

Creating a Spirit of Service

Companies that really put extraordinary service at the top of their priority list establish the ground rules for good service while also working to build a genuine customer-friendly “spirit” in all employees throughout the organization.

Practically every organization in today’s hyper-competitive marketplace claims that it “puts the customer first,” and every year we hear more slogans from companies trying to convince their customers—and themselves—that they really do believe in service.

QUICK TIPS

Customer service skill training has minimal long-term impact if the organization lacks a customer-friendly spirit or culture.

A true culture of service is locked into the environment of the organization, at every level and in every department.

Even those who do not interact with customers understand and appreciate how their role impacts the customer’s perception of the company.

But the reality is that few companies have a clear, comprehensive plan to achieve a high level of service quality in their organizations. Most are long on platitudes, short on practical solutions. And those with specific plans tend to focus on compliance – requiring employees to adhere to specific standards and policies – rather than developing an organization-wide attitude of service.

Skills AND Attitude

The companies that really put service at the top of the list of operational priorities do both: They establish and clearly communicate the ground rules for good service while also working to build a genuine customer-friendly “spirit” in all employees.

This is why companies like IBM, Marriott Hotels, Disney, and Federal Express are so profoundly better at customer service than their competitors: They understand that customer service skill development is useless if there isn’t also a general customer-friendly attitude throughout the organization.

Attitude Begins At The Top

A company-wide customer service attitude begins with the organization’s attitude toward its own people. Unfortunately many managers, consciously or unconsciously, treat front-line service people as if they were insignificant to the overall operations of the organization. They typically don’t see service workers as critical to success or in need of support and development. They tend to accept high turnover as a fact of life.

But in truly service-oriented companies there is a deep understanding that these people have the most impact on the perceptions of the customer. And this emphasis on the people of the organization doesn’t start or stop at the front line.

Service-oriented companies create a service attitude that prevails throughout the company and says, “Whether you serve the customer directly or not, we’re here to help you.” The service culture is locked into the environment of the organization. Even people who never see a customer can do everything they can to help those who do. The clerical worker in the Shipping Department may never talk to a single customer, but he or she should know that the salesperson looks bad if the order doesn’t get out on time.

Re-igniting the “Spirit”

If you realize that your organization needs to revitalize its service orientation or attitude, the most important thing to remember is that what you focus on will determine your outcome. If you start by noticing and attending to your service PROBLEMS, you’ll a) Have a long list of problems, and b) probably generate less customer service spirit, not more.

Instead, look for and highlight those occasions where the customer service spirit shines in your organization, even if those instances are few and far between. Begin with the assumption that everyone wants to do a good job, then highlight and recognize the actions of those who clearly exhibit a customer-friendly attitude. You may find that the morale of your organization begins to rise out of simple pride in a job well done.

Of course you’re bound to a few individuals who just don’t “get it” and continue operate under the assumption that the customer is merely a necessary evil. While it would be easiest to simply boot these people out, the way you treat them will show others your true attitude and intentions. Summarily dismissing poor performers will show that you’re focused solely on compliance, whereas providing them with the time, training and resources to re-ignite their individual service spirit will show other employees that you’re committed to their success as well as the satisfaction of the customers. And THAT is the ultimate key to re-igniting their service “spirit.” Knowing that there is as much in it for them as for the customer.

Here are a few more practical ideas for re-igniting the “spirit” of your employees:

- Help employees see their work as a direct expression of their values.
- Highlight your organization’s contribution to worthy purpose and a sense of shared mission/vision of the company.
- Provide genuine opportunities for advancement, to gain mastery, to learn.
- Emphasize relevant participation, inclusion and involvement to build a sense of community and teamwork.
- To the degree possible, provide job variety/cross training; flexible work processes; multiple ways to reach goals in order to minimize the impact of roadblocks, conflicts, or downtime.

QUICK TIPS

Boost the customer service attitude of your employees by improving your own attitude toward them.

Let your employees know, every day, how much you appreciate their contribution to the business.

Give random awards for exceptional acts of service or simple kindness toward customer.

Remind everyone, including yourself, that every dollar in every paycheck came from the same place: a customer.