

Is the Customer Always Right?

by Chanon Collins

We have spent the last few weeks examining the effects of change and re-engineering. Little time has been spent on examining one of the most important reasons for the success or failure of a business – the customer. I have read a multitude of penned thoughts touting the successes of excellent companies – Ritz Carlton, Southwest Airlines, and Disney – but a moment needs to be taken to examine that which is close to home.

Everyone, at some point in his or her day, is a customer. It could be at the local market, post office, or even at a school. The point is that every day every person enters into an agreement with a business or organization and a service is rendered. But what type of service is really received? Do customers, in general, receive stellar service? Do we as customers expect stellar service? Or do we continue to frequent establishments regardless of the service we receive? Think of how many times you have commented on the paradox of waiting in line for over 20 minutes for “fast food.” Why do we return again and again to these businesses that offer lackluster service? The better question is – why don’t we demand better service?

The answer is not a simple one. If customers have choices in all industries – dining, retail, entertainment, and home improvement, why do they continue to return to those offering bad service? Unfortunately, we are all guilty of this activity. We continue to patronize specific retailers despite the below average service we receive. Hopefully the product we receive can compensate for the distasteful residue left from bad service.

Organizations offering bad service are not the only ones remembered. Think of a time when you have experienced superb service from a business...what made your experience extraordinary? Were you greeted warmly? Were your questions answered in an efficient manner? Did you leave with a smile on your face? In most cases of superb service, the tiny things stand out in a customer’s memory. Things such as a warm cup of coffee, a pleasant smile, and a firm handshake make a strong impression. Benjamin Franklin’s advice still holds merit – “seek effectiveness in small matters” – these are the things etched in a memory.

It would seem a logical assumption that businesses with stellar service would out-shine their competitors and bad service would become a thing of the past. This is not the case. As a business owner, take a moment to examine your company from the perspective of your customer. What type of service do they receive? Are your customers raving fans, promoting your company with enthusiastic words of praise?

Customers are the most effective means of advertising. The conversations between customers speak volumes about the services of organizations. It is their perceptions and impressions of a business that dictate its future. Oscar Wilde spoke for all customers when he voiced – “I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best.” What are your customers saying about you?