

Customer Service VS. Service Excellence

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Customer Service – so many seminars and so many books! As the heading indicates, this article claims a difference between ‘customer service’ and ‘service excellence’. The reason for this is, I believe, that by having a smile on your face; greeting in a nice tone of voice; and handing out useless free gifts will no longer keep your customers coming back. The friendly Café on the corner has been replaced by Quick Shops where customers can get what they want, 24 hours per day. Business in your city have been substituted with large shopping malls where customers can shop for clothes, buy books, stationary, have lunch, and watch a movie, all in three hours, and just two blocks away from home. Truth is that the concept of customer service is rapidly being replaced by the philosophy of service excellence.

What is the difference? Well firstly; customer service focuses on being nice to clients; whereas Service Excellence is the contextual science of understanding why customers want things, and then giving them what they want, where they want it, when they want it, how they want it, on the double!

The 21st century has turned the world into an interdependent village where the customer reigns. If you and your organization don't meet your customer's significant needs in a very specific way; they will simply replace you with a more appropriate organization or business.

We are in the midst of an era where the customer holds the power to kill or to sponsor. The age of speed supremacy have dawned on us more than a decade ago. If you cannot deliver fast enough, you customers will stop sponsoring you. Yet we still see hundreds of organisations still providing customers with the worst possible service.

The cause of this phenomenon is probably twofold. Firstly; most organisations are still extremely process driven, and not customer driven. And as the organisation grows; processes become imbedded within the system. This often blinds the organisation to real customer needs. A simple example is where business religiously holds on to processes that worked in the past. The insurance industry, for example, had paper-based processes to close the insurance sale. Outsurance, a South African based insurance company, decided to not waste customer time on these tedious processes and launched the first telephone sales system where insurance could be sold without any papers being signed. Many industry leaders soon became followers.

Secondly; many organisations still hold the basic assumption that they will last forever. Yet; history teaches us that no system has the power of eternal relevance; be it political or business based. Government service might believe that Government Departments are here to stay. The Kings and Queens worldwide had the same view just a few years back. If I had to tell the Zulu king of a hundred years ago that his role would become irrelevant one day, he would write my statement off as absolute nonsense. The Kings and Queens who has ruled the world, just yesterday, have to date been reduced to people with good entertainment value. The truth is that not even Government Service has any guarantees of seeing the future.

The only way of staying relevant in current times is to keep the people who sponsor your existence, your customers, completely satisfied. The question remains - will your organization survive?

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