management and all associates of the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel: Thank you for your outstanding service! You are indeed the best and an inspiration for us all!

The Power of Using Names

by Shep Hyken

Want a simple strategy that will help build stronger relationships with anyone you work or do business with? It really is simple. You already know it, but it is worth reminding you of it. It is... using names.

Several months ago I was invited to a beautiful resort on an exotic island (Nevis) to present my program at a business meeting. As I walked off of the plane there was a representative from the travel company greeting me, holding a sign with my name. As soon as she identified me, she started using my name. She helped me get a cab and told the driver where to take me.

While we were driving to the airport the driver asked, "Where are you from, Mr. Hyken?" It wasn't the question that surprised me. It was that he used my name. We had a nice conversation on the way to the hotel.

Once at the hotel, the doorman greeted me by name. "Welcome to our hotel, Mr. Hyken." It was obvious that the woman at the airport informed someone I was on my way.

When I checked in the person didn't ask my name. She already had it.

The manager came out and introduced himself to me. He didn't have to ask my name. He already knew it.

On the way to my room, the bellman used my name.

I met the housekeeper later in the day. When she greeted me she asked if she was pronouncing my name properly.

Every time I walked through the lobby someone from the hotel staff acknowledged me by name. And, all of this started with the person who met me when I arrived at the airport. She had put the system to work by simply letting someone at the hotel know that I was on my way.

This was a great experience. I was truly impressed. I can't exactly describe how this constant use of my name made me feel, other than to say it was great. I felt more at home, more at ease, more comfortable – more of a guest than a customer.

It is obvious that the Four Seasons on Nevis has customer service down to an art. They are recognized as one of the top resort hotels in the world. It takes a lot of things, some big and some small, to be great. I would put using a customer's name down as small thing. It is almost just a detail. But, sometimes it is the smallest things that make the great ones great.

Consumer View: Customer Obsession

by Bettina Ann Grahek

My dog runs in the front door, whips his body around the corner and lands his large (no doubt about it) round snout in the middle of box of sausages strategically placed on a low counter and pulls one out. Then he pulls another one out. And then still a third. Happy, happy, happy! Betty steps around the corner, applauds my dog's assertive attack on the sausages and welcomes him into her business. My dog is ecstatic - and I'm absolutely thrilled!

I'm a consumer. Like most pet owners, I love my dog - enough so that I have just spent an entire Saturday afternoon (and not that I have time to do this) driving from town to town visiting local veterinarians and snooping around in their kennels trying to find a perfect fit for my beloved dog. I know what I'm looking for though honestly have never seen it, much less found it. In the coming year it is expected that I'll spend 7 consecutive weeks away from my pooch, and for my own comfort, I need to know that he will be loved and taken care of in my absence. Am I desperate for a particular kind of business? I'd say quite a bit so.

With a greeting smile and a warm "hello" and hug (for my dog) Betty takes Luke to the counter and feeds him delicious treats while I stand in awe of my most recent finding. My dog is happy - I'm happy. When Luke is thoroughly saturated with canine goodies, I ask Betty if she'd mind showing me around the business. Remember? I'm soul searching kennels ... I know what I'm looking for, but have never seen it.

Off we go down a long hall to the kennels. “It’s a kindergarten for pets!” I nearly fall over. Not just a kennel, not just a boarding facility, but a “kindergarten.” Yes, that’s what she said. Even her vet brings his dog here. And the going rate for this kindergarten? \$14.50 per day! (That’s nearly double the rate I encountered while visiting the local vets.) Will I pay it? Read on.

Everything is clean. The walls are white. The kennel floors are painted a bold pink - my favorite color. Am I happy that my dog will sleep on pink floors while I’m out of town for 7 weeks? You betcha. Animal prints, paintings, and sculpture line the halls. Does this business worship the customer? I’d say so!

Betty takes me from room to room sharing and pointing out the details of her business that convince me I’ve found the perfect “home away from home” for my beloved pet - a kindergarten camp for my dog. Each kennel is separated in part by a concrete divider about 3 ft tall - an important detail and necessity, she tells me, as a means of keeping each pet clean and free of debris from neighboring pets. Each pet not only has his own sleeping quarters, but also a lambskin cot and a little blue towel (detail, detail!) added to absorb any moisture left behind during cleaning. Can you believe this?

Each of the sleeping quarters has an adjacent runner through which access to the kindergarten “recess and recreation” yard is acquired. Does this business owner have toys in the yard for her customers? Absolutely! Down the hall we go to the next chamber where each feline has his/her own multi-level condo complete with resting mounts high above the canopy for cats who aspire to thrive

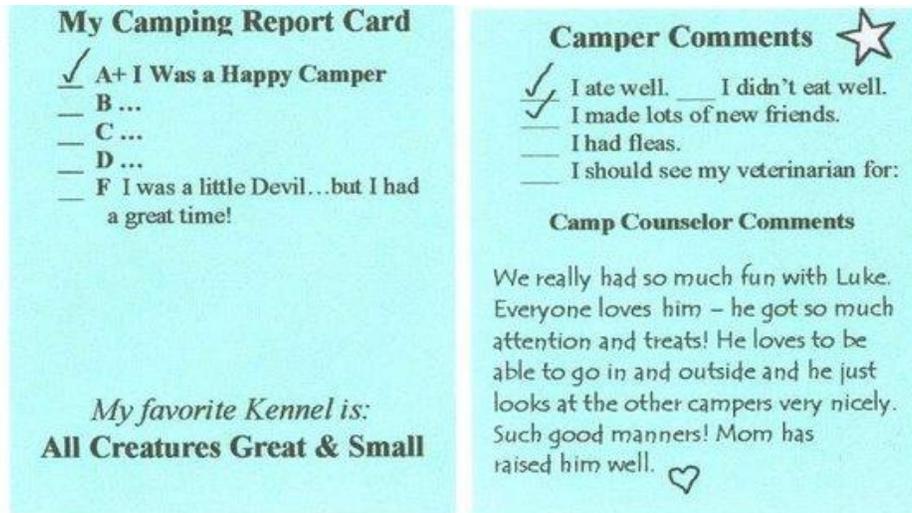
in jungle-like conditions. Yes, the big cats are quite at home here also!

Well enough of the details (yes, there are plenty more) - you get the picture. This business is completely devoted to its customers. It's a true customer-focused, customer-centered, customer-driven and customer-obsessive business. I am absolutely sold on this business. And from the number of dogs, cats, and iguanas, "campers" as Betty calls them, camped out at this facility, clearly others are equally sold as well. Betty's business is memorable.

Theory to practice.

I left Luke with Betty for a few days during the next week while I attended a conference in Charlotte. Family members of other "campers" were there the evening when I arrived back to pick up my dog. Recognizing that I was a new customer to the business, from the line of people just behind me came the faint words, "Wait till you see what you get before you walk out the door."

Just at that moment, on the counter, Betty had placed a little green "Camper Report Card" - just the kind I received when I was a little girl in elementary school - only this one had a star on it. Luke's first report card! "And you'll never believe some of the things they have to say about our pets!"



Good businesses are easy to find. Great ones? A bit more difficult. But customer obsessed businesses are rare and truly a pleasurable experience for the consumer. All Creatures Great & Small is an exemplar of the best in quality service for the customer obsessed business.

My favorite business is All Creatures Great & Small!

All Creatures Great & Small is owned and operated by Betty Kronenwetter. For further information, you can reach Betty at All Creatures Great & Small, Rt. 5, Box 16C, Hwy 701 South, Whiteville, NC 28472 (910)640-1909.

Pay Attention to Detail

by Rick Sidorowicz

I find it absolutely amazing to see what focusing on the details can reveal. Retail is detail they say, and although we all love to get into the big picture, the proof seems to always be found in the detail.

A former associate in specialty retailing once showed me how everything in a store is revealed from the detail. As an area manager charged with execution of the strategy and standards Dan could tell all from a very detailed examination of only one fixture.

He would walk up to any fixture and observe - the product - was it appropriate, the folds - were they crisp, the sizing - was it easy for customers to find, the cleanliness - did anyone care, the inventory - was it replenished or in the back.

From one fixture he could tell if the manager and staff were 'with the program' and cared and took pride in their work and their store, or didn't. And from that he knew what to expect with shrink results, store standards, training, selling skills, paperwork and almost everything else.

All from one fixture - any fixture, as any one reflected the commitment, pride and attention to the detail of execution.

Eight More Ways to Wow Your Customers

by Rick Sidorowicz

Greet your customers by name.

See Shep Hyken's piece on the power of using names to create a most memorable experience. What's in a name? A sense of respect for you, an openness to welcome you, a genuine caring about your experience today.

Use names consistently to create an exceptional experience.

A greeting by name is nice, but you do have my reservation and should know. The second greeting by name gets me to start thinking - it's nice! I'm feeling like they have a customer service "program" here, and that's a good thing!

The third greeting by name gets me wondering that this is quite an exceptional place. I'm quite comfortable; it feels like everyone really cares about my well-being and experience! The fourth greeting by name confirms you mean it! I love it!

Be consistently positive to be most memorable.

Pay attention to detail.

You reveal everything you are even in one simple display or fixture.

Take pride in who you are and what you have to offer.

Figure out what your customers need to trust you.

See Bettina's experience of all Creatures Great & Small for a most positive and memorable experience. Your customer is buying peace of mind - and all that you do is designed to create trust and confidence in who you are and the service you provide.

Create an integrated set of positive experiences.

Your on-line experience is positive. Parking is positive. Check-in is positive. Breakfast is positive. Check-out is positive. Create a cumulative positive, positive, positive - at all touch-points.

Pay even more attention to every little detail.

Everything matters!

Create an impeccable environment.

Keep everything clean, mindful - and take pride in who you are and what you offer.

Always have something unique for your customers to take away.

Create unique "souvenirs" - they are always memorable! You can show a sincere appreciation and create memories if you choose.

Denta +

by Bob Holder

Exceptional customer experience and Russia seem as similar as going to the dentist and being happy about it. Yet, Denta+, an Omsk Russia dental clinic, seeks to “wow” customers. Denta+ is more than a dental clinic. The firm has made going to the dentist not only an experience in receiving exceptional service but also a memorable one. The firm is not just “world class” in providing dental care and interventions. It is also a world class provider of “memorable experiences.” Denta+ has lessons for not only Healthcare firms but any business that wants to improve customer retention and attraction, word-of-mouth marketing and seeking to provide new economic offerings.

Customers are greeted by a smiling receptionist when entering Denta+. She presents them with foot covers when their shoes are dirty and/or wet from snow. She asks to hang-up their coats. They are also asked what they care to drink and/or eat. They are provided with choices. They are escorted to the waiting room. They aren't asked the, “Do you have the cash” question before they sit down and are given coffee and tasteful pastries and cookies.

The waiting space is a dental and art museum. The furniture is tasteful and comfortable. Nadya, the owner, has an appreciation of the “sitting experience.” It contained plants as did most of the rooms. Plants improve air quality by removing potential office pollutants. They can also improve people's moods. This has enhanced the customer's “waiting experience” as have other things such as art, displays, TV and a stereo system.

The waiting room and dental furniture are comfortable. This allows the client to escape from the problems of Russian life. He or she can also escape the normal waiting boredom. It is also entertaining as is the artwork and the waiting space that contains various dental items that Nadya has collected during her global education and training. The clinic is filled with various artworks. They range from the humorous, a large lip picture, to tasteful pictures. These are esthetic dimension examples as are the tasteful furniture, plants and furnishings. These are esthetically pleasing for Russian women.

Work spaces contain art and plants. They also contain charts, exhibits, models and professional certifications. The latter serve to enrich customer knowledge of staff competencies and skills. The former are used to educate customers. Some are even used, for example, to entertain frightened children or to present a bit of humor through the use a large tooth model.

Denta+ also illustrates customer surprise. Most people expect high quality dental services. However, they don't expect a "memorable experience." They don't expect to be able to watch their favorite TV show at the dentist. They don't expect to wait for their appointment in an interesting and comfortable space. Most expect uncomfortable seating and a boring space that is found in most dental clinics and even alternative Healthcare practitioners who speak about treating the whole person. However, most ignore that people's attitudes can be improved by a beautiful space while stressing a positive attitude. Nadya understands that it's important to transcend expectations. This is an idea that needs to be used by those who speak about customer satisfaction.

Denta+ is not only in the dental business. It's also in the entertainment, education and the "escape the everyday problems of Russian life" business. Nadya recognized people hated going to the dentist. She recognized that just providing good service wasn't the answer. She hit upon the theme of a dental salon. Nadya designed the clinic to be a relaxing, entertaining and enriching place where the customer would feel better leaving than before entering. She recognized the importance of props in conducting a great performance and work as theater in her use of the model, graphs and exhibits. Nadya also understands a great performance engages the senses to improve the experience. Props engage the customer visually; thereby augmenting the verbal and enriching the performance.

Nadya role models how employees ought to perform. She is continuously improving her professional knowledge; thereby allowing her to improve the educational experience realm. She shares this knowledge with her associates. Nadya treats customers as if they are dear friends. She educates her employees in how customers are to be treated. She is entertaining in her educational performances.

Denta+ has refreshed its experience through customer suspense. This can be characterized as changing something that the customer remembers. The firm wants the customer to wonder what will be added and/or changed. Denta+ didn't begin, for example, with its full entertainment experience menu of video, CD, tape and radio. It has added these items through time. There have been additions to the art, product displays and museum items. This staging through time has supported customers in expecting

refreshing and yet, not being actually sure what forms of enrichment will appear.

Using the experience economy idea requires thinking about the business as theater. The key questions are:

How can we provide customers with an ongoing unforgettable experience?

How can we refresh the experience so customers won't become bored?

How can we customize our offering so the customer does not experience customer sacrifice?

Finally, team members must think of themselves as actors in a real life performance. Theater is not a metaphor. It is a way of doing business.

A Wow in Garbage!

by Darlene Pineda

Garbage: Not usually a place to find superstars. Now, my trash pickup is usually on Thursdays. In September (2003) we had a bit of wind called Isabelle, (My house was still standing, by the way - YAY!), which naturally meant no pickup that day. The days following Isabelle kept everyone busy cleaning up the mess she left behind: Trees and branches and roof pieces and power lines and food that had spoiled and pieces of siding that had flown off houses and landed in yards. When trash day rolled around, I put my filled-to-the-brim trashcan out on the curb for pickup. YAY! I had a few bags that didn't fit, but at least most of it would be gone.

Later that day, the doorbell rang. When I went to the door, there was the garbage man, smiling! "Excuse me, ma'am. I'm sure you noticed that we weren't able to make a pickup last week, and I sure am sorry about that." I nodded, and told him I understood. Then he continued, "I'm checking to see if you have any more trash that didn't fit in the can, that I can carry to the truck for you." I blinked at him, and actually couldn't speak. "You ... want my trash?" I stuttered, puzzled. "Yes ma'am, if you have any more, I'd be pleased to carry it out to the truck for you."

So I led him to the garage, and he did indeed carry another three bags full to the truck, smiling the whole time. I thanked him, (and this is where he went beyond exceeding expectations to blowing them away), and he said, "No ma'am, thank you for choosing us. It was a pleasure to serve you, and you have a nice day."

I walked back into my house, stunned. Now, I expect great customer service in department stores and restaurants. I even expect it in gas stations and doctors' offices. But I never even thought about service in terms of garbage collection. And I realized that my garbage man had made a choice, and he **CHOSE** to make his day a great one.

He chose to **BE THERE**. He certainly **MADE MY DAY**. And he did it all with sincerity and mindfulness and an honest desire to provide service.

And I couldn't help but wonder; if someone in as difficult a job as his could find possibilities to exceed all expectations, how many chances can we find, every day? How often do **WE** say to our customers, "No, thank **YOU** for choosing **US**"?

So, what do your customers say about you?

Happy Anniversary

by Greg Smith

The Ritz-Carlton hotels makes customer service an art form. Unlike other places, they know if you treat your customers well and make a special effort to please them guess what? They come back, tell their friends, and maintain a long lasting relationship of loyalty.

My wife and I recently stayed at the Reynolds Plantation Ritz-Carlton at Lake Oconee, Georgia. Upon checking in, we dropped off our bags and took a seat in the lobby to enjoy the view of the lake. A few minutes later a service person named Susan introduced herself, beginning a friendly conversation. She asked us why we were staying at the hotel. I said, "We are here for our wedding anniversary." With a very big smile she told us, "Congratulations. Let me go get you some champagne."

Wow! This was the first of two episodes at this hotel that would capture my loyalty as a guest of Ritz-Carlton.

Later that evening a knock at the door caught us by surprise. Greeting us again was Susan. This time she surprised us with a luscious piece of cake carefully presented on a plate. In icing was this inscription, "Happy Anniversary." Wow!

It was not a stroke of luck we stumbled across Susan. She, as well as other Ritz Carlton employees, are carefully selected and thoroughly trained on how to identify guest's unspoken requests.

They follow a process called the "Three Steps of Service."

Step 1 - Warm welcome

Step 2 - Anticipation and compliance

Step 3 - Fond farewell

It is during Step 2 where staff members seek out and discover guest's needs or wishes. Then they present it in a way to create a 'moment of truth.' In our case, it was the champagne and the anniversary cake.

Now, let me make an important point to the critics. I know many of you are saying, 'I expect to be treated well at fine hotels - it is what I pay for.' Let's consider this. The same principles and standards of behavior demonstrated at the Ritz-Carlton can also be applied at your local car dealership, bank, or any business, can't they?

A Gallup survey found over a one month period a customer 'emotionally connected' to the organization spent 46% more money than a customer that was satisfied, but not emotionally bonded with the company.

Just imagine going to your car repair shop with your car. Within sixty minutes they fix it right the first time, and deliver it to your door cleaner than when you dropped it off. How many people would you tell about it? Surely, the proprietor of the car repair shop would see exponential growth. The additional profits and the revenue would outweigh the added time and expense spent exceeding customers expectations.

“Extra Ordinary” Customer Service

by Liz Weber

How do we provide Extraordinary Customer Service? Look at it for what it really is: “Extraordinary” is simply “Extra Ordinary” Customer Service. Simply do more of the basics when it’s appropriate.

Let me share an example: This past Saturday afternoon, while putting air in one of our car’s tires, the valve stem broke. My husband changed the tire, but noticed that our spare tire wasn’t fitting quite right. So we drove to a nearby tire and muffler repair store to see if they could fix the valve stem. However, it was 3:05PM and they had closed at 3:00PM. The employees were all walking to their cars as was one of the managers.

Not really anticipating any help, my husband asked the manager if there might be some chance he could help us. We were 20 miles from home and we didn’t want to risk the spare tire not holding tight.

Without hesitation, the manager said, “Absolutely.”

My husband and I looked at each other in shock and thought, “Wow.”

Within 15 minutes he had fixed our tire and helped change out the spare. When we tried to pay him, he said “No charge today. We’re closed.”

Then he smiled and walked away.

Extraordinary.

What Extra Ordinary Service can your staff provide customers?

Can your staff greet each customer they pass on their way to the break room?

Could staff call customers with interim updates on the project status just to ease their minds?

What would happen if staff started talking to customers instead of to each other when they were “servicing” customers?

What little things can your staff do that cause your customers to think “Wow.”

What three little things can your staff do to wow your customers everyday?

1.

2.

3.

If the Shoe Fits ... Lend It!

by Ed Horrell

All of the customer service stories I write about are interesting. Some stories are the stuff of legends.

This story is one is the latter.

One of my favorite companies is Davidson Hotel Company in Memphis, Tennessee. The reason is that the principals of the company, John Belden and Pat Lupsha, emphasize the importance of values (dignity and kindness) in their guest service. They discuss it often and it is reflected in the actions of their employees and on their website at <http://www.davidsonhotels.com/>.

They are among the leaders in the Kindness Revolution.

But discussing service is different from providing it. This story shows that constant emphasis on service leads to results.

Last month, Kris checked into the Renaissance Chicago North Shore Hotel, one of the Davidson families of hotels. He is a claims adjuster for a major insurance company and was there for training. He checked in on Sunday night.

“After a good night's rest, I woke up on Monday ready to tackle the first day” says Kris. “After my morning routine, I put on my finest shirt and prepared to go make an impression on the other adjusters.”

Imagine Kris' shock when he realized that he had not brought a pair of dress shoes, only the tennis shoes he had worn to travel. Calling the front desk, he knew that he wouldn't find a shoe store open in Chicago at 7:00 AM!

"Of course it was a long shot and I knew it" says Kris. "Imagine the horror I felt at that moment. I was about to go into my first day of training in my business attire and a white pair of K-Swiss sneakers! I looked foolish."

To his delight, however, the constant emphasis on guest service at Davidson paid off. Kris got a call back from a customer service rep who asked what size Kris wore. When he answered "a size 12", the rep, Christine Miks stated that her boss, Chris Dugenske, wore a size 13 and would lend Kris his shoes for the day.

In a time when most customers would expect to get a call back simply saying "we tried...nothing is open", this guest gets a call saying "we've solved your problem."

"To my knowledge", say Kris, "Mr. Dugenske worked the entire day with no shoes, and he did that for someone he didn't even know."

This is an impressive story and makes one point which is worth remembering in order to provide the BEST in service. The point is this ... when a customer has a problem, it is wise to determine the real problem when making the decision as to what action to take.

In this case, most companies would consider the obvious problem to be that no stores are open early on Monday and how they could

fix that (which they can't)? The Davidson employees addressed the real problem; their guest needed shoes!

Companies like Davidson Hotel Company are leading the Kindness Revolution by listening to their customers and solving problems as opposed to keeping lists of complaints. The old cliché “he’d give you the shoes off his feet” is true!

For more information on how to start a kindness revolution in your company, go to <http://www.edhorrell.com> . For information on Davidson Hotel Company, go to <http://www.davidsonhotels.com> .

Hey Paisano

by JoAnna Brandi

These days we hear a lot about providing “The Customer Experience.” But I’ve got to tell you, most of the time, in my routine dealings with companies, it’s rare that I actually have an experience with a big “E.”

I sure had one on Wednesday night! It was my friend Mary Ann’s birthday and a small group of women were getting together and going to Ft. Lauderdale to an Italian restaurant. I had never heard of it, but Mary Anne said it was a “fun and funky” place that served all food “family style.” Sounded nice, but I was interested in the company, not the place or the food so didn’t think much about it.

Mary Ann and I arrived a little early and went into the bar to wait. Funky, okay, it was reminiscent of someone’s paneled basement circa 1972. The walls were covered with some incredibly interesting pictures and the bartender was amazingly patient as the now convening group of women asked to taste many of the wine offerings before deciding on which to order. It was a good thing. Wine was served in tumblers, as the bartender said, “like it is in Italy.”

Before going to our table we were led on a short tour of the kitchen. Coming out of the kitchen we were introduced to a picture of “Big Joe” and led to our special table for the night, in the “Pope’s Room.”

Past what seemed like hundreds of pictures on the walls (I wanted to look at ALL of them) we were led to a large round table in a round room decorated with picture of, you guessed it, Popes!

Everyone we encountered was more than friendly. They actually seemed very glad to see us!

Soon thereafter our servers introduced themselves. Anamaria would be assisted by Jeff. Jeff led us through his suggestions of menu items (on the wall) and made sure to recommend a little something from several food groups.

We ordered our dinner and thought we just sitting back to enjoy each others company when Anamaria came over to instruct us in our obligations sitting in such a prominent place. As other diners passed by we were to greet them with a special cupped hand wave (and perhaps even use two hands) and say hello. That's where the fun began.

As each group of diners passed they were introduced to our group at the Pope's table and we did the special wave, as instructed. It was obvious many diners had been there before and knew the drill. Other members of wait staff dropped by periodically to visit and wish Mary Anne a Happy Birthday. When I leaned over to Anamaria to comment on what a fun place this must be to work she commented "You can't call this work!"

When it came time for the cake and the Tiramisu (oh yeah!) not only did the wait staff rally round to sing, but other patrons came over to join in the fun. What a hoot!

But it wasn't over yet. A young man passing by came over to give the birthday girl a kiss, and then two young waiters came over to serenade her. They sang an acappella version of "My Girl" and we all chimed in. Not to be outdone, shortly thereafter one of them

came back, with a new partner got down on one knee and broke into “Earth Angel” apparently a new tune for the duo. The staff gathered round to hear. They were having as much fun as we were!

Naturally I asked for the manager. “Who are you, I asked? What IS the place?” Turns out many of you may know it – it’s chain that strives to be the “un-chain” called Buca di Beppo (Big Joe’s Basement) It started in Minneapolis in, you guessed it, Joe’s basement. Remember the picture that greeted us outside the kitchen?

The culture at Buca is scrupulously tended to. The fun environment attracted people who want to celebrate (there were at least 8 birthday parties there on Wednesday while we were there. The “inclusive” environment (I didn’t tell you about the tour of the men’s room, and I won’t) really made for a family feeling.

I asked for their secrets.

Customers are “Guests.” If a guest leaves and isn’t dying to come back, they haven’t done their job. They hire good people (they sure do!) They train them. Every store has a certified trainer on board. They are taught to surprise with the unexpected and anticipate the guest’s needs. Every one says “hello” and “goodbye” to everyone they see. Everyone is responsible for running food, so wait staff can spend a little extra time with a guest when they need to. Teamwork is essential to success.

The culture, according to the delightful and proud manager is dynamic. And they don’t treat their employees like employees, they treat them like family members. Every night before the shift begins

there is a family meal. Everyone comes together and eats and talks and 45 minutes before the shift is to begin they have a meeting. Every night. No wonder they were able to create so many happy birthday experiences the night we were there. Hey, I like this place.

Does your company have its modus operandi as well defined as Buca? Does each one of your team members know what is expected of them? Do you huddle or meet frequently enough so people know what's going on? Do YOU have fun?

Are you creating the kinds of experiences that have YOUR customers talking about you?

It's so nice to know the "WOW" experience still exists.

So far I have recommended Buca to several people, and just in case you're in the area you can find them at 5975 N. Federal Highway, Ft. Lauderdale FL. (954) 229-0922. I understand they have restaurants in many different states so check them out. www.bucadibeppe.com.

Mangia!

Are you Present and Accounted For?

by Craig Harrison

Audit your own interactions with customers. Ask yourself the following:

- Do you greet them with genuine affection?
- Do you know and use their name? (Are you pronouncing it correctly? Not sure? Ask!)
- Are you giving them your undivided attention?
- Are you giving good and consistent eye contact?
- Are you preoccupied with a previous client, customer or call?
- Are you easily distracted?
- If the phone rings while you're in conversation, do you let it ring through?
- Do you listen actively and intently or are you "faking" it?

In today's world customers long to be heard, to be understood and to feel others care about them. Help customers feel connected! Show them you care. Treat them as if they're the most important people in the world. For the brief time they're in your midst, give them your undivided attention. Don't just be here now...but hear now! Or, forever lament the loss of treasured customers!

The Night Before Christmas

by Darlene Pineda

What Does Great Performance Look Like - The Night Before Christmas?

Picture this: It's the Friday night before Christmas in a large bookstore. The lines at the register are consistently 50 to 60 people deep, and have been all day. The staff is tired, and the managers have been on a mandatory six-day workweek since November. All eight registers have been going nonstop for hours, when suddenly, at around 8 PM, the registers crash. Not freeze, not need rebooting, but completely shut down. All of them. At the same time! With 60 people in line! Time to panic? Ah, there's where great performance comes in.

Rebecca is the manager there, and she jumps into the emerging chaos. Quickly one supervisor is on the phone paging the IT department, and Rebecca has a basket of candy and is moving down the restless line of customers, explaining what is happening, giving each person some candy, and assuring them that a solution will be found shortly. No one leaves the line.

Ten minutes later the IT department is trying to get the registers working again, and Rebecca is walking down the line with coffee, explaining to each customer how very sorry we are, what options they have (leaving their info and us shipping the items later, putting items on hold, etc.), and offering them coffee. 20 more people have joined the line. No one leaves the line.

Twenty minutes. IT is frantically bringing the computers back up, and Rebecca goes back down the line, this time with bottles of water and \$5.00 gift certificates, good anytime, apologizing and letting the customers know we expect to be back online in the next 5 to 10 minutes. Four people leave the line - leaving their info with us so we can mail their purchases (free of charge) to them the next day.

Thirty minutes - the registers are finally back up. The line stretches to the back of the store with over 100 people waiting. Rebecca makes an announcement over the paging system, and a cheer goes up through the store! Almost every employee is at the registers, ringing, bagging, and Rebecca is still going up the line, thanking everyone for hanging in there.

Registers were down for half an hour, on one of the busiest days of the year, and we still beat budget by over 20%. Why? Because Rebecca demonstrated all the qualities we look for - honest, sincere, friendly, knowledgeable, and most importantly - she brought it all together into professionally handling a daunting situation with grace. We didn't lose a single customer, and she got a letter from the CEO thanking her. The supervisors who were working that night all chipped in to treat her to dinner. I also received about 10 phone calls and 3 letters from customers complimenting her behavior.

Now that's what great performance looks like!

So what do your customers and fellow employees say about you?

Beans, Bacon, Bologna, and Beauty Products

by Greg Smith

America's Favorite Retailers Have One Thing In Common - Great Customer Service

One of the first jobs I held was with K-Mart. Back then K-mart was one of the top retailers in the country. I was proud of the fact of all the people working at our store, I generated more sales than any other person.

My success was based on one thing. I was good at announcing the "Blue Light Specials." Most people reading this probably won't know what a Blue Light Special is, but when I made my announcements shoppers came running to my department with money in their hand. That was a long time ago and things have really changed since then. Now K-mart is at the bottom of the heap.

In May 2007, Quality Digest completed a customer satisfaction survey of the best and worst retailers as ranked by consumers. Here are the results.

TOP 10

Wegmans

Trader Joe's

Nordstrom

Publix

Amazon.com

Kohl's

Whole Foods Market

Costco
Barnes and Noble
Bath and Body Works

BOTTOM 10

Dick's Sporting Goods
Sears
Best Buy
Albertson's
Big Lots
Circuit City
7-Eleven
Home Depot
K-Mart

In addition to ranking the best and worst retailers, the survey analyzed the primary reasons shoppers choose one retailer over the other. As a business consultant who specializes in hiring, service, and employee retention, I consider this as the most important aspect of the survey.

Consumer trends and brands change rapidly. What is popular today becomes history tomorrow. However, there are two factors that consistently build customer loyalty, no matter what business you are in.

Which is more important – the price of the product, or the shopping experience? Quality Digest asked people to choose between two factors that would cause them to recommend a store to others. The first factor was “value” which equates to the feeling they “got their money’s worth.” The other factor was the “shopping experience”

which included a gamut of elements such as friendliness, helpfulness of employees, checkout lines, cleanliness, and location of the product.

Front Line Employees Provide the Key to High Customer Satisfaction Scores

In the end, the number one reason people choose a retailer is the “shopping experience.” The survey further showed the major contributor to the shopping experience was “employee helpfulness.” Value and price are important, but in this survey as well as others, the number one reason shoppers come back over and over again is the shopping experience.

Hiring good employees and then training them on good customer service skills remains the driving force of either creating a positive or negative experience.

Trader Joe’s is a different kind of grocery store that provides both value and a pleasing shopping experience. Coming in at #2 on the list, these stores are growing rapidly in popularity. One interesting customer service technique one store uses is the Trader Joe’s Fearless Flyer. This unique marketing tool generated an additional \$40,000 of business during one weekend.

Wow!

Toilet Paper and Times Square

by Jill Griffin

Toilet Paper. How do you successfully build an engaging, loyalty-building brand story around *that* product?

Just ask the ace marketers at Proctor & Gamble and they'll tell you about the 20 free, deluxe Charmin restrooms opened in New York's Time Square for the 2007 holiday season. At the same location in 2006, the Charmin Holiday rest rooms served more than 420,000 people from 100 countries and all 50 states, so a 2007 encore was in order.

But free, family-friendly restrooms and ample toilet tissue were just one part of the unique, memorable brand story crafted by the Charmin team. First, friendly folks dressed as dancing toilets greeted passersby on the street, inviting them to visit the Charmin Holiday Restrooms nearby. Visitors then took escalators up and wove through a rope line while a legion of smiling hosts wearing Charmin apparel greeted them and upbeat holiday music played in the background. Inside the stalls (serviced by staff after every use), Ultra Strong and Ultra Soft tissue were available and afterwards, guests were asked to vote for their favorite.

Next, guests could jump into one of several winter-wonderland dioramas and have their picture made with the Charmin bear; or guests could go on stage and do the Charmin dance, while their image was captured on flat-screen monitors surrounding the stage. For those holiday-weary guests who simply wanted to rest for a bit, a fireplace and comfortable seating awaited. Bottom-line, a lot of

unexpected, family-friendly holiday memories were made ... all because of a toilet paper brand.

Many people got the message. Besides the brand story 'told' in person to the nearly half million Charmin Holiday Restroom visitors during the 2007 season, an impressive 100 traditional media reported on the project followed by a strong wave of social media including Flickr, You Tube, and countless marketing blogs and forums, etc. (Hey, your reading another one right now!)

Loyalty Lesson:

As fellow Austinite and Brand Autopsy blogger, John Moore, so aptly put it, "This is further evidence...there is no such thing as boring product categories, just boring products!"

Make this the year for finding your brand's story and engaging your customers with it!

What is Your Lagniappe?

by Ed Horrell

In my customer service talks, I refer often to a French word which was used commonly among French Creole store owners in Louisiana. It was used like this: a customer would order five pounds of sugar for example. The store owner would fill his customer's bag with the sugar and then add one additional scoop while saying "lagniappe" (which is French for "a little extra".)

This, I submit, is the essence of great service. Giving a little more than is expected, a little more than paid for, is lagniappe. It is part of the secret to great customer service.

Think of some of the examples of companies who do a little more than what is normally expected. Who comes to mind?

Doubletree Hotels, for one, offers a warm cookie to guests when they check in. Just a little extra; it is their lagniappe. Infiniti dealers wash their customers' cars when they bring them in for service. In the northwest, a tire company has customers drive for miles just to watch their sales reps literally run to the cars when they pull into the parking lot. It is lagniappe....not expected, but awfully welcome.

It can make a difference in owning and renting your clients. Let me give you an example.

Recently I was asked to speak at a breakfast meeting to a group in Nashville. The meeting was in a part of Nashville that I was not familiar with and I wanted to stay in a hotel as near the meeting as I could find so as to avoid rush hour traffic. The Internet solved that

problem and I found the Hotel Preston. The rooms looked nice and reasonable so I made a reservation.

I wasn't necessarily impressed when I pulled into the parking lot, but that was going to change. I checked into a nicely decorated room with an enormous, comfortable looking bed. On the bed was a card welcoming me and stating that they realize that a good night's sleep is important after a long day and offered a "pillow menu" from which I could select my pillow type for my stay firm, soft, medium, or hypoallergenic. A little extra!

Do you think I have told that story? You bet!

What is your lagniappe?

What do you offer that is just a little more than your competitor?

Here are some tips:

Lagniappe doesn't have to cost money! It can be something extra that simply gives something to your client. For example, when you find a new restaurant that you like, drop a client or two a note introducing them to your new favorite place. Do the same for a new wine or cheese that you have discovered a good movie, or hotel.

If you want to spend a little money on your client, pick up a gift certificate for a dessert or cocktail at the restaurant you discovered and send it with your note. (Don't be surprised if you get an invitation to join your client for dinner there.) Make sure your visitors feel especially welcome when they come into your offices.

Also, lagniappe is best when little attention is called to it. Try to avoid signing off your note with something like “This extra is brought to you by ABC Companies, where you always get something extra”. Don’t call attention to the little extra that you give. It will call attention to itself.

Find the little extra that you can give to your clients. Surprise them occasionally. You are going to find that not only will they appreciate what you do for them, but they will tell their colleagues about what you do. This is the best form of advertising and costs you nothing. You’ll find a terrific relationship based upon your culture of “a little extra” and you’ll own your customer.

What is **your** lagniappe?

Are You Easy?

by Shep Hyken

Here is a great question: “Are you easy to do business with?”

That may sound like a simple question, and you may immediately want to say, “Yes!” However, I urge you to take a close look at how you are perceived by your customers and fellow employees.

Certain companies create an image that they are extremely easy to do business with. Their sales people are friendly. They bend over backwards to take care of you. They provide a “hassle-free” experience. They never question a return. Most people (especially me) love doing business with a place like this.

I recently had the opportunity to refinance my home mortgage. Interest rates had been dropping for a while, and I felt now was the time. I shopped to find the best rates. I ended up doing business with Nexstar, and the guy that helped me was Brian Parks. He is the perfect example of how to be “easy to do business with.” He assured me the application, taken over the phone, was going to take less than fifteen minutes. He assured me how much things would cost and explained everything in detail. I completely understood the process and along the way there weren’t any surprises.

He followed up after the “closing” with the title company to make sure that went well. If I called to ask a question and Brian wasn’t available, the person on the phone was able to access my information and thanks to Brian’s great notes, they could answer

my questions. My experience with Nexstar was nothing short of perfect. Most important, it was easy!

I recently bought a pair of pants from the Men's Department at Neiman Marcus. My sales rep, Patty, assured me the pants wouldn't shrink if they were washed at home. Her comment was simple. She promised, "If there is anything wrong with the pants after you wash them a few times, bring them back." It was that simple!

Look at your business through your customers' eyes. Have you made it as easy as possible for the customer? Or are some of the procedures in place simply for the convenience of you or your company? Ask your customers. Listen to their answers. Find out ways to improve. The bottom line is the easier you are to do business with, the happier your customers will be.

Serving Each Customer Uniquely

by Rebecca Morgan

She stood at the entrance in her crisp uniform, greeting every arrival. The guests filed past into the hotel meeting room for the local radio and TV broadcasters annual awards banquets. She looked each person in the eye as they passed and said, “I hope you have a great time tonight.”

I watched her, noting this out-of-the-norm behavior, even for 5-star hotels, which this was not. After we were seated, she visited each of her tables and asked if there was anything we needed. She chatted with those who wanted to chat and moved silently to pour wine for those otherwise engaged.

I complimented her on her impeccable attention to the guests and asked what motivated her to treat everyone with such care. She said she’d been working in hospitality for over 40 years and loved her job. But the next thing she said stood out for me.

“These people have given me so much joy every day, I’m thrilled to be able to help them make their special night memorable.”

This server had a clear vision of who her customers were that evening and how she could give each something from her heart.

Did she do this with every group? What about those who she had no personal connection to? I didn’t think to ask her, but now I’m guessing she found something to celebrate about each group.

Do your employees find ways to relate to each of their customers?

Do they think about how to make each interaction special?

Do you notice exemplars and compliment them? Or better yet, reward them?

What Your Customers are Really Saying

by Jeff Mowatt

Imagine a survey reveals that 96% of your customers are satisfied with your service. This is where I often see managers assuming that the company is doing great. They jump to the conclusion that with a 96% satisfaction rating they're getting an A+ score from customers.

Actually, the survey only showed that a lot of customers consider the service to be *adequate*. Customers are not saying that they were *impressed* or *delighted* or even *pleased* — merely that they were satisfied. Imagine your sweetheart talking to a close friend and describing you as being *adequate*. You'd probably see that as reason for concern! It certainly isn't reason to think you're getting an A+ performance rating.

I wonder... what does your customer feedback *really* say?

What Matters Most

by Shep Hyken

You are taking a flight on any airline - it doesn't matter. Couple of questions:

1. Would you rather have an extra couple of inches of leg room, or know you arrive at your destination on time?
2. Would you rather have a meal, or know your luggage will show up on the baggage carousel when you arrive undamaged)?

Most of us reading this are aware the airline industry is in tremendous turmoil. It seems every blog, consumer website and speaker (myself included) tells the woeful stories of the airlines. But put any feelings (both negative and positive) aside and consider this fact.

According to research from University of Nebraska and Wichita State University in their annual Airline Quality Ratings survey, the highest rated customer service airlines are Southwest, Air Tran and JetBlue. These are the budget airlines, where amenities are literally, in some cases, peanuts, but reliability trumps the major airlines.

Many of us would sacrifice a few amenities to know our flight will arrive on time and our checked bags will show up. What that means is that we want and value reliability. It is reliability that defines customer service in the airline industry.

Here is the lesson. On the surface, most of us would think customer service for an airline comes in the form of amenities; bigger seats, meals, etc. Of course the employees have to add to the pleasant experience. However, it turns out that in this case, this is not what customers want. They want reliability. The customer defines what is important. Do you know what matters most to your customers? Don't guess. Don't make assumptions. Find out, and then don't just meet their expectations. Exceed them!

What Neatness Really Says

by Jeff Mowatt

After speaking for a client in Cancun, I spent the late afternoon at the resort's beach where I noticed something odd. As guests left the beach for the evening events, the resort's staff would realign the vacated beach chairs, going so far as to crouch to chair level and eyeball the chair backs to ensure they were precisely in-line. First, I wondered why the need for being so neat, then it occurred to me ...

When the chairs are lined-up exactly, it tells guests those chairs are available. When your operations are neat - shelves faced-off, landscape and entrance manicured, uniforms tidy - it doesn't just show you're clean. It tells customers you think details matter, you have self respect, and most of all - you're ready to do business.

Free for the Giving

by Craig Harrison

You may think customer service requires a huge capital outlay: expensive training, high-falutin' CRM software, and thousands of dollar in expenditures Nonsense! The most important parts of customer service are free.

Here's my baker's dozen list of customer service components that are free:

1. Smiling.
2. Saying "I'm sorry", "We're sorry," or "I apologize"
3. Saying "thank you for your business."
4. Saying "thank you for bringing this problem to my attention"
5. Thanking customers for allowing you to fix their problems
6. Listening
7. Sharing important information in a timely manner
8. Giving customers choices
9. Addressing customers by name
10. Making small talk that build the relationship
11. Relating to customers on a human level
12. Relishing your interactions with your customers
13. Enjoying your work

The point is, customer service is about many things, most of them tied to attentiveness, friendliness and empathy. We all have the capacity to employ and deploy customer service to salve our customers' wounds. It's as much a mindset as it is phraseology.

The same skills you employed while delivering newspapers, selling

lemonade or Girl Scout cookies as a kid, will hold you in good stead as a sales or service professional. The best things in life really are free. Now pass them on!

Moments of Truth Revisited by Phil Dourado

I'm re-reading Jan Carlzon's book **Moments of Truth**. He's the CEO who turned around the Scandinavian airline SAS.

He starts the book with these four statements. They are a mini manifesto for getting people engaged and energized throughout the organization. The four rules apply particularly to the steps you need to take to free up your front line people to serve customers more effectively.

1. Everyone needs to know and feel that he or she is needed.
2. Everyone wants to be treated as an individual.
3. Giving someone the freedom to take responsibility releases resources that would otherwise remain concealed.
4. An individual without information cannot take responsibility. An individual who is given information cannot help but take responsibility.

Are Your Mystery Shopping Results a Mystery?

by Rick Sidorowicz

In most organizations most of the time the idea of “engineering the customer experience” becomes a “scripting” of the desired behaviours of front-most customer-facing associates. Mystery shopping or customer service auditing therefore becomes an exercise of observing and recording behaviours, based on the premise that if associates “perform” the desired “script” the outcome - a positive experience for customers - will be manifested. It’s all very logical. Trouble is ... it’s bunk!

Reality check: Do your mystery shopping scores correlate with your customer satisfaction scores and your tangible measures of performance? Or are they a mystery. Take a look and decide for yourself. Are your mystery shopping scores up to your objectives consistently in all locations, or is there great variability between locations and within locations over time? Is your mystery shopping “program” a source of celebration and success or ongoing irritation, frustration and pain? And what about for your customer-facing people?

Most mystery shopping more often than not, measures the wrong things. Here’s an example of one mystery shopper’s final comments:

“I was greeted immediately and was treated professionally and politely throughout the entire encounter. I found the SA (sales associate) to be knowledgeable of the products that he was promoting. He went to task to explain the differences in the air

cushion supports and flexing the shoes and pulling out the insoles to show the soft feel and support that the shoe will give me. He was bang on with his request to look at some other garments immediately after we had the shoe selection done.

I came away from the visit feeling as though he had a genuine concern for my satisfaction with the fit and feel of the shoe. He did not maintain the up sell with me as he was starting to look after other customers and left me on my own to find a pair of tracks and go and try them on. He was serving someone else when I came out of the dressing room and asked how they were on my way to the cash desk, to which I said, I just did not like them and was only going to take the shoes.

I found the dressing rooms to be clean and tidy and well lit with lots of room to try things on.

The SA seemed to be very enthusiastic about his function and seemed to enjoy what he was doing.

I would have no problem in recommending this store to my family or friends.”

Many of the comments of the mystery shopper were connected to the sales “script” all associates were required to “perform.” What score does this service experience deserve? What would this experience “score” in your program?

In this specific business the score was a feeble failing grade, as the incredibly scripted series of behaviours was not performed to perfection.

My take is that we have a front-line associate serving multiple customers and doing quite an excellent job. This is a very positive service experience as described by the shopper. The example cites a prompt greeting, politeness, product knowledge, genuine concern and caring, a clean and well maintained store, the positive “engagement” and enthusiasm of the associate all while serving multiple customers, and the shopper ready to be an advocate of your business.

What score does this service experience deserve if your measurement scale rated the shopper’s outcome? At least a 4 on a scale of 1 to 5? What would this experience “score” in your program if the score was based on the outcome, and not the overly scripted behaviours?

What is it that we’re after? What do we want our customer-facing associates to achieve? What is the desired outcome? Is it to:

- A - perform the script perfectly ... or
- B - create an extremely satisfied customer.

Sorry to say ... A doesn’t get you to B.

There is a better way - a much more mysterious way to create extremely satisfied and loyal customers. More to come.

How to Dance With Your Customers

by Jill Griffin

I spent the summers of my college years on the coast of South Carolina as a waitress. I learned a variety of skills including how to balance and carry out five steak platters on my arm, how to gracefully dive under a table to retrieve a baked potato when it rolls onto a customer's shoe, and how to pacify a table of anxious, hungry diners who have already waited 30 minutes for their meal when I've just been advised by the kitchen that their order ticket is missing.

Sure, there were some hair-raising times, but for the most part, I loved every minute I spent waiting tables. Why? Because it was a fast-paced, customer-intensive job that provided instant gratification (by way of tips and smiling faces) when the customer experience was well delivered. Perhaps my biggest education was learning the art of the "customer dance" - recognizing when to lead the customer and when to follow. Over time, I learned to pick up subtle signals that helped clarify the customer experience I needed to deliver. Were they there to eat and run? Did they want to linger over coffee and dessert? Were small kids at the table in need of a fun distraction? I watched for the customer clues and then tailored my services accordingly.

Ace Hardware has taken the delicate dance of "lead and follow" to a whole new level with its addition of "customer quarterback" positions in its 4,600 U.S. stores. This technique was born out of the \$3.8 billion hardware cooperative's year-long initiative of analyzing ways to best serve customers, during busy stores times, without adding extra staffers. When store traffic is heavy at the

Cape Coral, Florida store, for example, customer coordinator, Linda Gillard, gears up to “call the play.” She talks to incoming shoppers, analyzes their body language and then alerts store staff on how to best serve them:

Mission shopper with no time for small talk?

Browser?

Shopper gearing up for a big project?

Gillard makes the assessment and then, using an earpiece, radios ahead to staff so they are ready in the aisle to help, when the customer arrives. Gillard knows the danger of too much contact too early and is quick to warn the team, “Browser entering Housewares. No immediate assistance needed. Give them at least 5 to 10 minutes before you approach.”

Loyalty Lesson:

Customers come to us with a mindset shaped by a host of factors. We must learn to read their clues and then sculpt our service delivery accordingly. Often times, this will involve a number of staff members. That’s why systems, such as the one Ace Hardware mobilized, provide important pathways for helping front-liners “lead” and “follow” in the all-important customer dance.

Now, about that baked potato that landed on my customer’s shoe...

Have a Conversation and Care

by Rick Sidorowicz

I often visit a local branch of TD Canada Trust to look after my mother's banking, as she no longer can get out on her own. I have been very impressed with the service and care they consistently display and I can now understand why my mother always insisted on bringing the staff chocolates at Christmas.

It's Saturday morning and there are four young smiling faces at work at the tellers, two others working with clients in offices, and one smiling face at reception. There's a couple waiting for an appointment with an advisor and their young daughter is busy colouring at a child-sized desk and chair. The ATMs are also being used. All of the tellers and receptionist are serving customers. There's an air of efficiency and everyone is busy. There are a lot of smiling faces and conversations abound. I'm second in line and the wait is about 15 seconds.

"Hi Rick, what can I do for you today?" I clarify what I need and Sean goes right into action. "Any plans for the weekend?" "I might head up to the cottage to make sure it's still standing," I say. "Where's the cottage?" "Near Midland." "Nice spot, great beaches, been there many times." "And you?" And our conversation continues as he very efficiently handles everything.

Then Agnes walks by and says "Hi and how is your mother?" I fill her in and we talk and she tells me what a wonderfully kind customer she has been over the years. I will give my mother her regards.

Five minutes and I'm done and all went efficiently and I reflect that this branch has a most memorable group of efficient and caring people. Somebody is getting it right - in terms of service, conversations and caring. There was no customer service script - with canned questions and feigned interest. These people just seem to enjoy having conversations, and want to engage and connect personally with their customers as real people. And as far as I'm concerned, they really care.

Is this a one-off branch perhaps led by a most service-oriented manager, or have they had more than their fair share of good recruits? I think there's more to it. I get the sense that there something more cultural involved, that there are significant investments being made in service orientation, and development, and that customer service has become strategic to the long term plans for TD Canada Trust.

Can customer service be strategic and create a sustainable competitive advantage? Yes I think so and know so. Based on my experiences of the people that work at this branch I am very seriously contemplating moving all of my business to them - and they haven't even asked me to. If getting people to switch is a challenge for business development at the banks, I'm already teed up to do it - just because of the positive and memorable experience.

And I think there's more to it.

Consider this:

- TD Canada Trust has won the top award in seven of the eleven categories of Synovate's Customer Service Index this year, and has been the top bank three years running.
- J.D. Power has ranked TD Canada Trust highest in Canadian retail banking customer satisfaction for the second consecutive year.
- They have announced more convenient banking hours at all branches across Canada - to serve customers 62 hours a week, and opening at 8:00 am including Saturdays.
- Their most recent quarterly results reported earnings of \$1.1 billion, compared to \$886 million in the prior year.
- They have recently completed an \$8.5 billion acquisition of a major regional US bank and will be one of the largest banks in North America.

Hmmm ...

I think I "get it."

Think ‘Purpose’ Not ‘Function’

by Phil Dourado

“The front-desk’s purpose is not to check people in. That’s its function. The purpose is to welcome the customer.”

“Purpose is too often ignored in favor of function. Functional competence can be commoditized – you’re just as good at checking people in (or whatever the process is) as your competitor.”

“But, purpose is something that frees people up to contribute with imagination and even passion. You can’t impose a purpose, though. Leaders set the purpose of an organization. But, employees make the decision to buy into it. So it’s a compact or agreement rather than simply following instructions or fulfilling a function.”

**Theo Gilbert-Jamison,
V-P. Training & Organizational Effectiveness,
The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company**

The Purpose of a Housekeeper

This is what happens when, say, a hotel housekeeper, sees her purpose as ‘enlivening the senses’ (the Ritz-Carlton purpose) rather than simply clearing up a room.

It’s a story I heard Tom Peters tell:

A customer wrote to the Ritz-Carlton expressing his astonishment at the behavior of the housekeeper during a stay in New York with his wife and daughter. After a day sight-seeing in the city, they returned to their room, only for the daughter to complain that her teddy bear was missing.

After a quick search, they found it hidden in the towel cupboard, with a foil-wrapped chocolate clasped in its paws. The next day, the bear had disappeared again; the daughter found it under the bed with another chocolate in its paws.

At the end of each day, for the duration of their stay, the daughter couldn't wait to get back to the room to play 'find the teddy' with a housekeeping maid she never actually met. "It was the best part of her stay," wrote the customer.

What can you do to help bring your organization's purpose to life so your people deliver an exceptional customer experience like this housekeeper did?

Make Yourself Memorable

by Rick Sidorowicz

I think most people love receiving gifts and souvenirs of a most memorable experience. There are many ways to surprise and delight your customers and it rarely has to cost a lot of money. It's the thoughtfulness and appreciation that counts.

A friend recently told me a story of a flight on Emirates airlines. Of course they provided his children a little kit of activities to do during the very long flight, and, then they went beyond. They took photos of every child on the flight, put them in a little frame that had the flight number, route, pilot and attendants names and presented them to all before arrival. What a wonderful gesture of appreciation and a most memorable souvenir for a young child.

Is that something you could apply in your business?

I remember attending a conference of all of the executives in a most progressive organization. As we arrived for the three day session a photographer took shots of every participant as we registered, and many more shots through the sessions. At the conclusion of the conference our chairman presented an amazing slide show that featured every single one of the participants. Our take-away was a file of all of the presentations and also the incredibly memorable slide show. It's something I cherish from a most enlightening time in a very progressive organization.

What can you do to make every company event most memorable?

The more I talk to people about customer service the more I hear about the mindless and dysfunctional activities organizations do to alienate their customers. Take the telcos where customer 'churn' is a key issue.

The typical approach to dealing with 'churn or turnover is to aggressively recruit new customers with new deals, ipods, gifts and whatever.

Almost every single person I talk to is totally pissed as, being a loyal customer they not only **don't** get to take advantage of the deals for new subscribers, they never get any acknowledgement or appreciation for **being a customer**. How bizarre. So what creates the 'churn'?

What have you done to appreciate your current customers and make yourself memorable in their minds?

Create memories.

Make yourself memorable!

The Paschalis Factor

by Rebecca Morgan

As I boarded the flight, I was greeted by a flight attendant. In the course of a year, I'm greeted by dozens of flight attendants, most of whom are pleasant and professional. This one, however, struck me as different.

She not only said "Hello," looked me in the eye, and smiled, she added "how are you today?" in a way that seemed she was really interested in my response, not just a throw away pleasantry. "I'm doing great" I responded. "I'm glad to hear it," she continued, "we're going to have a great flight."

I noticed she interacted similarly with every passenger she came in contact with. She wasn't just doing her duty by perfunctorily interacting pleasantly with each person, she seemed actually interested in their responses.

A passenger had difficulty putting his too-large carry on in the overhead bin. She approached him "What do you have in here? Your life's belongings?" She tried to help him stuff it in, but no amount of shoving would get it to fit. "Darlin'" (she was from the south) "I'm afraid this baby just isn't going to make it. Let me just have those strong baggage handlers gently put this in our underbelly." He complied easily.

I chatted with her about her attitude and approach to her work. She was in her late twenties, had been flying for a while, and really liked what she did. "I like people," she stated clearly. "It's clear you do," I confirmed, "but what about difficult passengers?" "I've not met

someone I couldn't get through to. I just treat them with respect and don't let them ruffle my feathers. They all come around sooner or later."

Flight Attendant Paschalis Cowell is from Louisiana. She has a special way about her that makes you feel better to have been on her flight. Look for her on American. When you find her, tell her I said "hello."

The Perfect Customer Experience by Rick Sidorowicz

I like Dale Wolf's definition of the perfect customer experience:

"The perfect customer experience is one which results in customers becoming advocates for the company, creating referral, retention and profitable growth."

Clear and precise. It's the positive, memorable and emotional impact that creates advocacy and loyalty - and that creates business!

Dale's blog is a rich source of information on customer experience. It's appropriately titled [The Perfect Customer Experience](#). Enjoy!

Customer Service Scripting

by Rick Sidorowicz

The trouble with compiling a book about great customer service experiences is that there are just so few experiences and stories to talk about. What a sad state of affairs! C'est dommage. But then again, what an incredible opportunity!

I've been involved in creating customer focused cultures for many years and have seen the incredible empowering impact it can have on your front line people and on tangible business results. There is no doubt that when customer service becomes strategic for your enterprise you can win – beyond your wildest imagination. But most organizations, most of the time, don't get it.

For most enterprises most of the time, the best they can come up with is customer service scripting. Scripting is really, quite feeble. It speaks to an intent to provide a certain minimum of engagement but most often just sounds like lip service to customer service.

I've wondered why. I think I have the answer.

I think it is all very logical and reasonable. It does seem to make sense.

If a customer is satisfied, her expectations of you were met, the product was good, the service was fine – what's the impact? Might tell a **few** people about it. (Positive but not overly memorable.) You get paid, life goes on.

If you wow your customer! (And that's a very good thing!) You'll create a fan (maybe a raving fan) and loyal supporter who will tell **several** people about his wonderful experience. Great referrals! Excellent stuff! (Positive and very memorable.)

But if you screw up, guess what? Your customer will tell **a lot** of people about this very negative and memorable experience. (All negative experiences are very memorable – aren't they?)

And here's the kicker. If you screw up and then screw up the complaint process your customer will tell **hundreds** of people about her most negative and very memorable experience of you!

So the logical solution is to avoid the negative – to have a play safe script for your people to “perform” to avoid the nightmare. Have your service providers ‘get with the program’ and do their very best to meet expectations and minimize the risk of screwing anything up. Totally logical! It's an MBA approach to engineering the customer service “experience.”

Trouble is ... we all know it's lip service. Your customers know it and feel it. Your service providers know it too. That's why it doesn't make any \$%^& difference! All it does is keep you on a very mediocre path and not very memorable, unless of course you screw up, which you inevitably will.

You cannot ever dream to provide a script to deal with every new and unique experience! Yet most businesses most of the time keep on trying the same things and then wondering why the results aren't really any different. Must be a problem with your people – in their commitment and execution.

This reminds of a wonderful question posed by Paul Levesque in one of his presentations. “Are your people unmotivated, lackluster and uncommitted 24 hours a day, or only the 8 hours a day they spend with you?”

How do you create great experiences for your customers if every new and unique experience is new and unique? You have to start from an ethic or value of service. It’s about who you are and what you stand for and believe in. And you can’t fake it!

It’s about inviting positive and caring people to share your values and then being able to make it real for your customers. Stories help communicate some of the elements of success however, great service is always “improv” within the framework of shared values. You create the framework and ‘context’ and then empower your people to unleash their creativity to make it so.

So please throw out the scripts and unleash the creativity of your people.

Try this the next time you’re in one of your favourite restaurants and the server attempts to very professionally recite all of the specials of the day with all of the detail and pizzazz they can muster, (and it’s best if it’s a new server trainee.) Say, “Wow, sounds like you have the script down pat, good job!” “Have you tried them?” Which one do **you** like best?” Very often you will get more scripting as in “They’re all great!” Occasionally, your questions will invite the wow factor into the experience and you might just get a most interesting, improvised, passionate and refreshing performance.

Scrap the scripts. Let your people perform!

Lessons from a Venetian Waiter

by Sara Holtz

I have just returned from a wonderful week in Italy. There were lots of interesting sights to see (Pompeii in particular was amazing) and great cappuccino to drink, but the highlight of the trip was two dinners my family had in a small trattoria in Venice (Da Zorza on Calle Fugazi).

What made the dinners so special was our waiter. He was very enthusiastic about the food the restaurant offered and very knowledgeable about the various menu offerings — cautioning me against adding parmesan cheese to my spaghetti with seafood and suggesting a light white wine to start dinner but a heavier white wine as dinner progressed.

He didn't make us feel foolish when my son ordered spaghetti with meat sauce and french fries. He asked questions about where we were from and what we had done that day. He brought us cornmeal cookies with chocolate drizzles, grappa and after-dinner drinks — all gratis.

Now you may wonder why I am telling you about this (I promise, it's not just to make you salivate). Our two wonderful Venetian dinners illuminated two important business development lessons.

You can learn a lot about what constitutes good client service by paying attention when you receive either great or poor service from another service provider. And that can be any service provider — whether it is your waiter, your dry cleaner, your accountant, or your financial planner.

In this case, I realized that what made this experience so positive was that the service provider was enthusiastic and knowledgeable about his service offering. He was delighted to share his expertise with us and didn't flinch at my son's order. He showed genuine interest in us and provided a level of service that went above and beyond what we expected. All of these are equally good practices for a lawyer who is trying to develop a relationship with a prospect or nurture a relationship with a client.

The next time you experience particularly good or bad service from a service provider, break the experience down into its elements. What specific things did the person do that impressed you one way or the other? How could you translate that into how you serve your clients or approach your prospects?

The other lesson is that little things can go a long way in enhancing a relationship. In the context of the cost of the dinner we had, the "freebies" we received were actually very minor. But the fact that someone had given us something for free had an enormous impact on how we experienced the evening.

What small thing could you do that would wow your clients?

- Give advice off the clock.
- Send them a book you think they would find interesting.
- Introduce them to someone they might do business with.
- Send them a list of your favorite restaurants in a foreign city.
- Remember their birthday with a card.

I learned a lot from our waiter that evening. Not the least of which was that a hug from a handsome Italian man is a nice way to end a great meal!

Be FHE by Rick Sidorowicz

Robin Sharma captures the essence of “wow” in his three simple attributes:

“I can’t help observing businesses in action. At every touch point in every business I do business with, I’m watching to see if they get it. Or if they don’t.”

The three simple attributes of the best employees at the Greatest Organizations: they are **Friendly**, **Helpful** and **Excellent**.

Friendly looks like a smile, using your name, a great attitude and just raw good energy. **Helpful** is all about initiative. Trying to get you the result you want versus passing the buck. Seeing things from behind your eyeballs and then doing whatever it takes to make you gasp “wow”. And **Excellent**...well I know you know what that looks like. It’s about devoting to becoming BIW (Best in World) at what you do. About playing a big game - whether you’re in the mailroom or the C-Suite. About being brilliant in the work you’ve been blessed to have. ”

A Perfect Experience in Landscaping **by Rick Sidorowicz**

Exceptional service experiences are rare however, today I had the most perfect experience buying shrubs and plants, and I received an education in the process. Best of all - I feel totally invigorated! I may have a new career in landscaping.

Situation - Major concrete work on the front steps required demolition of the trusted shrubbery that was in the way. Concrete work is done, granite coating is complete (after many hours of effort), all railings are now pristine white - only issue is a naked landscape. I need (or think I need) two sort of evergreen things about four feet high for each side of the steps.

I do a little research. I think about \$100 will get it done.

So I dig out the old stuff. Tough going but I am on a mission to complete this project. Several hours later I have the old out and new holes, but then I think I need more foliage in this tapestry. Dig more holes - another one there on the right, two more there to the left and just one more on the corner as an accent.

So now I have many holes in the ground and haven't a clue what to put in them.

Off to Sheridan Nurseries on Burnhamthorpe Road, my closest plant people.

I'm wandering, looking at these emerald things that might work, and then looking at other shrubs that might fit and really wanting

someone to talk to. “Need some help?” from a young lady who could see that I did. “Yes I do.”

This young lady was incredible. I outlined my project. She understood. We discussed exposure to sun and soil conditions. We were on our knees looking at the emeralds and she was so very knowledgeable about how to best transplant them but I just couldn't see how I get the holes big enough to make it work. What other options?

We explored several. She took me on a tour to explore everything - the special characteristics of spruce, how these other ones were unique, which ones thrived best in various conditions, how to transplant, how wide they will grow, how high they will grow, how to trim, how to maintain - what a learning experience - and she was so knowledgeable and sincere!

So we settled on two blue spruce as the 'soldiers' for the stairs, and several other accent pieces. She also suggested a special transplanting solution, several bags of their soil, and a few bags of mulch to make it all work. Everything I needed to become the landscaping artist I was destined to be. She helped me to the cash, ensuring the shrubs were safe in my hands, and thanked me for trusting my needs with her.

I came back the same day for two more pieces to complete my work. She saw me wandering again and wanted to know how the project worked. “Superb” I said, just need a few more. I could see in her smile that she enjoyed being of service and helping me create my little work of art. A little conversation and exploration and she

helped me find two additional perfect pieces to complete my masterpiece.

It was a wow for me - experiencing sincere, honest, knowledgeable and professional service.

I think it was a wow for her - in being the expert, being of service and helping me succeed at my project.

The outcomes: I set out to spend \$100 on two shrubs and did spend just under \$600 and was very happy doing so. Sheridan Nurseries now has a very satisfied customer who is referring them to others (as we speak) and I will be a customer for life.

Sincere, honest, knowledgeable and professional service. What an enjoyable experience!

The New Principles of Service

by Rick Sidorowicz

Remember the seven steps of selling? They are a little “foggy” for me today but “overcoming objections” and “dealing with buyer remorse” come to mind. Are you still thinking that way? “Foggy” for me is OK, as the seven steps of selling are outdated and done - they’re bunk. And if you’re stuck perfecting your techniques I predict you will lose more than you win - and in short order, you will be out of business.

We are in a new era of service. Forget selling. I assert that all “selling” - b2b, b2c, me to you, you to me - is now all about being “of service”. “Selling” is a dead concept. Banish the word from your vocabulary. From this day forward don’t ever think about selling anything to anybody!

Think service - and live by the following principles:

- sincere,
- honest,
- friendly,
- knowledgeable
- professional

There are no other rules, no seven steps, nada. We are **all** now in the personal professional services business, and that speaks to integrity, credibility, trust and value. You get there by bringing the new principles of service to life in all you do.

What Kind of Pillow Do You Prefer?

by Ed Horrell

I like to find examples of companies who offer what the French Creole refer to lagniappe...a little extra. I contend that the best companies are the ones who offer a little extra in their service...something that sets them apart.

I found this recently in Nashville, Tennessee.

I was to speak to a breakfast meeting to a group there and needed to find a location near the venue. I went on line and “Googled” hotels near the venue to avoid rush hour driving. I found the Hotel Preston (www.hotelpreston.com).

I was impressed enough with their website to feel comfortable to book a room there. The rooms looked nice and comfortable, and I felt comfortable with my decision to stay there.

What I discovered when I got to my room was what impressed me.

On the bed in my room was a little laminated card that read:

“You have worked hard all day...Nothing worse than an uncomfortable pillow to ruin your night’s rest. The Hotel Preston has the answer. Please select from our pillow menu to ensure a perfect night’s rest. Dial 0- We are awaiting your call. Soft, medium, firm, extra firm, hypoallergenic”.

As an observer of companies who offer lagniappe (pronounced lan-yap) as part of their service offering, I was obviously impressed. I

am still impressed enough to use the Hotel Preston as one of my lagniappe examples each time I speak.

I decided to look a little further and contact the Hotel Preston general manager, Bill Ghumm.

“The pillow idea came from listening to our guests at other hotels. They were consistent in saying that they wished they could have pillows like the ones they had at home” said Ghumm.

What a unique idea...listening to your customers!

“The response has been fantastic” Ghumm goes on to say. “People love to choose their pillow”.

The Hotel Preston also offers other “little” extras, such as pet fish companions, milk and cookies, CD selections, and games. Ghumm says “if our guests want it, we will get it.”

I hope readers of this article will ask themselves about their own company lagniappe. What are you doing that sets you apart? What are YOUR customers telling others about the way you do business?

Or are you the same as everybody else?

Why not learn from the Hotel Preston? Take the following steps and see if your customers will start talking about the service you provide.

Be bold and ask your customers what “little extra” you could do to make your service memorable and different from the others. This can be done via an anonymous survey or small focus group. It doesn’t make any difference...ask them.

When they tell you what it is, do it! Find a way. You’ll probably find, like the Hotel Preston, that it won’t cost a lot.

And the best part...don’t make a big deal out of it. Make it happen and let your customers talk about it as opposed to YOUR making a big deal out of it.

Give your customers the pillow they want and they’ll dream of your service at night.

Beyond Being Satisfied

by Rick Sidorowicz

In this book we are advocating from a very strong point of view of customer service - clearly, that the outcome you must create for your customers is a very positive and very memorable experience. It's the "Wow!" factor. It's "wowing" your customers! And the "wow" is always positive and memorable, and to be positive and memorable it must be a positive, memorable and emotional experience. That's a lot of wows, positives and memorables - and it's the only outcome that makes a difference in terms of your business results.

Satisfying customers is not enough - it never has been. In some organizations that have made great strides in measuring customer satisfaction there is a growing dilemma: Survey says our satisfaction index is improving; but our rate of churn or defection is increasing as well. How can this be? Why do customers who appear to be satisfied, or tell us they're satisfied, defect to the competition?

There is a growing body of research on customer decision making and loyalty that supports our very strong point of view.

In **Human Sigma** published by Gallop Press, John Fleming and Jim Asplund present the results of several fascinating studies that illuminate customer behaviour. They have analyzed customer satisfaction ratings and found that those customers who are *extremely satisfied* can be classified into two distinct groups - *rationally satisfied* and *emotionally satisfied*.

They report that the rationally satisfied customers, although extremely satisfied, lack a strong emotional attachment to the company. And just as we might all predict, *emotionally satisfied* customers outperform *rationally satisfied* customers on all dimensions - average spend, frequency, loyalty, rate of defection, etc.

One of the most fascinating findings however, is that, (and please read this slowly), **rationally satisfied customers behave no differently than dissatisfied customers!** Wow! Interesting findings.

In a study of “advocating” the authors report similar results. *Rational advocates*, who report that they are *extremely likely to recommend a company to others*, ultimately behave very similar to *non-advocates*. And course, *passionate (emotional) advocates* deliver far superior performance on all dimensions. Wow!

Human Sigma is an excellent book if you need more data to develop a strong point of view about service.

So, the only outcome you should strive to create for your customers is the ‘WOW”, the positive and memorable experience - the emotional experience.

Nothing else really matters!

Have It Your Way by Rick Sidorowicz

Have you experienced a situation where you really didn't want to appear difficult but you just had to have it your way? Great service shines when you can get beyond the scripts and allow people to be creative.

We were a little late for brunch and far too early for dinner, but we wanted to spend a few hours overlooking the bay and catch up on conversation. I was also fixated on having a traditional surf 'n turf and, as this was a wonderful seafood restaurant I was totally enamoured with having a lobster tail as a treat. It was a special occasion and I so hoped this would be very memorable.

After a most engaging conversation with our server who was so very knowledgeable about their private label wines and the menu, I popped the challenge. "Can I tell you what I really want?" A moment of truth – her reaction was delightful! "Absolutely!" A wonderful smile and she was up for the challenge.

"Well, I'm not sure if we can do that; lobster is on our dinner menu and I don't know if they're ready to serve this early." (managing expectations) "I would love to make it possible and I will see what I can do. Please give me a few minutes with the chef."

A few minutes later and a beaming server confirms that she can make it so. Sounds wonderful, make it two, and then a modified version for a third were our orders. We were having it our way and our server did whatever she could to make it possible. And she was delighted to be able to do it.

What an incredible early dinner with excellent food, good company, and a most delightful and engaging server. She encountered a challenge and stepped up to the plate with enthusiasm. She was our advocate to break the rules to wow her customers, and we were. The food was superb and her service was so very positive and memorable.

As I write this I think you may think this is quite a trivial matter – I had a great meal with wonderful service and ... so what.

The so what is this.

Playing within the rules we would likely stayed within their brunch menu and would likely have spent about \$50 for three. Our server's product knowledge and enthusiasm to make our day resulted in a final tally of almost four times that expectation and very delighted customers. Wow!

And what is the value of a positive and memorable experience in terms of positive advocacy? How about telling 20,000 to 30,000 people about that experience? Well that is what is happening as we speak. (Is that a wow?)

For the record, when in Vancouver, BC, Canada you must visit The Boathouse on Beach Road at English Bay for excellent food and superb service!

What's Your Definition of Above-and-beyond Service?

by Rebecca Morgan

My friend, internationally acclaimed concierge-level service speaker Holly Steil and I were talking about what constituted world-class service. I had just returned from Malaysia and Singapore where I stayed in 4- and 5-star hotels. I gave her a few examples of what I thought was extraordinary service:

- The bellman who took me to my room of the 600-room at the Berjaya Times Square Hotel called me by name two days later, with no contact in between.” That’s standard at a high-end hotel,” Holly said.
- The concierge at The Legend Hotel who escorted me from the lobby down nine floors to hail me a cab, even though there was a doorman who could do it. Holly shared, “All concierges would assist you in getting a cab if they didn’t have another guest waiting.”
- The front desk clerk at the Gallery Hotel who took my carry-on luggage and escorted me to my room.” All guests should be escorted to their room,” Holly said. True, but it’s usually by a bellman, not the front desk staff.
- The front-desk and bell staff at the Gallery called me by name throughout my week-long stay.” Hotel staff should know and use guests’ names all through their stay.”

I argued that even though these things might be in the Standard Operating Procedure book, they were hardly standard in my experience, or at least not prevalently.

So if these things were supposedly standard at any good hotel, what made up higher level service at any operation, whether in retail, hospitality, or a call center? What behaviors made up concierge level service? And how could we teach these behaviors, ensure they were being used consistently, and measure the results of their use?

Holly said we had to teach staff how to think like a concierge. She says, “The practice of exercising creativity, ingenuity and efficiency to fulfill a customer request are job requirements that are nurtured and honed by the people who are known in hospitality for ultimate service. The attitudes and skills that make a successful concierge are applicable to many service oriented jobs, from administrative assistant to security guard, ticket-counter clerk to telephone service representative. It is the spirit in which the job is performed that makes the difference.”

But how does one teach resourcefulness? Creative thinking? Putting yourself in the customer’s shoes? How do you know when your people are going above and beyond? And what does above and beyond look like to your customers? They may think it is just what is expected when you think your staff has bent over backwards to provide a special service.

Holly and I have some ideas on how to do this. If you have ideas, we’d love to hear them. (Holly is the author of *Ultimate Service, The Complete Handbook to the World of the Concierge*.)

How Zen It Is!

by JoAnna Brandi

This weekend I had the time to take a long walk on the beach and play with some of those ideas. Lately I've been working with the word "Simplify." The world is so noisy and cluttered and everyone I know is feeling a little overwhelmed with it all. Thinking about how to makes things easier, simpler and even more peaceful, my mind turned to thoughts of business.

My business and yours.

What all businesses have in common is the need for taking outstanding care of customers. No matter what kind of business you're in it's critical (especially now with the economy moving in the direction it seems to be going) to have a philosophy about and a methodology for continuous improvement in the area of customer relationships.

That goes for internal customers as well as external customers.

As I walked an idea began to form in my mind as an outgrowth of this word "simplify." What simple advice could I give to start the year off about taking care of customers?

What do the companies that are doing it right know, and do, to sustain what I call "exquisite" care? What qualities do they embody that others might learn from?

I walked, and walked and walked some more. I stood and looked out on the ocean and took several deep breaths and then it came to

me. Not to my head but to my body – I got a feeling of being grounded, of being still and at peace.

And then the ideas flowed – companies that have mastered customer service – ones whose customers rave about them practice a Zen-like approach to the activity.

So herewith you have the 4 P's of the Zen Approach to caring for customers.

Present

Presence is paying 100% attention to the person in front of you, whether they are on the phone, standing in front of you or popping into your email box. Present means listening, with your whole body, not to respond, but to understand. Present is knowing that your job is to make sure that customers want to come back and do business with you again.

Being present to the customer means remembering to bring them up in a meeting, and remembering that they are the reason you are in business. “How will this change we are about to make affect the customer?”

Being present means being responsible to and for the success of the relationship. It means showing up authentically with intention and attention.

Companies that deliver world-class service understand that power is always in the present moment – and they use the moment to build the relationship stronger.

Positive

Every customer deserves to walk away from an interaction feeling good about doing business with you. When the service giver has the skills necessary to maintain a positive attitude and recover quickly from negative situations they have a good chance of creating a positive impression as well as a positive state of mind and body for customers.

Mounting evidence from the emerging “Science of Happiness” field tells us that the experience of positive emotion indeed builds good health, helps make us more resilient, and even allows us to think in broader, more holistic ways. Optimists live nine years longer than pessimists. Workers report being more productive in the presence of positive people. Companies that want to win over and win back the customers had better be focused on creating a positive outcome in every interaction.

Patient

That positive outcome may come as a result of enormous patience. In this hurry-up-I-only-have-a-second world, patience is truly a virtue. Patience is required to understand what the customer needs (even if they don’t know themselves.) Patience is required to walk them through the process, one more time, with caring and compassion, even if you have told them before how your website works. Patience is required to make sure they know how to use your service or product and use it to their advantage.

Patience (and its sister, Kindness) means finding yet another way to create value, one that matters to the customer, so you can stand

out in the crowded field. Patience – especially with those internal customers – to find out what really makes a difference – what really motivates and inspires – pays off handsomely in loyalty and repeat business.

Practice

I think of customer-caring as one would think of yoga, golf, woodworking, or cooking – a craft that is practiced, and mastered, over time. In all these kinds of endeavors we add to our learning on a regular basis, incorporate the new skills and do them over and over again until we master them. The practice of these things is a reward in itself – the same thing with service – if you allow yourself to look at the Zen of it.

Every day we get the opportunity to practice the art of relationship in life – in business, in community and in family. Some days (just like in yoga, or golf etc.) are better than others. We master an art when we learn to look at our practice objectively and understand what went right, what went wrong and how we can be better today than we were yesterday.

In business, as in other areas of life, practice makes profit. The discipline of returning our thoughts to taking care of our precious customers and creating value for all the people we work with does pay off handsomely.

As we practice being present – really showing up in our work; as we practice being positive – making the effort to look for the good and refocus our attention; as we practice being patient – to be calm in the face of craziness, we will find ourselves enjoying work more.

We will find ourselves enjoying others more, and we will find that customers prefer doing business with us. Use the 4 P's to get to the 5th – **Preferred**.

Closing the Delivery Gap by Rick Sidorowicz

A survey by Bain & Company's James Allen, Frederick F. Reichheld, Barney Hamilton and Rob Markey reveals a serious gap between awareness, intent, assumptions and the actual experience of the delivery of customer service.

Most companies assume they're giving customers what they want. Usually, they're kidding themselves. When Bain & Company recently surveyed 362 firms, they found that 80% believe they deliver a "superior experience" to customers. But when we asked customers, they say only 8% are really delivering.

Time to get real, and perhaps time to really ask your customers!

Be the One to Say Yes

by Rick Sidorowicz

In *It's Not About the Coffee* Howard Behar, former President of Starbucks International, identifies **Yes** as the most powerful word in the world. "Yes is freeing and inspiring. It means permission. It means possibility.

Saying yes makes you feel good."

Saying **No** might initially be a self serving "rule" to achieve an illusion of efficiency, but it is self limiting and even mindless when viewed by your customers. It can also become a very insidious habit that may be driving your most valuable customers away.

"WE DON'T ACCEPT \$100 BILLS!" It's usually in caps with an exclamation point. So ... you won't accept legal tender, and you stick that sign in my face, all because it minimizes your risk of counterfeit currency ... and you won't spend the few bucks for the technology that would minimize your risk and accommodate my needs. Time to say yes.

"WE OPEN AT 8:00AM!" Is that customer banging on your door at 7:45 just some transient individual who happened by your store, or perhaps one of your most devoted clients who needs her double low fat mocha latte with room to go for an earlier than usual meeting? Say yes and open early.

Several years ago in the menswear business we had a store manager that consistently exceeded all sales targets - quite uncanny, really. His store was in a mall well known for tourist

visitors. All stores in the mall opened at 9:30 am and the hours of operation were defined in the lease.

I just had to get a better understanding of what he was doing to replicate it as a best practice for our business. Our conversations usually concluded that his superior leadership and skills were the factor, and he was an exceptional leader, but he had a little ace up his sleeve.

As a very conscientious manager he always arrived early to be ready for business. Typically, his opening routine involved walking the mall, checking out all shops and having a coffee.

More often than not he would strike up a conversation with visiting shoppers who arrived early, and were disappointed that they would have to wait to shop and spend their money. He always offered to open the store for their immediate, personal and exclusive shopping experience.

It always worked very well. No need to wonder why he did about 20% of his daily target before opening.

Wow your customers by saying **yes** whenever you can.

Seven Things Every Customer Service Person Needs to Know

by JoAnna Brandi

You may be a small business owner, the manager of customer service, operations, branch banking or any number of organizational functions. You may be someone in a customer facing position yourself. Either way, this is an important message for you to read and to pass on.

In my opinion, Customer Care is everyone's business, and should be part of everyone's job description. But in every organization there are those people – the customer facing people – whose primary responsibility it is to take care of the customer. It's to them I am speaking today, so be sure to make sure that everyone in your organization has a chance to read this tip. It's especially critical in these challenging times to take EXQUISITE care of the customers we have, so herewith are seven things that I think every customer service person needs to know.

1. You chose this job, or it chose you.

Either way, it's in your best interest and the best interest of the customer for you to show up and be fully present to the job. Set an intention every day to be the best you can be at your craft. Make it a point to do a little learning about how to get better at it every day.

Find joy in doing your job well. Recognize and acknowledge yourself for all the "wins" during your day. (Even if, and especially if your boss doesn't notice often enough.)

2. Be proud of what you do.

You play an important role in the company's success. I'm here to remind you that the experiences you provide for the customer could make or break their relationship with the company. Even if parts of the process are broken, even if the wait times are long, even if the customer is upset about some aspect of the company, a great experience with a customer facing person can make up for a whole lot. You have the opportunity to make deposits in the customer's emotional bank account and keep those customers happy.

3. You have emotional genius.

Being good at customer service requires a great deal of emotional intelligence. In fact, in your job, EQ is as important – and often more important – than IQ. Here's the neat thing – being in a people oriented position gives you the unique opportunity to practice and even perfect those EQ skills. That's going to help you in every relationship you have in your life. As you get better at your job, you get better at your life. That's a bonus!

4. The customer is not always right.

I know you might have a little card that came from the corporate office that tells you they are, but I'm telling you what you already know to be true. They are not always right. Sometimes they are wrong, sometimes they are mean, sometimes they lie, sometimes they drive you crazy. But being right or wrong is not the point. Your job is to be so skillful that even if they are wrong, angry, nasty or just having a bad day, you have the ability to turn a bad situation into a better one.

A highly skilled customer facing person is a magician, able to transform and diffuse difficult situations into good ones.

5. You work in the performing arts.

Service is not like a manufactured good. It can't be made ahead of time and put on the shelf. It happens in the moment, as needed, and it's all about performance. That makes you the performer. Just like an actor (or a public speaker or trainer for that matter) there will be days when you just don't feel up to it and you will have to act "as if" you were. Here's where your good training comes in. Rehearsal and visualization work to help you prepare for a great performance every time. Think of yourself as an improv artist.

6. You have a stressful job, but the amount of stress you take home every day is up to you.

How you view your job is just as important as how you do your job. If you allow yourself to over dramatize, 'catastrophize', get defensive, and take everything personally, you're in for a tough time. Your body reacts to the perception of danger with primal instincts to fight or flee – both involving a cascade of stress chemicals that can damage your body. You have the power to change how you view any situation – including your job. Find a frame that makes it less stressful and more enjoyable.

7. You have the opportunity to make the world a better place every day.

Whether you deal with 10 customers or 200 customers a day, you have the power to create positive experiences for all of them. When

you make your best effort to add sincere care and appreciation to every interaction, you are infusing it with positive energy and vibration. When the customer leaves the interaction with you feeling good they are likely to spread that positive emotion. Emotions are contagious.

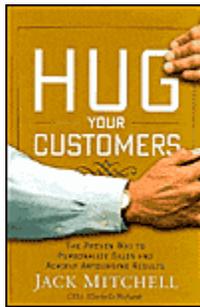
You have the power to spread positivity and make the world a better place. We all know how important that contribution is these days. Take it seriously and you can make a serious difference in the lives of your customers and every one they touch. Allow yourself to see the ripples of good will and well being you are sending out into the world. Spread happiness and appreciation and you will feel energized.

So there you have it – a short story every customer facing, customer caring person should see. Spread the word around and start a lively dialog in your organization by discussing each of the points – and perhaps by adding a few of your own.

Caring is contagious – please spread the word ...

Create a Hugging Culture by Rick Sidorowicz

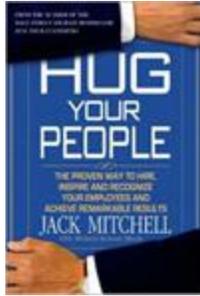
Jack Mitchell is a “hugger” and his first book - **Hug Your Customers** - has become a handbook on providing exceptional customer service. All retailers should make this required reading for their associates.



Hug Your Customers: The Proven Way to Personalize Sales and Achieve Astounding Results by Jack Mitchell

Once a customer, always a friend — that is the simple philosophy behind Mitchells / Richards, two of the most successful clothing stores in the nation — and that is why Jack Mitchell, his family, and associates inspire the enduring loyalty and admiration of his customers, including today’s top CEOs.

His follow-up - **Hug Your People** - hits the mark as you cannot expect your associates to passionately serve customers unless you care deeply and sincerely about them. I love Jack’s approach and the stories of treating people very well, and I’m sure he’s mentioned all of his people in the book in one way or another.



Hug Your People: Hire, Inspire and Recognize Your Employees to Achieve Remarkable Results by Jack Mitchell

“Giving great personalized customer service has always been the foremost goal in my family, but one thing we never lose sight of is that you can’t possibly deliver great service if you don’t treat your own associates right.”

In **Hug Your People**, he shares his secrets for creating happy employees, secrets as simple as they are revolutionary. Here are a few:

Have Expectations and Standards, Not Rules and Regulations

I’m told that many, even most, companies maintain thick employee handbooks jam-packed with all shapes and types of rules — rules about when you come to work and when you leave, rules about how often you get a break, rules about coarse language, rules about penalties for defacing bulletin boards, rules about this, that, and everything, so many that even the person who wrote them couldn’t possibly know them all. So you have a business drowning in rules that no one can remember, including the managers who dreamed them up.

When you have piles of rules, we believe it makes people extremely uneasy. They feel like they’re back in school — or,

worse, in prison. And the upshot is that they don't feel as if they're trusted.

You know the old saying "Rules are made to be broken." Well, we find that people look on rules as meaning that you're testing their integrity. Which translates to "I don't trust you." So one of the most important ways we show that we trust our people is by not having rules except those required by law.

You see, we're a hugging culture based on values and principles, not rules and regulations.

So how do we establish parameters? Rather than rules, we have expectations. And if you have a company comprised of trustworthy people, setting examples and expectations works a lot better than rules.

What's the difference between rules and expectations? To our mind, rules are unbending. If the rule is that you have to take lunch from noon to one o'clock and you don't take it at that time, then you starve to death. So rules are rigid. To me, they're cold and impersonal.

Expectations, on the other hand, are warm, and they're flexible and freeing when they need to be. The clear understanding is that you are expected to live up to our expectations, and so you come in and leave when you are scheduled to, but you don't need a time clock to keep you honest. Expectations are mutually agreed upon — and they can be fulfilled in different ways by different people. No two individuals are completely alike in talent, strengths, motivation, or personality — everyone has plenty of quirks or weaknesses — so

why should everyone have to follow rigid rules? Expectations are pliable and they may be adjusted to suit an individual and build on his or her strengths.

What, then, are some of our expectations?

There are seven key expectations that are important to me:

- Be positive, passionate, and personal.
- Work and play hard — and work smarter, too.
- Understand the power of the team. That means exhibiting mutual respect and trust. Fun and success mean we, not I (remember the old expression, “There is no ‘I’ in team”).
- Dress appropriately (this especially applies to us since we’re in the clothing business).
- No surprises.
- Always, always be open and tell the truth!
- Hug one another and hug the customers

We also like to use the word standards a lot in place of rules. In general, we set very high standards, and we expect everyone to do their level best to live up to them. My tenth-grade civics teacher wrote in my Staples High School yearbook, “Live up to your potential,” and I obviously never forgot it and think about it often, and that’s what we want our people to do: live up to their highest potential.

That’s why effort, hard work, and education are emphasized. We like people to keep raising the bar, especially in areas where they are naturally strong. We realize that if the bar is raised appropriately with each individual in mind, then everyone will reach

his or her personal and professional goals and will enjoy — indeed love — the journey, the process, the playing of the game of the career of life.

And so within our expectations we establish specific standards, or targets. For instance, we expect our sellers to achieve \$1 million in sales their first year with us (but we don't horsewhip them if they do \$900,000). We expect tailors to be fast and accurate — we never like pants that end six inches above the ankle — and to work as a team. And, of course, we expect everyone to support one another in a sale, to share their skills and “secrets” on personalizing relationships with other huggers, and to store data for everyone to use in an open and honest way with respect for privacy and confidentiality.

So set expectations for your associates, but leave rules to the prison wardens.

Thanks Jack!

Wow the Employee - Wow the Customer!

by Shep Hyken

How much would it cost for somebody to buy you out of your job?

Well, this is exactly what Zappos.com does. Haven't heard of Zappos? They are an Internet retailer that sells shoes. They are known for their customer service. They pay shipping costs - both ways if necessary. Internally they have a saying. "We are a SERVICE company that happens to sell shoes. And apparel. And handbags. And Accessories. And eventually anything and everything."

I think the first line of their "mantra" sums it up; a service company that just happens to sell shoes. They get it! And, not only for their customers, but also for the employees!

According to an article by Barbara Rose, writing for ChicagoTribune.com, Zappos offers \$1,500 to anyone who wants to quit. They actually offer to buy their new employees out of their jobs! (Between 2-3% of the people accept the offer.)

You see, Zappos only wants people working there who want to be there. They have an incredibly successful company, and realize that it is not about selling "stuff," but creating an experience that people love. No matter how great their website is, or how great their products are, their people back up the entire customer experience.

According to Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos.com, "...in addition to trying to WOW our customers, we also try to WOW our employees, and the vendors and business partners..." And, they do!

Zappos has created a culture that has employees saying, "I love working here." How do they do it? First, everyone knows the "mantra." Second, Zappos trains well. Third, there are really cool perks that WOW the employees. No, not the usual corporate perks. They have pot-luck lunches, bowling parties, haunted houses at Halloween, holiday decorating, karaoke, picnics, go-carting and much more. The culture is fun. Most important, they have an environment where people can just be themselves.

All of this is a lesson on taking care of your internal customers so you can better serve your outside customers. Zappos is a role model in this area.

So, what do you do to create an environment in your organization, or in your department that has people saying, "I love working here?"

Think about what Zappos does.

Just Google Zappos and you will not only get a link to their website, but many links to articles and accolades that just might teach you something about creating an environment that says WOW to customers AND employees!

Engage

by Rick Sidorowicz

How many truly positive and memorable shopping or purchasing experiences have you had last week, or last month? I suspect just a few. I bet it's also very likely you can relate many more negative stories, especially if you've been out and about in the hectic holiday season. Have to wonder why that's so in this enlightened age of customer engagement, delight, devotion and creating raving fans.

I think it all stems from a very flawed point of view about people, processes and performance - one that stifles, limits, controls and demeans. This may also correlate with the very disturbing studies of workplace disengagement, where up to two thirds of employees are reported as either actively seeking new jobs or disengaged in their workplace. Tough to expect customer engagement and delight with discouraged or disengaged front-line customer-facing employees.

In **Human Sigma** published by Gallop Press, John Fleming and Jim Asplund coined the phrase "The Terminator School of Customer Service" to describe the point of view of eliminating the human factor in business processes.

"Every interaction one of our employees has with a customer is a chance for something to go wrong. If I could get rid of every single human touchpoint we have with our customers, I would."

Wow! What a context for disengagement. What a self limiting belief. And where does this take us?

To control and compliance, micromanagement and yes ... customer service scripting. We will require, monitor, measure and reward employees to follow prescribed behaviours to provide exceptional customer service. We will standardize and eliminate variation.

Do you see the flaws in the logic? Yes every interaction one of your employees has with a customer *is* a chance for something to go wrong, as it is a new and unique experience between people. How can you standardize behaviour if every interaction is new and unique? Do all high performing people achieve their success in identical ways? Of course not. There are many ways (behaviours) to achieve the desired outcomes.

There is a better way. Instead of scripting behaviours, controlling and micromanaging, why not clarify the outcomes and expectations, provide proper training and tools, encourage all to exercise their creativity and skills, and provide rewards and recognition for the achievement of the desired outcomes?

Deal with reality, embrace variation and focus on the outcomes.

Provide a set of values - sincere, honest, friendly, knowledgeable, professional service - and what that looks like for the customer.

Create an opportunity for your people to unleash their creativity.

Care about and truly value your people. Encourage their development. Invite your people to create your 1001 ways to wow your customers and have a voice in the process.

I assert that this approach will be far more effective in creating an environment of pride and engagement - and that is fundamental to creating positive and memorable experiences for your customers.

Reality check:

Every encounter your employee has with a customer **IS** an opportunity to screw-up! ... and ... every encounter your employee has with a customer is a **new and unique experience!** ... and ... you cannot script for every new and unique experience!

A better way

Create the context in which your employees care about providing sincere, honest, friendly, knowledgeable service, and wowing your customers.

- Clarify the desired outcomes;
- Provide proper training and tools;
- Provide reward and recognition for the achievement of desired outcomes;
- Provide a set of values to guide behaviour;
- Care about and truly value your people;
- Encourage their growth and development;
- Give your people a voice in the process;
- Embrace the variability in behaviour and focus on the clarity and achievement of the desired outcomes;
- Encourage your people to unleash their creativity and talent to achieve the desired outcomes.

Rona Gets “It”

by Rick Sidorowicz

Rona is Canada’s hardware and home renovation depot, a formidable competitor to the Home Depot and Lowes invasions, and one of their key differentiators is service. I had a very positive and memorable experience this morning, in my do-it-yourself plumbing adventure.

Situation: broken pipe at the cottage and it’s mid season and I’ve been delinquent due to travel. Received a quote for over \$1,000 from the local contractor and decide to do it myself. Hey, if I can replace the eavestrough, strip and paint, and put up a few shelves I should be able to crawl underneath and get this work done without burning the place to the ground.

OK.

So I’m off to the Rona in Midland, Ontario, and after wandering a bit ask if there’s some new high-tech solution to plumbing for cottages. Sorry, not - but all the help I ever expected was on the way.

I drew a diagram of the broken pipe issue.

My plumbing expert then drew a diagram of the solution and all of the parts it would entail. We found the parts, added a pipe cutter, a few short sections of copper pipe and I was good to go - with a complete understanding of what to do and an appreciation for why each element was needed to cope with the annual freeze that most cottages up here experience.

Excellent so far - I am on my way to the solution, and feeling confident about being able to pull it off.

Then a wow ...

“Would you like a crash course in soldering pipes?”

Thank you!

So I wonder if Rona is in the business of selling plumbing parts and pipes, or in the business of enabling me to have confidence and competence in meeting my plumbing challenges. There’s a subtle but very profound difference in outlook that creates a most positive and memorable experience, and loyalty.

With the ongoing “money pit” at the cottage they will have my business for years to come.

Check out Rona here

- <http://www.rona.ca/content/home>

Self Service or Full Service?

by Rick Sidorowicz

With the advent of the web and the most incredible advances in technology we may be compelled to move to a fully automated self service model for our customers. There's no doubt that self service is being embraced for the low-touch, quick and convenient access for routine transactions and inquiries, and customers of all demographics are increasingly web savvy and time stressed. A few clicks and you have the information you need or the quick transfer and bill payment, or flowers for Valentine's Day, tickets to the game or a reservation in your favourite restaurant. It's a win win for the customer and the provider. Nice when everybody wins.

Is it self service vs full service? Are they really mutually exclusive?

What about both at the same time? What a paradox!

Full service? Is that still a relevant experience? Absolutely, and especially within the self service context. What gives?

Intriguing research (from Forrester) suggests that we have a growing segment of self service web savvy customers that want it all. And that is you and me, (or I) as we speak.

Delegators - Hand off most purchasing decisions to the experts - 31%

Soloists - Make and implement their own decisions on their own with no help from experts - 19%

Validators - Gather their own information and make their own decisions but actively seek the advice of experts - 51%

Does that make any sense to you?

Can you see the paradox of the great acceleration to a self service economy and the growing need for more full service experts at the same time?

So I'm thinking ... make it easy for me to gather information, compare alternatives, understand the differences, truly appreciate the value you offer - to enable me to make my own decisions - that's a wow! And then I will validate that with the expert that you should be.

Something like all-at-once-ness ...

Customer Experience

by Rick Sidorowicz

Whether you're into personal, face-to-face, online, voice, email, self service, full service, B2B, B2C and even B2E service - in any instance of 'service' - it's the customer's experience that matters.

Look beyond whatever 'construct' of service you have in your head or organizational mindset. It's not full-service vs self-service or bricks-and-mortar vs online or internal or external - it's all "service" - and who you are shows up for your customers in their experience of you (or your people, or web-site, or call centre, or communications, and actions.)

Sit back and think about the experiences you offer.

In **The Open Brand** (New Riders Press) authors Kelly Mooney and Nita Rollins highlight four categories of experiences to help companies move off a closed and singular brand focus.

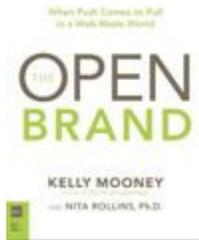
The On-Demand Experience - characterized by efficiency, ease, control, findability and immediacy;

The Personal Experience - characterized by acknowledgement, dialogue, customization, privilege and popularity;

The Engaging Experience - characterized by participation, belonging, immersion, entertainment and inspiration; and

The Networked Experience – characterized by self-expression, ego gratification, co-creation, community and social change.

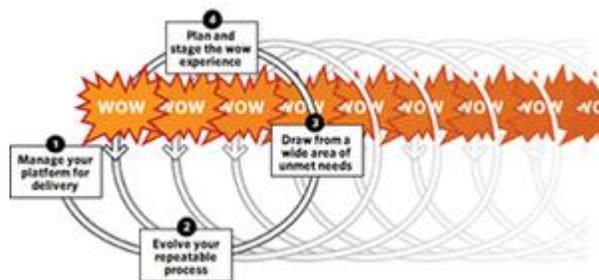
Then think about how you can create experiences that continually wow your customers.



One of the best books of the year.

The Long Wow by Rick Sidorowicz

As you're thinking about 'wowing' your customers, and creating an ongoing, lasting, emotional connection and relationship, go beyond and think about how you can create "the long wow" - a deep and ongoing engagement. It's beyond being consistent. It's something like this:



It's about 'wowing' your customers over and over again. It's a powerful concept!

No Sale is Ever Final (Again)

by Rick Sidorowicz

If you are serious about service and want it to be a differentiating factor you'll need to take a good look at your customers' complete experience of you. Do all of your processes and procedures reflect your sincere service ethic? A good place to start is at the end - in how you handle returns.

What is your return policy? Is it easy to understand and apply? Does it build confidence and trust?

I suggest that anything less than "No Sale is Ever Final" is just lip service.

"No Sale is Ever Final" means that if for any reason a customer is not 100% satisfied with my (our) product or service we will make it right (to their 100% satisfaction) or we will give their money back, no hassles, no problems, no nonsense. When you (valued customer) choose to spend your money with us we will guarantee you will be satisfied, no matter what.

Sit with this for a moment - examine it carefully. It is very empowering.

If we are honest, if we are ethical, if we believe in the value of our products and services, if we believe in being of service - how can we not act otherwise? Anything less means that you do not believe that your product or service is of sufficient quality or utility or value to stand up in the marketplace. If that is true you had better fix it fast or you will soon be out of business.

Check out L.L. Bean for some guidance and inspiration ...

“From kayaks to slippers, fly rods to sweaters, everything we sell at L.L.Bean is backed by the same rock-solid guarantee of satisfaction. It’s been that way since our founder sold his very first pair of Bean Boots in 1912. Today we’re proud to continue the tradition – by offering quality products and standing behind them.

Of course, we want you to be the final judge of quality. If you’re not satisfied with your purchase, we’ll replace it or give you your money back. It’s that simple.”



Thank you Mr. Bean.

Happy at Work by Rick Sidorowicz

How's this for happiness at work?



Wonderful post from Alexander Kjerulf - the Chief Happiness Officer! He speaks and consults in businesses all over the world, showing executives, managers and employees how to change workplaces from dreary and stressful to more fun, energized and happy... and profitable! Please visit <http://positivesharing.com/> for his excellent book - Happy Hour is 9 to 5 – and more!

Top Ten Tom Peters Quotes from London

by Phil Dourado

Here are Richard King's personal top ten takeaway thoughts from another Tom Peters mega happening in London.

1. Excellence comes from human beings doing things of value that customers find memorable.
2. Remember. You are the only human being in the world who can help this particular customer at this particular moment in time.
3. The thing that keeps a business ahead of the competition is excellence in execution.
4. Brand inside is more important than brand outside for sustained success.
5. Leaders' careers will usually be determined by their handling of one or two critical events that no one could possibly anticipate or plan for.
6. Make sure that you spend your time on the things you say are your priorities.
7. Tuck the shower curtain in and give away two-cent candy!
8. It's remarkable how quickly an excellent culture can be torn apart by poor management.

9. Irrelevance comes from always doing the things you know how to do in the way you've always done them.

10. If you love your company and love what you do, you will serve your customers better—period!

Thanks Richard,

Thanks Tom.

World-class Customer Service

by Ed Horrell

These are the ten keys to world-class customer service. These come from the “best of the best” service providers. They can be learned and implemented by any company and are the core of everything we do. They are as follows:

We believe:

1. Values are the basis for the service a company delivers;
2. Customers **MUST** provide the input for change, not the boardroom;
3. The way employees are treated is the way they will treat customers;
4. Employees **ARE** the company;
5. Employees **MUST** be empowered and trusted to take care of customers;
6. Complaints are gifts;
7. Kindness leads to loyalty;
8. Customer service **MUST** be discussed regularly and often;
9. The Law of Attraction works in business;
10. Great companies know their mission and never rest.

A Customer Service Culture

by Rick Sidorowicz

Nordstrom is often cited as one of the most admired enterprises in terms of its customer service culture. Wonder why?

Here are their values as posted on their web site – very clearly ‘on purpose’ where unleashing creativity and being ‘of service’ are indeed ‘strategic.’

Our Values

Here at Nordstrom, our people and the passion they have for service make all the difference.

We’re family.

Nordstrom began as a family business and while we’re now publicly traded, the Nordstrom family is still actively involved in the business. We continue to cherish our shared experiences, celebrate our achievements and appreciate one another — just like family.

Use good judgment.

We trust one another’s integrity and ability. Our only rule: Use good judgment in all situations.

Be empowered.

Want to go above and beyond for a customer? Make a suggestion? Try something new? We want you to take the initiative and we’ll support your efforts to deliver exceptional service.

Setting goals matters.

And we set ours high. Here at Nordstrom, you can determine your own success and make a real difference by accomplishing the goals you set.

It's your business.

Our employees have a personal, financial and professional stake in the success of our Company. Here, you're encouraged to take ownership of your career.

Healthy competition is good.

And we love to win. If you thrive in a high-energy, competitive team environment, you'll love it here.

Be honest.

We value open, honest and respectful communication.

Be recognized.

We value people who drive results and we regularly recognize outstanding performance — whether you're serving customers or supporting those who do.

Be a good neighbor.

Our Company and our employees support hundreds of community organizations through contributions, outreach programs, special events and volunteerism.

Be kind.

We still believe the golden rule has a lot of merit: Treat others as you'd like to be treated. We work hard to offer each and every

customer great service and we believe it begins with showing courtesy to everyone, including our coworkers.

Have fun.

Fashion is one of the truest forms of self-expression. It's creative and colorful and totally limitless. If you're passionate about fashion, this is the place for you.

Our door is always open.

Have an idea? Want to talk? If it's important to you, we're listening. It's important to us that every person who works here feels valued, welcome and cared for. And if you've got a great idea, we want to hear about it.

Wow!

We will end volume one of 1001 Ways to Wow Your Customers here, and look forward to many more memorable articles and stories in volume two.

Thank you for your interest!

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