

Welcome to the latest edition of the microskills™ network for participants of microskills™ training around the world.

This edition is devoted entirely to customer service:

- Different slant
- Best not to be a 'GEM'
- Training customers to be nasty
- Aligning staff measurement
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- Are you being recorded?
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Different slant

With so many companies selling identical products and with costs and prices cut to the bone, customer service is back on the agenda in a big way as the distinguishing variable.

However, a survey last year in the banking sector showed that whilst people over the age of 55 years preferred to physically go into a branch and talk to someone, customers between 35 and 55 wanted the convenience of 24 hour banking with only telephone access to a human voice; those below 35 wanted to process transactions themselves on the Internet.

E-commerce is gaining pace with logistics and delivery companies doing amazing things to guarantee the speedy arrival of the purchase.

So what's wrong with human service that some customers prefer to avoid it.

With our usual irreverence, we take a different slant on the normal approaches that are promoted.

Best not to be a 'GEM'

Going the Extra Mile and being a customer service 'GEM' is often

proposed as the way that staff should always behave. But we are not too sure.

Once you have gone the extra mile a couple of times for the same customer, it ceases to be an extra mile and becomes the norm. Next time the customer will demand it as their right with the common cry, "You did it last time, why won't you do it now?" Then they complain!

You were able to do it last time because it was possible and you had the time. On this occasion you don't.

Sometimes in going the extra mile for one customer, with finite resources, you inadvertently give a lesser service to the others. Then the others complain! "You did it for them, why can't you do it for me?"

The aim is to delight all our customers as often as we can, so instead of making a big splash and going all out to become a GEM, it might be better just to come out and **Go Another Yard!**

Training customers to be nasty

'Rewarding bad behaviour and punishing good' is a common mistake of managers and supervisors as any staff who have ever volunteered for anything will attest. The staff who moan a lot get to leave work on time; the willing hand has no social life.

The same technique has trained many of us to become really obnoxious customers. The louder I shout, the better the deal I get, whilst the submissive person gets taken for granted. Threaten legal action or going to the media and you usually get it for free.

It is refreshing to see staff, with the full support of their management, who are able to take firm and polite action against the bullies.

Aligning staff measurement

If customer service staff are measured by compliment to complaint ratios, there is a danger that they will solicit compliments and break rules to avoid complaints.

If call centre staff are measured by the number of calls they can clear within an hour, they will transfer potentially difficult or time consuming people to someone else thus making that customer even more angry. In some cases, such staff have been known to 'lose' calls by disconnecting them.

If staff are measured by accuracy, they will work slower. The greater the number of transactions, the greater the likelihood of error.

Management of customer service staff need to align the ways that their staff are measured with the true aims of the customer service that they are expected to provide.

If supermarket shelf fillers are measured by the gaps on the shelves, they won't sell anything. If checkout staff are measured by the number of items they can scan per minute, customers had better learn to pack their shopping bags – fast!

Staff dignity

Spurious figures are often quoted about how much it costs to attract a new customer rather than to retain an existing one.

Less frequently are figures published for the cost of recruiting new staff rather than retaining an experienced one.

If front line staff are abused by customers, they will resign.

If front line staff are constantly blamed by their management, they will leave.

If front line staff stick to the company's policies and subsequently refuse a customer request only for their manager to reverse the decision because the customer complains, the staff will go.

And remember, it is the good staff who will leave. The bad staff also apply for jobs elsewhere but they aren't successful.

Are you being recorded?

We have come across several cases recently of customers secretly

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recording interactions with customer service staff using Blackberries, PDAs and mobile phones.

Whilst such furtive behaviour might not stand up in a court of law, it can be sufficient for the company to settle the case out of court for fear of adverse publicity.

Of course, it is good practice to express concern about customer complaints and regret that events have happened, but be very careful about admitting liability until a complete investigation has taken place.

Abusing loyal customers

Loyalty cards, frequent flyer points and discount schemes are only awarded by companies to their very best customers in an attempt to retain them and to make them feel that their custom is of value and is being rewarded.

So why do organisations make it so difficult to spend the awards, attach so many terms and conditions and suggest that the customer is trying to get something for nothing?

Rather than feeling important, the message is that the loyal customer is a bit of a cheap skate.

Turn off

Some companies spend millions to promote an image and then ruin it instantly.

A notice in the bathroom of a five star international hotel:
“Dear Guest

Please be advised that items in this bathroom can be purchased from Housekeeping. The chambermaid is held personally liable for any losses from this room.

The Management”

Now the advert

We have worked on customer service issues, strategies and training for many years with some of the major organisations in the world in both the public and private sectors.

Our client list includes top names in travel and tourism, banking and finance, retail, logistics, hospitality, education and government.

Experiences, comments and questions

We'd love to hear from members with any views and experiences they have either for publication or for reply off-line.

microskills™, problem ownership™ and Supportive Manager™ are part of a stable of methods used by the Tim Russell Group to train staff around the world in interpersonal skills. User organisations come from finance, travel, hospitality, retail, manufacturing, government, education, health services and telecoms. Applications range from customer service to management development, team-building to support skills, negotiations to managing meetings interviewing to selling.

new ways of working™ is the consultancy service to work with organisations on how they will be operating in areas of staff management in the future.

For more information

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