



APPOINTMENTS

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Ensuring and retaining customer satisfaction

By Ranjan Saheed

Customer satisfaction, customer delight, customer intimacy.....the list goes on. Each term has a different emphasis, but the central core is the "customer" and the importance of the customer to marketing.

Irrespective to the type of industry (FMCG, Services etc.) size of the organization and the scope of activities of an organization, we can generalize the "specific" expectations of customers. Customers are 'paying customer'. Therefore, an organization has no right to survive or even thrive, without providing the needs of the paying customer.

Customer requires to be treated as 'special'.

Consistency in the level of service provide, is another requirement of customers. Customers have being afforded "variable" service levels.

Customers are conscious of privacy and it pays respect this need. It is often something customers really value.

Continuous value in the product and services offered is a modern day customer requirement. In fact, customers are demanding that 'value be recreated' by marketers on a continuous basis.

In many instances customers do not really know or are not certain, about what they really need. In such circumstances marketers are expected to clarify as well as satisfy the needs.

Customers should and require a practical mechanism to provide feedback on the 'exchange counter'. Feedback is critical to the marketer as well.

Arising from this point customers need acknowledgement and action as far as their feedback is concerned. Nothing irritates a customer more than silence from a marketer!

Silence is not golden in this instance.

Practical Insights on providing customer delight

Customers expect courteous and attentive treatment from marketers. After all they deserve it- they are nothing but the paying customer that provides the wages for those who serve them.

Customers expect to be dealt first and the circumstances second. In other words, emotional aspects should be given priority over practical aspects.

There is one thing, application of same, is something altogether different. There are many theories on how to understand

customers etc, however the practical reality is quite different.

Make a sincere and concerted effort to understand the needs of customers. This is easier said than done. Empathy is the essential ingredient. Get in to the customer's shoes often).

Be committed to serving customers, to the best of your ability. "Nothing but the Best" is the motto, you should live by. No matter what time of the day, day of the week, service to the customer comes above all else.

Truly and passionately, love your customers. Treat them as partners and not annoyances of your business. To be passionate about customer is not easy. As in the case of any relationship, you will face the upside and downside.

Respond to customer enquiries, queries and proposals speedily. Speed is key for two reasons, emotional and functional.

Emotionally a customer is happy to receive a quick response. Functionally a performance aspect is involved.

Try and cultivate a true friendship with your customers. In order to develop a genuine friendship, be open to suggestions,



criticisms and comments. Honesty and openness are key ingredients in cultivating lasting friendships.

Innovative your business process continuously, in order to deliver superior value to customers. As stated earlier, it is the ability to "add" value that result in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Learn the art of saying "no" to a customer in a matter that retains the relationship that has been built. It is not always possible to say "yes" to customers in an objective manner.

Pay regular visit to your customer's offices, factories etc. this helps you to understand the true chemistry and culture of your customer or customer organization. Further it provides opportunities for both formal and informal interactions.

Make your customers, your best ambassadors. Let your customers speak for you. This is the most powerful endorsement and it is important to strive towards same respect your customers' wishes, right for privacy etc. After all, you like to be treated with respect and dignity. Then why not your customers?

Marketing starts at home! In order to satisfy and delight external customers, employees (internal customers) must have the right orientation, training and motivation. In addition to employees in marketing, other functional employees too need to have a 'customer focus', in carrying out their jobs.

Internal marketing was originally thought to be of importance in service marketing and for contact employees.

However concept has now been extended to cover all types of marketing and non-contact employees as well. This clearly demonstrates the practical relevance of the concept, towards marketing effectiveness.

You cannot expect a demotivated, untrained employee to strive to provide the level of service excellence required to 'delight' customers.

A pre-requisite is that the employee is delighted to work for his/her organization. This is only possible if the right organizational culture is prevalent, where employees are continuously motivated, trained and valued.

As marketing guru Philip Kotler states, "you must hire the right people, train and motivate them, in order to delight customers."

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Leading from the front

There are many different power bases that a leader can develop and use.

These include problematic ones such as the power of position, the power to give rewards, the power to punish and the power to control information. While these types of power do have some strength, they put the person being led in an unhealthy position of weakness, and can leave leaders using these power bases looking autocratic and out of touch.

More than this, society has changed hugely over the last 50 years. Citizens are individually more powerful, and employees are more able to shift jobs. Few of us enjoy having power exerted over us, and many will do what they can to undermine people who use these sorts of power.

However there are three types of positive power that effective leaders use: charismatic power, expert power and referent power.

This article teaches you how to build expert power.

Expert power is essential because as a leader, your team looks to you for direction and guidance. Team members need to believe in your ability to set a worthwhile direction, give sound guidance and co-ordinate a good result.

If your team perceives you as a true expert, they will be much more receptive when you try to exercise influence tactics such as rational persuasion and inspirational appeal.

What's more, if members of your team see you as an expert, you will find it much easier to guide them in such a way as to create high motivation.

If team members respect your expertise, they'll know that you can show them how to work effectively;

If members of your team trust your judgment, they'll trust you to guide their good efforts in such a way that you'll make the most of their hard work; and

If they can see your expertise, team members are more likely to believe that you have the wisdom to direct their efforts towards a goal that is genuinely worthwhile.

Taken together, if your team sees you as an expert, you will find it much easier to motivate team members to perform at their best.

So how do you build expert power?

But just being an expert isn't enough, it is also necessary for your team members to recognize your expertise and see you to be a credible source of information and advice. Gary A. Yukl, in his book "Leadership in Organizations," details some steps to build expert power. A summary of these steps follows:

Promote an image of expertise: Since perceived expertise in many occupations is associated with a person's education and experience, a leader should - in a low key way - make sure that subordinates, peers, and superiors are aware of his or her formal education, relevant work experience, and significant accomplishments.

One common tactic to make this information known is to display diplomas, licenses, awards, and other evidence of expertise in a prominent location in one's office - after all, if you've worked hard to gain knowledge, it's fair that you get credit for it. Another tactic is to make subtle references to prior education or experience (for example, "When I was chief engineer at GE, we had a problem similar to this one"). Beware, however, this tactic can easily be overdone.

Keep informed: Expert power is exercised through rational persuasion and demonstration of expertise. Rational persuasion depends on a firm grasp of up-to-date facts.