

Employer's Advantage

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From Jim Sirbasku's Desk

Crisp and Vivid High Def Customer Service

That's a great picture on your new HD television, isn't it? The images are sharp and crisp and the colors so vivid. It's grand to kick back and watch a sporting event when you feel as if you are in the middle of the game or on the golf course. But wait. Why is the screen breaking up and going dark? Somebody DO something – before we see only a test pattern and a "technical difficulties" message!

Most of us give no thought to the parts responsible for that beautiful TV image until something goes wrong. Then disbelief and disappointment set in and sometimes we get an education we never dreamed we would need, with a vocabulary revolving around such things as resolution and pixels, those tiny dots that make up an image.

Customer service in our companies can fail in just the same way: Business seems to be humming along. You've told workers that customer service is your number one goal, and you hung the plaque on the wall in your office. Complaints are non-existent, and the financial reports are good. No news is good news, right?

Companies gladly accept traditional marks that they are doing well – such measures as few complaints and customer retention. But sustaining the big picture requires more than happy numbers. There's competition out there for whatever you do, and it's trolling for your customers. If you want to keep customers happy and your company healthy, you must nurture and maintain the individual attitudes

that form employee behaviors, starting with top management.

Think of your customer service as a picture made up of thousands of tiny dots, or pixels. These combine and align to form a complete, brilliant image that pleases the eye. But if part of them malfunction, the picture might blur or break up in areas. It might even disappear completely, collapsing into a muddy smudge.

The first step in creating crisp, vivid customer service is developing a framework that describes the behavior surrounding customer service excellence. This includes getting down to the nitty-gritty of actions we expect from employees, such as urging customers to ask numerous questions, training workers how to develop rapport with their clients, or instructing employees to take the time to understand what a customer needs.

This framework must show how a company's desired behaviors align to its business goals, thus illustrating the bigger picture of what you are trying to achieve, and showing how these practices compare to those of other companies. Do your practices depart from industry standards? This could be problematic – or it could be just fine if your service behavior encourages excellence and supports corporate goals. Either way, it's good see how you are doing in the broad scheme of things and note "why we do it this way" if you differ from national norms.

The next step in your customer service plan is an internal behavior audit. You need to measure

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If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.

—Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon

attitudes toward the specific behaviors in your framework so you will know if workers are with you or not. Do they believe in the importance of following up with customers to see if they are satisfied with the service they received? Do they think good customer service includes telling a customer why he or she is wrong?

Once you have the numbers in front of you, it's time to mend the gaps in places where behaviors have broken down. Think of it as fine-tuning of individual employees or perhaps a whole department, if you discover a large percentage of staff with behaviors/attitudes outside the zone of acceptable customer service.

If you think of your framework in broad terms, it will help you hire the right people by exploring the attitudes of job candidates to ensure their beliefs about customer service mirror the company's.

Finally, remember that almost nothing thrives on neglect. The companies that perform the best measure often. They regularly "fine-tune" their image through training in areas where the picture is blurry. Through regular maintenance, they can kick back and watch the show without fear of technical difficulties or a distorted picture.

*Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International*



Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.

-- Walt Disney, film producer/director/screenwriter

BOOK REVIEW: Do You Own or Rent Your Customers?

Kindness is not a new value, but in the arena of customer service, it might be one whose time has come/gone/is returning.

Author Ed Horrell, in his book *THE KINDNESS REVOLUTION: THE COMPANY-WIDE CULTURE SHIFT THAT INSPIRES PHENOMENAL CUSTOMER SERVICE*, recalls an era when businesses were smaller and managers or owners knew their customers, called them by name when serving them and urged them to button their coats against the cold.

Compare that with today's indifference. Is personal service possible in 2008?

Yes, says Horrell, who gives numerous examples. One is a department store with legendary customer service. The store's company "handbook" is one paragraph long, thus ensuring that employees will read it. The gist of the handbook message is that the company stands for service excellence, and Horrell relates several tales that back up the store's reputation.

One widely circulated story says a clerk at the store returned a customer's money for tires that he was dissatisfied with – even though the store does not sell tires. The organization's customer service is so highly thought of that when Horrell was writing the book, people asked him repeatedly if he was including this particular store. The continuing refrain intrigued him, so he studied the store and found many gems of wisdom. It proves one of the points of his book – that people are loyal to service excellence, and they will talk about it.

The author makes several points that seem simple. He discusses four values that make customer service come alive when they replace indifference: dignity, respect, courtesy and kindness. Put into practice, this means going beyond giving customers what you THINK they want and actually ASKING them what they want.

He also asserts that good customer service is a practice that everyone inside a company must adopt. "The way you treat your employees will be the way they treat your customers. I have found this to be a universal truth; it never fails."

Good customer service separates the companies that merely rent their customers from those that actually own them, he writes. And a primary rule of ownership is that you take better care of something you own.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

THE KINDNESS REVOLUTION: THE COMPANY-WIDE CULTURE SHIFT THAT INSPIRES PHENOMENAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

208 pages

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Well done is better than well said.

-- Benjamin Franklin, founding father, inventor, politician, satirist

CASE STUDY: Gaining Confidence with ProfileXT™ Job Match

In the highly competitive advertising sales arena, a productive sales staff is crucial to growth. Although success in sales is measurable, productivity is difficult to spot during the hiring process. How do you gauge the energy and effectiveness of people you do not know?

An advertising sales organization discovered that ProfileXT's™ Job Match Pattern provides clear answers and infuses hiring leaders with more confidence.

Participants

The company chose 26 advertising sales representatives to participate. Managers administered the ProfileXT™ to each employee, and also recorded the number of each worker's new customers, the ads each one sold, and each one's overall dollar volume.

Job Match Pattern

Four salespeople ranked highest in each of the three areas (new customers/ads sold/dollar volume). Fifteen employees ranked in the middle, and seven ranked lowest.

From this scale, the company developed a Job Match percentage and matched all 26 employees against it. An 86 percent or better match most strongly identified top performers. Leaders chose this percentage as the company's breakpoint for hiring.

Results

Of the 26 employees in the study, eight met or exceeded the benchmark. All four of the top performers ranked in this group. Only one of the seven low performers displayed the same match.

Thus the pattern differentiated between the top and bottom performances made by the company's own evaluations, with these results:

- Top Performers correctly identified by the pattern: 4 of 4 (100 percent).
- Bottom performers incorrectly identified by the pattern: 1 of 7 (14 percent)

This pattern now serves as the company's benchmark for matching employees.

Summary

Using the ProfileXT's™ Job Match, the organization has developed the ability to screen sales representative candidates with success. Leaders believe their hiring practices show more consistency with ProfileXT™. Their knowledge that the PXT is based on employee attributes gives them more confidence in hiring decisions. This process demonstrates how employee selection practices can improve using Job Match Patterns.

In business you get what you want by giving other people what they want.

-- Alice MacDougall, businesswoman

Spelling Out Good Customer Service

Telling employees what you expect removes all doubt
Airing customer service complaints allows employee to find solutions
Losing customers is not acceptable
Knowing what's best should not be a mystery

Aiming high works well if you have a target
Burying a problem rarely makes it go away
Owning the business makes everyone successful
Understanding creates a common language
Training employees is an ongoing event

Ingraining good service makes it part of the culture
Talk is not cheap when accompanied by action

PRODUCT FOCUS:

New Customer Service Profile™ Report Shines Light on What Customer Service Means

For years, Customer Service Profile™ has waged war against poor treatment of the people your company needs to survive. Managers use CSP's placement, coaching and individual reports to see which job candidates' attitudes best match the organization's expectations for excellent customer service. For employees already on the job, CSP reveals which areas and/or individuals would benefit from more training.

Now a new CSP report gives organizations one more strategy to use in battling poor customer service. Called the **alignment report**, this revealing survey gives managers a dual-screen view of both marketplace attitudes and those of their own employees in one convenient document.

The alignment report works in two specific ways. First it shows Company ABC how well its customer service standards match those typical of other companies. Second, it reveals to Company ABC how closely its own employees agree with ABC's customer service values.

After viewing the results, Company ABC may want to make some changes – or may choose to do nothing at all. As with other reports, this one's power lies in the information it provides.

Here is a picture of the report at work: It takes Company ABC's answers to 50 important statements and matches them with industry norms. A sample

statement says: "All of a customer's concerns are important; never dissuade them from asking questions." In column format, Company ABC's yes-or-no response to that statement is compared with that typical of other companies. Differences are highlighted. A third column shows whether a selected group from Company ABC agrees with the company's perspective. This answer is given in percentages when employees disagree. No percentage means overall agreement.

If Company ABC's answer to the statement differs from that typical of the marketplace, it may or may not be a cause for concern. A company might want to change its response to the statement. Based on corporate goals, only that company can determine what constitutes its best customer service practices.

Large percentage differences between a company's agreement with a statement and that of its employees might be of more concern. If Company ABC believes that all of a customer's concerns are important and 50 percent of employees surveyed disagree, more exploration is necessary, and perhaps more training.

The alignment report is one more nail in the coffin of poor customer service and one more step to establishing a customer-oriented culture in your organization. Call us at (800) 406-0087.

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The single most important thing to remember about any enterprise is that there are no results inside its walls. The result of a business is a satisfied customer.

-- Peter Drucker, management guru