

Griffin Training

Solutions for a Modern Workforce

Introduction to Customer Service

Leaders' Notes



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Scenario

Jim had never been in a job before where he had to deal with customers. His boss had been giving him a few tips just to keep him on track and to ensure that his service was always good. One day Jim was working alone in the liquor store. A gentleman in his mid-thirties entered the store and walked up to Jim. He explained that he was looking to have a key cut and inquired as to whether Jim could help him. Jim remembered the words of his boss, “always give the customer what they want and they will keep coming back.” Jim knew that there was a lock smith just down the road and so he took the customer’s key and went to have it cut.

It only took 10 minutes for Jim to return but when he did he found that the customer had helped himself to some of the bottles of alcohol. All in all 2 bottles of whisky had been opened, a few bottles of wine and half a case of beer. The customer explained that he had wanted to find out what they tasted like and so had sampled a few.

Again, Jim remembered the words of his boss “always keep the customer happy and we will never be out of business.” He told the gentleman that it was no problem and gave him the newly cut keys. The man thanked Jim and walked out of the store not buying a single bottle of alcohol.

Jim was feeling really good about the progress he was making in customer service and could not wait to tell his boss what had happened.

Introduction

Customer service is more than simply giving customers what they want. It is about giving a service that fully represents the organisation. This means that our service must not only be in line with our organisations’ products or services but also in line with its values, vision and mission. In this module participants will explore the true meaning of customer service, they will find out who their customers really are and discover some tips to help them achieve great customer service.

Objective

To discover the true meaning of customer service.

Aims

At the end of this module participants should be able to:

- 1) Define customer service
- 2) Point out who their customers are
- 3) Dispel the myth in customer service
- 4) Understand why they should care about customer service

Key points

Leaders should focus on making the following points:

- 1) Customer service is about the organisation's vision and its values
- 2) Everyone who interacts with the organisation is a customer
- 3) The customer is not always right but always deserves to be treated with respect

Ice-breaker

Have a single volunteer leave the room for a few minutes. Explain to the remaining participants that they are working in a shoe repair store and that the volunteer is to be their new customer. The volunteer however, does not know what they do at the store. They must show the volunteer what they do by serving him/her. The trick is that they must serve the customer (Volunteer) without talking.

Have the volunteer brought back in the room and explain to them that they have entered a store and that they must guess what store it is by being served by the customer service representatives (the remaining participants). See if the volunteer can guess what store it is.

Section 1: What is Customer Service?

Many people define customer service in different ways. Some say that it is giving customers “what they want” or to “serve” the customer. This definition is not broad enough. Say for example that a company produces furniture. If a customer enters the store and requests a bottle of fine French champagne the store may not be able to give the customer what they want or even to serve the customer. The best they could do is to politely inform the customer that they do not sell champagne and perhaps point the customer in the right direction. Since every organisation is different, every organisation will have a different way of approaching customer service.

A better definition of customer service would be to say:

“Customer service is any human interaction that promotes the organisation’s vision”

Discussion point: Ask the group what your organisation is all about. Is it about service, helping people, providing a needed product or simply about money. Give a few minutes to discuss this question. Try to help the group to identify value terms such as: professionalism, friendliness, service, etc.

Tip: Show the group something that demonstrates the organisation’s values such as a brochure or webpage.

What is service?

It is a commonly held belief that service is ‘giving customers what they want’ but customer service is much more than just ‘giving customers what they want’. Since customer service is about your organisation’s values, vision and mission the way you serve customers must represent your core values. Therefore, the way you serve is just as important as the service you provide. If your organisation is about providing high-quality products surely you must have a high-quality

service? If your organisation is about hospitality surely your service must include a welcoming approach?

Discussion: How do your organisation's values affect the service you provide?

Bridge: If customer service is about the organisation's vision, then who are my customers?

Section 2: Who are your customers?

How do you define who your customers are? The common basic definition of a customer is someone who pays for goods and services which the organisation/company provides. This definition narrows the concept of a customer to simply someone who exchanges money for goods and services and is therefore flawed. A good working definition for customer service is "any human interaction that promotes the organisation's vision." Therefore, surely anyone who comes into contact with the organisation is a customer? For example, are people who receive services, such as education and health, from the government not customers?

The definition of a customer needs to be widened to include anyone who interacts with your organisation. It must be highlighted here that this definition includes customers who are external and internal to the organization.

There are four basic types of customers.

- I. External paying customers: External paying customers are customers who are external to the organisation. They pay for services and goods and deal with the organisation face-to face, over the phone or by the use of the internet. These people are regarded as customers in the traditional sense of the word.
- II. Internal customer: The organisation cannot achieve its vision without the assistance of its everyday employees. Employees need to interact on a

daily basis with each other. They need to communicate with each other be that across departments or simply across the office. Internal customers are the everyday employees who work within the organisation. Every single employee you encounter at work is an internal customer, from the janitor to the CEO.

It is very important that we see both external and internal customers. It is significant for several reasons. For example; dealing with other staff (internal customers) can indirectly affect interactions with external customers as it may impact the way information is transmitted throughout the organisation. This can affect services.

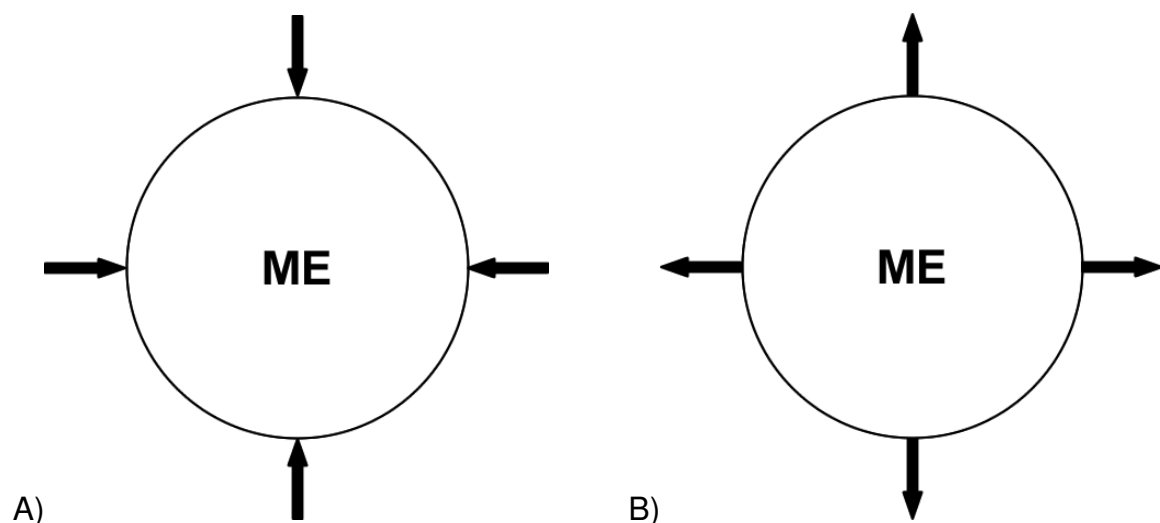
Think of it as a customer chain! The customer chain is formed by the relationship between internal customers and external customers. By looking at the whole picture, it is easy to see that everyone within an organisation is in some shape or form fulfilling the needs of external customers. Therefore, external customers are linked to all the staff. All the staff members are linked together as internal customers. This concept can go along way to providing an excellent customer service as each staff member can envisage the affects of their work on customers' and on their perception of the organisation.

- III. External non-paying customers: External non-paying customers receive goods and services without directly payment for them. This category of customers includes students in the state education system, tourists getting tourist information from the tourist office. There are many examples of customers who receive goods and services without direct payment. External non-paying customers also provide the organisation with valuable service such as the delivery of office equipment, maintaining the premises or providing expertises such as accountancy services. Without these people and their services the organisation would grind to a halt and could never achieve its vision. It is therefore important that these customers are treated with respect.

IV. Regulated customers: The term regulated customers applies to customers who are regulated by certain authoritative bodies such as the government, for the common good. It is easy for us not to treat these people as customers but it is beneficial for everyone if this interaction is steeped in principles of good customer service. A good example of a regulated customer is found in the police service. Here the officer tells their customers what they can and cannot do. Another example is in the medical industry where doctors and nurses tell patients what they can or cannot do.

It is important that everyone who interacts with our organisation is treated as a customer. Treating any individual poorly will adversely affect the ability of the organisation to achieve its vision.

Discussion: Can you identify some of your internal customers? How do you treat these people? How do these people treat you? Take a look at the two pictures bellow. Using picture “A” list four activities that internal customers do to help you achieve. For example; the janitor keeps the office clean, or the payroll staff pay your cheques. Using picture “B” list four activities you do that help others achieve. For example; you cover for someone when they are sick, or provide the sales representatives with information.



Bridge: Okay, if everyone is my customer then how do I treat them?

Section 3: Dispelling the Myth

Has anyone heard of the slogan “The customer is always right”? Should we operate with this slogan in mind at all times? Many experts would argue that this myth is unreasonable and misleading. Just imagine if your organisation began to meet every simple customer demands. Imagine the furniture store we mentioned before handing out bottles of Champaign just because customers requested them or if your doctor began prescribing every drug you requested. Not only would our organisations collapse under the weight of the demands but customers would never really be served as we would be too busy trying to make everyone happy all the time. Customers are not always reasonable and sometimes have unrealistic expectations. Customers do not always understand what the company can or cannot offer.

Perhaps, a more appropriate slogan needs to be created. A new slogan should focus not only on what customers want but how the organisation provides it.

Discussion: Can you come up with a new slogan? A slogan should incorporate notions which pertain to the importance of customers and what the organisation is trying to achieve.

For example: All Customers Deserve to be Treated with Respect.

Bridge: If the customer is not right, then why should I care?

Section 4: Why should I care?

Many organisations believe that their employees should care because they are paid to care. The truth is that no one is paid enough to be shouted at, sworn at or disrespected. The truth is that sometimes customers can be rude and even aggressive. If your organisation wants its employees to care simply because they are paid to care it will soon find that this strategy fails.

In order for employees to care about customer service and to provide excellent customer service even under difficult circumstances they need to connect their work-life with their personal life. We do not mean that employees should take their personal problems to work. Instead, just as customer service in an organisation has to do with the vision of the organisation, so too does personal customer service have to do with a person's vision.

Discussion: Ask participants what the most important thing in the world is to them.

Note: you will find that most, if not all, participants will mention some form of relationship. Many will say family, others will say friends. Simply connect this to customer service. For example; if a participant says family is important then mention that everyone has a family some kind? Surely they would be hypocritical if they did not treat other families with respect even when they were a bit unreasonable?

Section 5: Moving Beyond Simply Doing it Right.

Tip 1: Stop thinking your goal is to have satisfied customers.

Why: Satisfaction is relative. If in general, service is pretty terrible, customers will be basing their opinion on this generally bad service which is around them. In other words, they have no other choice but to be satisfied with a slightly better service. They don't realise that organisations can do so much better.

Tip 2: Decide what your vision is. Envisage your plan of what you want your customer service to be like. Get creative. Reach for the stars. Aim to achieve a dream customer service. Think of what customer service would be like in an ideal world.

For example, a supermarket car park, where attendants park your car; where a sports gym offers free 10 minute sports messages; where a supermarket gives out nutritional advice.

Tip 3: Discover what the customer wants. Listen! Ask! Think!

Listen to what the customer wants. Ask their opinions. Think about what you want. Adjust your plan if need be.

Remember customers don't always know what they want. Silence does not mean that everything is okay. Be careful of the word fine.

Tip 4: Go Beyond the Vision.

Deliver what you say you will and add a little extra. Try to improve by 10 per cent all the time.

Conclusion

Customer service is not about giving customers what they want. It is about promoting the organisation's vision through interaction. This means that everyone is my customer and that even though they may be wrong I should still treat them with respect because I too have a vision and without other people I cannot achieve it. I need to go beyond simply serving and reach for a vision.

Activities

Activity 1: 2-4 Participants

Material Needed: Nothing

Time: 5 minutes

Aim: To get participants to identify exactly how their customer service interactions affect the organisation's vision.

Method:

Split the participants into twos. Have each pair sit facing each other about an arms length apart. Encourage the participants to take turns to tell each other about the worst interaction they have had with a customer. Let them tell their partner why they feel they acted appropriately or inappropriately, according to the organisation's vision and their own personal goals.

Follow Up:

Ask one or two participants to relay back how their partner reacted to the situation and how this may have positively or negatively affected the organisation's vision.

Activity 2: 10+

Material Needed: Nothing

Time: 10-20 minutes

Aim: To get participants to identify exactly how customer service relates to the organisation's vision.

Method:

Split the group into teams of between 5 and 8 people each. Ask each team to create an organisation. Ask them to name the organisation, to quickly develop core values and a vision statement. Then have the teams role play a customer service interaction based on their organisation, its values and vision.

Follow Up:

Discuss the activity focusing on how the unique approaches to customer service as it relates to their organisation's values.

Questionnaire:

1) What is customer service all about?

2) What are the four types of customers

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3) What is the myth in customer service

4) Why should you care about customer service

5) What can you do to improve your customer service:
