

Article 1

“WOW” CUSTOMER SERVICE

- genuine Customer Service that's guaranteed to produce consistently better profits for your business and make every working day an exciting challenge – and, a pleasure.

WHAT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Customer service, at the level of excellence, is the most “explosively” effective means of generating dramatic **PROFITABLE** growth in any business.

EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE, THE KIND THAT MAKES YOU SIT UP AND SAY “WOW” IS ABSOLUTE DYNAMITE – BUT SADLY, MOST COMPANIES DON'T EVEN KNOW IT!

It can put companies into the stratosphere compared to their “earthbound” competitors. In measurable terms, we are talking hundreds of per cent growth possible in any business.

The words “Customer Service” have been around for years. Many companies believe they are practising “Customer Service”, when in fact they are at an advanced stage of “lip service” only. They don't really understand what genuine Customer Service is all about.

Customer Service – the words alone tend to tell us that it means to serve or service our customer. But is that enough? Does it mean purely giving the customer what they have asked for in a pleasant manner?

Being nice to people is only a small (albeit vital) part of providing great Customer Service. The important part is designing systems that allow you to do the job right the first time – every time! All the smiles in the world aren't going to help you, if your product or service is not what the customer wants.

Does it mean only giving service to people who have already become your customers? What about all the other people out there who are not yet customers, but you'd like them to be?

Delivering Customer Service comes from within. To be genuine and effective it must become a way of life – not just a quick trip to “smile school” with a handy spiel to learn off parrot fashion.

Delivering genuine Customer Service means developing customers who really want to deal with you and your company and will see no reason to change to a competitor, either now or in the future.

They like you – they like your company and they love dealing with you under an umbrella of **total trust**.

The best Customer Service is that which virtually guarantees a customer will continue to do business with you and recommend others – **FOR LIFE!**

So, developing “Customers for Life” should be every Company’s goal and is the essence of true Customer Service.

CREATING A CUSTOMER SERVICE “CULTURE”

Creating a powerful Customer Service culture within any business needs a structured approach and the following points need to be implemented.

1. PHILOSOPHY

Before **great** Customer Service can be delivered, it must start with a Company philosophy. The owner of the business must first decide on the importance that Customer Service will play in the successful and profitable growth of their business i.e. before you can even think about providing better Customer service, you must first determine how good you want to be. Then, you must determine the impact your philosophy will have on every aspect of your business and your employees who will implement it.

2. POLICY

Once the philosophy has been established, this needs to be transmitted to every manager, supervisor, section head, etc, as well as every other staff member. Preferably by means of documented policy, relating to the treatment all customers (internal and external) and potential customers must receive and the public “face” the company will always portray.

The policy needs to be documented so that both existing and new personnel can study it and check it should there ever be any doubt. In this way, there will be consistency in the way Customer Service is delivered throughout the life of the business.

3. AUTHORITY

It is important for individual management and staff members to be given the necessary authority and therefore responsibility to act on behalf of the customer. This may often cost the company money in any given instance, but

the long term result is an excellent Customer Service image for their company, with the other resultant benefits.

Award winning Ritz Carlton Hotels, publicised a policy whereby every staff member could spend up to \$2000 of the company's money when dealing with customer problems, without having to refer to a supervisor or manager.

Whilst some company management might recoil at the possibility of employees spending their money in this fashion, usually, where staff members are given this responsibility, they treat it in a responsible manner and customer satisfaction levels are excellent.

They far outweigh any costs and it does wonders for the individual staff member's self esteem, because of the trust their company has in them. Therefore, the way they conduct themselves and carry out their business is exemplary. Also, the company saves potentially thousands of dollars and countless hours that would otherwise be wasted, while staff chase management and have endless discussions to decide on a course of action, often whilst a customer is still stewing and waiting for the results.

4. SYSTEMS

As with one of the world's amazingly successful fast food franchises, one of the main reasons they are so successful is that they have an almost foolproof system. Everyone carries out their business in a way that guarantees consistency of service and product anywhere in the world. People can rely on that consistency no matter where they go.

Again, it is vital that once systems are put in place, they are documented so there isn't any doubt as to exactly what has to be done, when it is to be done and how often it is to be done, so that existing and new employees will all be working in exactly the same way.

This comes right down to the simplest things, like keeping the washrooms clean. Deciding to what standard of cleanliness they need to be kept, how often they need to be cleaned, what items and how many need to be supplied, and a check system that ensures it is done (every time!)

5. KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Those who care about serving their customers in the best possible way, understand that their product knowledge (their own and competitors'), has to be the best and make the effort to ensure this is so. This includes knowledge of all other departments within their company, so they know what they can realistically promise, and to avoid letting the customer down by putting impossible demands on others.

Constant training gives the knowledge necessary to develop superlative job skills. Demonstrating those gives confidence to the customers, who react well to being treated professionally.

6. SELF ESTEEM

The better we feel about ourselves, the better we project ourselves to others. Simple self esteem training and reading is invaluable, if it helps you to value yourself and understand your true worth – all of which leads to the next point.

7. ATTITUDE

Apart from their systems, attitude was taken to be all important by the international fast food franchise when hiring staff, regardless of their level.

If your own self esteem is high, then your attitude in dealing with others will be right, and seen as such by all those who you come in contact with.

This is vital because:-

WHAT YOU DO IS IMPORTANT

THE WAY YOU DO IT IS CRUCIAL

A company can do the most wonderful things for a customer – they can give the earth; even overcompensate for a problem. However, if this is done in such a way that it seems to be a bother, or annoying to the person who is arranging it, then the customer may accept the recompense, but often that's the last the company will see of them.

Too often when this happens, companies stop doing the wonderful things because they feel they are not working and are merely costing them money. What they should do is correct the attitude of the people who are implementing the policy.

If something is given grudgingly, the customer immediately feels they have been put down in some way and will not wish to deal with a company who feels about them in such a way.

8. COMMUNICATION

Everything resolves around effective communication. It is vital in all business, social and personal interactions. It is part of the policy and system we

discussed. There are two elements that need to be looked at to ensure the correct communication occurs, and that everything happens as and when it should.

Communication System

Communicating a simple message from one person or one retail outlet to another should be easy, but the communication and the way it is done, is a part of the system and should be carried out in the same way, each and every time.

Communication in the right way

As we said before with attitude, it is the way the communication is done which will determine whether the communication is successful and whether the communicator's requests are carried out in the way they should be.

To summarise, the system of communication needs to be documented so it will always be consistent. Most importantly, "What you do is important – How you do it is crucial", so all communication must be carried out with the right attitude.

In the next article, we will look at a list of things you may wish to implement, to assist you in developing your own Customer Service "Culture".

Ian Grace conducts training throughout Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA and UK. In the Real Estate arena, he is known as "Mr Real Estate Advertising" internationally. In 2003, he became one of only two non North Americans ever, to be invited to speak at NAR (the annual National Association of Realtors Convention – the world's biggest), in the USA.

He also conducts powerful "WOW" Customer Service training programs that were nationally accredited throughout Australia, to Newspaper, Motor, Retail and Real Estate Industries and blue chip Corporate clients.

His range of world first Real Estate Advertising support material can be purchased direct from his website. He can be contacted at: -

Ian Grace Marketing

Phone (61 7) 3715 8630
Fax (61 7) 3715 8650
E-mail amazing@iangrace.com.au
Website www.iangrace.com.au