



Exceptional Customer Experiences Pay Off in a Major Way

In our January-February issue of *Designing Strategies*, we addressed exceptional customer experiences. Everyone claims to have great customer service today, but do they really? What passes for customer service has become, in many cases, a joke.

Businesses, large and small, develop policies and procedures meant to make things easy for themselves and their employees, not for their valuable customers. Of course, any business focused on growth and success needs to have set processes in place to standardize the way their employees function. That said, it is important to remember that processes without flexibility and empowerment can pave the way for some very unsatisfying customer experiences.



I spent more than thirty years working in the interior design industry. As you can imagine, that experience put me in the middle of quite a number of construction sites, working with contractors and installers of finishes and furnishings to complete client's projects. I was always amazed at the number of contractors and installers who held no respect for each others' work. On one job, after days of painting, installing wall coverings and staining doors and trim in a hotel, the painting contractor's team walked off the job, making way for the next team to work. The following day, carpet installers arrived on the scene. After taking measurements, they cut the material, with its typical rough jute backing, and unrolled it down the hallway.

Their careless approach resulted in every single door and door frame being damaged. The rough edges of the carpet, when unrolled, scuffed every single one of the stained doors and painted door frames. When all of the carpet was installed, they too walked away, thinking they had done a great job. When contacted about the damage, the carpet installation firm's owner insisted his people could not possibly have done the damage. After much arguing, he finally assumed responsibility and agreed to cover the cost of re-doing all of the doors and frames. Good customer service? Not

by a long shot. The schedule was thrown into turmoil, painters had to return and redo much of the work they had already done and the client was anything but impressed.

Compare that experience to another I had last year at my home. My husband wanted to change out two picture windows in our living room and dining room to newer, energy efficient models. After putting the project off for a number of years, we finally decided to bite the bullet, deal with the construction dust and get it done. Because of their quality and reputation, we decided on Pella Windows. I was pleasantly surprised - no, shocked - to see that when they arrived to install the windows, not one of their installation team entered our home before slipping 'booties' on over their work boots. Next, they put down plastic runners on the floor covering their path from the door into the house, across the kitchen and into the living room. They carefully moved any furniture near the work area, and then covered everything with drop cloths for protection. Never, in all of my years on job sites had a contractor or installer taken this much care for my clients. When they finished the installation, the drop cloths were removed, the area was vacuumed and the runners were taken away. Now *THAT* is exemplary customer service.

Companies that adopt anti-customer procedures are making it easy for themselves to 'process' things - people, orders, inventory and paperwork. Clearly, the focus is not on making it easy or pleasant for customers to do business with them. Customer service staff with no authority to work with customers outside of rigid policies is another example of what will push customers away. Find ways to work with customers that will get their attention with good or unexpected services. Empower your people to bend rules when necessary to keep a client satisfied. That is the kind of experience they will be happy to share with others.



Set customer service and experience policies from an outside perspective – from the customer’s side of the counter. How can you make it easy for customers to learn about your product or services, place an order, and solve any problems that might arise? Make them want to do business with you. Make every relationship touch point a positive experience. Surprise them. Amaze them. Make their experiences with your firm a joy – something positive they want to share with friends who can become customers at little to no expense on your part? News, good or bad, spreads faster than a speeding bullet these days, thanks to the Internet. Do you want positive messages about your customer service and experiences spreading, or do you prefer that it be all negative? “Fine” or “OK” opinions are not good enough in today’s highly competitive marketplace. Make customers start their shared comments about your company and services with “WOW!”

Start thinking of ways you can work with your clients that will pleasantly surprise them. Don't just get the job done, do something memorable that is worth sharing. How can you change your existing processes and procedures to be more customer- friendly? Think beyond the norm - consider what will really grab their attention in a positive way. If your company's goal is to get more customers or get repeat customers, this is the way to do it. Profits from the first sale or project will be good, but repeat business and client referrals will make for even higher profit levels. Visualize your existing situation. Analyze how many customers have left due to dissatisfaction with how your staff dealt with them. Then, work on new strategies to change direction and make your customers' experiences with you exceptional.

VISUALIZE -- ANALYZE -- STRATEGIZE

If you are focusing on growth for your company in 20134, be sure the processes and systems for all sectors of your company structure are in order. This includes general management of the company, administration and operations, financial issues, marketing/sales and human resources. Even the smallest of businesses have to deal with each of these areas of business management to assure the stability of your company as it grows. Need help? Call on Terri L Maurer for help getting your business organized and developing strategies to make your move forward painless and successful. Our mission is simple – to help small businesses succeed. **Call Terri at:** 330.666.0802 or e-mail her at: tlmaurer@maurerconsultinggroup.com

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