

THE SERVICE DIALOGUE

Let's Show Some Love!

Providing customer service at the level of customer satisfaction is no longer acceptable, and that is the minimum standard. But what does service at this level look like, and how does one create it? Creating truly memorable experiences is a very spiritual and creative level of service, which has little to do with what one encounters in so many organisations and establishments. It is not simply about improving standards, providing more technology, and doing the same things even better. It is a level in which service is infused with love, care, warmth, empathy, and creativity. Everything you do touches people's hearts, including mundane tasks, such as responding to "Please help me understand"

I remember months back when I saw this beautiful bag at a certain shop that I would prefer not mention by name, wow I just had to buy that bag. I walked into the shop and without allowing my eyes to roam to other things that would otherwise affect my already disastrous budget, asked the shop assistant to show me the bag. The assistant gladly handed me the bag and all excited, I started checking it out, the pockets, the texture and the zip, and yes at the zip is just where all the drama began. Noticing that it was faulty I remarked "mama this bag costs P360.00 and it's supposed to be Nike, are you sure it's the real thing because the zip is problematic ". The lady quickly snatched the bag from out of my hands and started being all defensive and obstinately told me that they do not sell fake merchandise and if I feel that the bag is not up to my standard then I must just leave at once. I tried to explain to her that I was not at all trying to be rude and I even tried to apologize. She did not want to hear of it. Well at that point I just had to take what belonged to Caesar before the fireworks turned into uncontrollable wild fires. I wondered "where is the love?"

Someone once wrote "You know when an establishment is creating truly memorable service experiences because it's in the eyes of the leaders and staff, like in Celine Dione's song "The First Time I Ever Saw Your Face". It's in the body language, like in Ronan Keating's song When You Say Nothing At All! The leaders and staff feel about their customers like in The Corrs' song "Everybody Hurts Sometimes". Above all, you feel it. There is a light in their eyes and face that shows an attitude, "Whose heart can I touch now?" or "Where can I create a truly memorable experience?" The staff do things spontaneously to touch the hearts of the guests; things which often they have never been allowed to do before or dared to do. In other words they show some love! Their goal is not just to provide service, but to touch the customers' hearts. Every customer!

The intangibles of caring play a far greater role here than ever before in the service industry. There are probably no manuals for this level of service, which is a good thing. This is the age of creating experiences and touching hearts. People don't remember what you do or say, but they remember the feelings you create. In love, most times we look for the simplest things yet we constantly deal complications. We seek for trust, search for companionship, we cry for faith and understanding, we search for closure, and humanity and yet we given the exact opposite of what we ask for. Just like in customer service we ask for kindness and most times we are served with the opposite. We seek faith and understanding yet most times we are misunderstood and deceived. We rummage around for closure and humanity and yet we customers are tormented with arrogance and service issues that are left unresolved. To develop love, care, warmth, empathy, and creativity organisations should focus on people's spiritual nature. This is just not training, but rather spiritual capacity development. The HR systems of organisations really have to be adapted to support this level of service. I think the direction of

customer service globally is that it will become a more and more spiritual experience, with an ever stronger focus on the core values of love, care, warmth, empathy and creativity. The often huge gap in the experience provided by organisations will close significantly. The next level of service will be to create an even deeper kind of experience and to fulfil the expectations of customers, which again will be different, but indeed we will have to create a strong foundation first in creating truly memorable service experiences in order to get there.

There is of course another perspective. Sometimes "tough love" A customer service culture has one foot in both camps - the buyer's and the seller's - and, like straddling two canoes, can be painful if the balance is not right. It's fascinating to watch a group of people evolve in a work environment. The search for meaning at work is constant and if a positive model is not presented to us, then we'll look for other things to hang our hats on. That's not usually very pretty. Most of us, as customers, have experienced being passed like the proverbial hot potato from person to person in organisations that employ people who don't really care. It is infuriating and truly stressful. In many companies, good customer care has been reduced to being given your position in the queue. Dreadful. But leave a team of people to their own devices, don't give them support or anything to believe in, and even the most talented and positive of them will end up embittered, cynical clock-watchers. So this fight against entropy is one a good company has to win. There is a saying that you can't polish a brick. In Botswana we refer to some people as "makgela" (Cannot translate this one) When building a good customer service team, one has to be picky. That means only taking on people who have the brains to understand a problem and the attitude to do something about it. It also means that you usually pay a bit more and offer a positive working environment. But we all make mistakes. And mistakes need to be rectified or else you end up with the sediment effect. That is, an organisation where no one is ever fired. Pretty soon you get to a tipping point where the bad people control the culture and all the good people leave. And Love dies....

The dialogue continues...

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