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Getting Your Team to Care About Customers | JEFF MOWATT

GETTING YOUR TEAM TO CARE ABOUT CUSTOMERS

Five strategies for creating a customer service culture

by Jeff Mowatt

One of the most common challenges I hear from managers and business owners is how to get staff to want to provide better service. After having trained hundreds of customer service-oriented teams for over 25 years, I've observed organizations that nurture the best service behaviours use these five strategies:

1. Educate Towards Empathy

It's easier to get employees to care about those coming in the door by putting them in the place of customers. I ask participants to create a list of what they expect when they are customers. Then we reveal tips on how, by simply changing a few words, staff can demonstrate they understand the client's perspective. Compare: "I'll have to check our schedule" versus "I'll be happy to check our schedule for you."

2. Send Grumps to Your Competitor

Pay attention to how each of your employees responds when a customer casually asks, "How are you?" If an employee uses that small-talk question as a licence to complain about how he or she feels (tired, busy or ready for a break) it's time for a chat or a training review. That employee needs to make a serious choice to either stop burdening clients with their problems or consider working for the competition. That might sound harsh, but the last thing today's harried customer needs is to be forced to listen to the soul-sucking lamentations of a service provider who over-shares. The bonus of sending toxic talkers to work for your competitor is your remaining staff will appreciate the more positive atmosphere with the purging of just one negative person.

3. Catch Them Being Good!

That message was pasted on a banner at a daycare across from a fitness room where I was working out. It was meant to remind the staff to pay attention when toddlers are doing the



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4. Stage a CAST® Meeting

Getting employees to care requires more than a one-time event; it requires ongoing nurturing of your customer service culture. To make the process more efficient, consider staging CAST® meetings. CAST® stands for a Customer Service Team Meeting. It's where leaders and their teams talk about how to make the experience better for customers, employees, managers and other stakeholders. CAST meetings take as little as 90 minutes a month and you'll find that in as little as six months they transform your customer service culture. Essentially they remind team members of your service mission and standards, provide a coaching moment, disseminate

customer service feedback, discuss ways to enhance the experience, and celebrate your service legends – examples where staff went above and beyond for customers.

5. Turn Service Stars into Owners

Owners care more and it shows (particularly to customers). Employees who have a vested financial interest in ensuring customers are happy over the long term take a different approach to service than those who are just waiting for a paycheque. That may mean putting your money (actually your equity) where your mouth is. At some point high-performing front-line employees, who presumably don't earn as much as managers, are going to want to create a more secure financial future. One of the most effective ways to involve them – literally – is to offer share ownership to your star performers.

Bottom line: cultivating a customer service culture isn't complicated. It does however require training and support. Some managers claim they're too busy for this. In today's hyper-competitive marketplace where your service is increasingly the only significant differentiator, what could possibly be more important than ensuring your team provides outstanding service that customers notice, pay a premium for, and tell others about? 