

Customer Service....Bah Humbug?

Yes, it's confirmed. We are in a recession. There's no avoiding that reality. Those who encourage business owners to get back to basics are loudly shouting that attention to the delivery of excellent customer service will keep you in business. There's a recent flood of articles relating to customer service in the Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, Inc., and too many books to list. The torrent of words to raise service awareness promises increased sales, customer loyalty, higher productivity and greater job satisfaction. This information is not new! When has customer service not mattered? Don't we all know that without loyal customers, businesses will find themselves with no business?

Some examples of recent customer interactions that were brought to my attention, have me wondering if anyone is listening to the business advisors. A colleague shared with me his experience with a local bank in the Carrollwood area. He walked in to make a sizeable deposit. The teller was extremely rude! Without going into the details of the encounter, do you think that he will ever recommend this bank? Do you think he is going to move his account to another bank? How many people will he tell about the less than optimal service? This one teller's rudeness will effect more than this one customer and no one in this bank's management is aware of how much business will be lost because of her attitude. So, why share this one story which is repeated hundreds of times in many businesses every day. My purpose is to bring to your attention how important it is to know what's going on in your business. How would your customers describe their experience in doing business with you? Are they treated with warmth and respect? Is each customer viewed as an individual with personal needs? Are your front-line employees who engage with your customers given the latitude to accommodate the needs of your key customers? Or do they need permission to do the right thing?

I am sure that you don't wake up in the morning and decide to make your customers' lives miserable. Yet, everyday, many employees (from the front-line to senior managers) make decisions that send customers to the competition. 95% of the time when customers decide to take their business elsewhere, it is because they were not heard. The customer's voice *needs* to be heard. If you want to improve the customer experience with your business, then it would appear obvious to focus your attention on the customer. Not so! The focus needs to be on employees. The relationship between employee engagement and the customer experience is where service happens. As Walt Disney observed, if employees are well trained and feel valued, then you can be 98% sure that your customers will receive excellent service.

The rules for employee engagement:

- ¶ Provide training
- ¶ Make it easy to do the right thing
- ¶ Communicate, communicate, communicate
- ¶ Celebrate and reward good customer service
- ¶ Give employees a voice