

November 2006: The Customer Service Edition

Customer Service: A culture or just a job title?

Have you ever sat down and thought "when did I last receive *really good* customer service?" For many of us, it can be very difficult to think of an occasion.

However, if the question was changed to, "when was the last time I received *really bad* service?" it is likely that a number of different examples will spring to mind!

Why is this?

As a nation, we do not (yet) have a customer-focused culture. Many job titles have the words "customer service" in the title, ("Customer Service Advisor", "Customer Service Manager" etc), but how focused are the staff on delivering customer service excellence?

Very often, these positions are process, rather than customer focused. By this, we mean, focused on delivering the product or service, based around an internal process, rather than on the needs of your customer.

The United States has a true customer service focus

While it is easy to knock the "*have a nice day culture*", it does work.

One of the best examples of customer service that I have encountered was on our first visit to Florida. We passed the same toll booth each day on our drive from the villa to the Disney parks. Each day, as we stopped and wound down the window to give the man our 50 cents, he asked the children who they were going to see and what they were looking forward to.

This focus by someone who was employed to collect road tolls really stood out and set us up for the day ahead. Contrast this to the hand and (if you are lucky) the grunt when we go through toll booths in the UK!

Now consider your customers

If they were thinking about their interactions with your company, how would they answer the questions posed in the first paragraph? Could they put hand on heart and say you have delivered really excellent customer service?

Or does nothing stand out as excellent service?

Here are five simple-to-do basics that create great customer service:

1. Put yourself in their shoes: what does it feel like to be your customer? What would you want, expect, need?
2. Listen to your customers. Don't try to come up with a reason, answer or excuse. Just listen, respond with respect, and make them happy.
3. Always deliver on your commitments. Never promise what you cannot deliver - always under-promise and over-deliver.
4. If you foul up: own-up, say you're sorry and put it right. Be over-generous with your reparations and turn the mistake into a chance to impress.
5. Be pleasant, courteous, precise, and understanding to everyone. Above all, leave your troubles at home and keep an optimistic, positive attitude: *smile*.

These are all simple. What makes great customer service a real challenge is doing these basics consistently: day-in, day-out, all day.

Retaining valuable customers

In business today, price is no longer a major differentiator. So many companies offer price promises and will undercut the opposition. The one aspect that will mean your customers come back to you is **how they are treated** and the **level of customer service**. There are some statistics to support this:

- A Company can increase profits by 85% if it retains 5% more customers each year.
- It is 5-8 times as easy to sell to an existing customer as to a new prospect.
- Some direct mailing tests to groups of "customers" and "prospects" found that approaches to customers were four and a half times more profitable than approaches to prospects.

Source: Research from Bain & Co

Customer service is all about attitude

Nurturing and retaining customers is crucial to the success of your business. Customer service is all about attitude rather than techniques. A member of staff can have all the techniques in the world but if they do not believe in the business and do not want to do it, they won't.

Are all your staff focused on making the customer the focus of their world?

How we can help

Kent Trainers run a number of courses designed to help you deliver strong customer service including "Customer Service Excellence" (next date - 18 January 2007) and "Complaints Handling" (12 December 2006).

Alternatively, you can commission an in-house course that works with your staff on this crucial area. This is the most cost-effective choice if you have five or more staff to train.

Impartial training advice

Kent Trainers are always looking for other services that might benefit our customers and complement our own programme of courses. So we thought you might like to know about a new service that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) can offer you.

The **Train to Gain** service has been set up by the LSC following a number of successful pilot programmes.

The service offers impartial advice, matches training needs with training providers and ensures that training is delivered to meet employers' objectives.

Train to Gain is important because if businesses are to be successful, you need to compete. And, to compete, you need to train your staff.

The advice offered will be impartial, flexible, responsive, and offered at a time and place to suit your business.

For more details, look at the website: www.traintogain.gov.uk

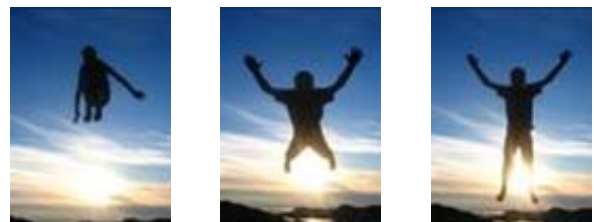
Or ring the helpline on 0845 751 2288

Latest Management Thinking

The Wizard and the Warrior

The Wizard and the Warrior is a splendid book by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal. Having identified four roles for leaders in their earlier book, *Reframing Organisations*, they assert that two roles get insufficient attention.

Most leaders focus on rationality and structure – the **Analyst** role - and on people and the human side of leading – the **Caregiver** role. *The Wizard and the Warrior* focuses on the two remaining much-needed and under used roles.



The Wizard

The Wizard brings wisdom and foresight, deploying their imagination and creativity to inspire their followers through the powerful use of symbols. They bring a sense of magic and purpose by displaying passion and charisma.

The Warrior

The Warrior brings persistence and a willingness to fight. They display strength and courage that gives them real power in a political and commercial environment. Their primary role is to protect their organisation from external challenges.

Types of Warrior and Wizard

Not surprisingly, there are different types of Warrior and Wizard – the authors identify three of each. In addition to the Authentic Wizard and the Principled Warrior, they discuss a harmful, or toxic, version of each and also what happens when the Warrior or Wizard experiences inner conflict: The Relentless Warrior and the Wannabe Wizard, whose effectiveness can be compromised.

Spend time thinking about your leadership style on our two-day programme: **Leadership Skills for Senior Managers** on 21 & 22 November at the West Heath Training Centre, Sevenoaks.