Thank you for downloading the sample chapters of *How To Achieve Customer Service Excellence* published by Gull Publishing. This excerpt includes the Table of Contents, and the first chapter, which overviews the book.

We hope you find this information useful in evaluating this book.


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Chapter One

Introduction

The management of a business has the responsibility for administration, creating opportunities, financing risk, recruiting and training staff, respecting the environment, and everything else that forms a part of the modern business scene. Why, therefore, with a multitude of seemingly more pressing matters, should a business also be responsible for professionally managing customer service?

The answer is simple:

Without customers there would be no sales, no profits, and no business.

Customers are a major resource. They feature in every aspect of a business, are a vital part of it, and nurturing them is a business strategy that underpins survival and future growth. It should be kept in mind in any business that consumers today are more selective, demanding and value conscious than ever before.

Those businesses that elect to let customer service ‘just happen’ will lose customers, market share, and eventually, in many cases, their business. Successful businesses are, and will be, those that accept responsibility for integrating customers into their operations and their culture.

This does not mean that customers will become involved in the business decisions, rather, business decisions will take account of the needs and requirements of the customers.

Customer service is a marketable commodity. It is the basis of every customer’s value package. It is therefore incumbent on every business to ensure their customer service quality is of the highest standard, with ‘excellence’ being the primary objective.

Staff must be flexible and innovative in their approach to customer service. However, this requires total management support for actions taken by them in the interests of the business and the customer. Such support helps to ensure that:

• Staff is fully aware they are empowered to offer a meaningful, professional service that involves their total personality.
• Customer satisfaction becomes the focal point of the service being supplied.
• Judgemental decisions made by staff at the time of the service will not result in a ‘kick in the rear’ from management at a later date.
• Discretion, based upon individual responsibility, becomes the customer service norm.

Repeat business will continue to be forthcoming from customers who see themselves as a valuable asset to the business. This will be achieved through quality customer service, because this creates quality customers.

Customers should be encouraged to raise any observations or difficulties they have with regards to the business, its operation, and the service provided. This includes staff interactions, service quality, product range, product performance, distribution, and anything else that may be restricting or inhibiting customers’ dealings with the business in any way.
Such observations or difficulties provide a chance for the business to demonstrate interest in the customer by acting promptly on any information presented by them.

Experience shows there is a tendency to exaggerate or change the facts, however slightly, when retelling a story from memory. In the case of customer service, for example, it is often a more interesting tale if the service was bad or the products faulty, and the person telling the story was adversely affected.

Research by a number of organisations has clearly shown that more people will hear about an organisation which provides a poor service (or has faulty products) than one where the service is good.

**Customer perceptions are the basis of customer service.** These perceptions develop expectations of the quality of service he or she will receive. There are many tangible and intangible things that affect these perceptions. These I have called **Points of Influence**, and recommend that aspects of them be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that customer service standards are being maintained.

The aim of this manual is to offer new ideas as well as provide an opportunity to rethink customer service from a different viewpoint, and to assist businesses to improve their performance and gain a greater hold in the market place through customer service excellence.
Customer Service - An Overview Of The Myth Of Modern Business

Notwithstanding my earlier comments, I mistrust the term ‘customer service’ for it can be twisted to mean or represent, anything a business wants it to mean or represent. Customer service, in many cases, being the ‘candy’ offered when things have gone wrong for the customer and may adversely affect the business in some way.

One such example of this is the restaurant that offers a customer a substantial discount because the food the person had been presented with was unpalatable or cold. This is implying that although the food experience was poor, the provision of a discount made things ‘right’ and was good customer service. This is nonsense. In terms of customer service, the food should never have been presented like that in the first place.

In my dictionary, the definition of myth includes ‘…an invented story’. I would suggest that this can be applied to many versions of customer service with customers running a poor second to organisational demands.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PERCEPTION

As indicated earlier, customer service is concerned with perception, the ‘internal feelings’ generated through some form of personal interaction. From these perceptions expectations are developed which, in turn, influence the end results. For example:

- How do you think staff will treat a customer who they perceive, for whatever reason, to be an ‘old misery guts’?
- What sort of service do customers expect from a five-star hotel?
- What are the likely expectations of a diner if the waitress or waiter shows them to a table that has not been properly cleaned or is poorly presented?
- Why are first impressions so important?

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TRAINING

The aim of every business must be to try to exceed the expectations of their customers, thereby achieving customer satisfaction. Customer service training for staff plays a crucial role in this.

Many organisations spend thousands of dollars training staff to react in a certain way in specific situations, for example, when dealing with customer complaints. Consequently, staff may be reluctant to use their discretion when faced with a customer who is having difficulties. This reluctance being caused, perhaps, by the conflict between the training undergone and a desire to do something else that would seem to be more appropriate in the circumstances. In these instances, the training may well have been counter-productive.

Caution should be exercised in trying to adopt customer service techniques or particular aspects of customer service training, simply because these appear to be effective elsewhere. Every country and every culture is different.
Customer service training needs to be directed towards the needs of the customers and the business. Therefore, it must be meaningful and of real value to everyone concerned - the customer, the staff, and the business.

**BEING ABLE TO USE DISCRETION**

Discretion is a most valuable personal asset. During the provision of service to customers, every service provider must be encouraged to use their discretion freely and without fear of retribution for any decision they may make. This requires a determined and genuine commitment by management.

In practice, it is sometimes the case that staff mistrust management’s future intentions in this regard. This, in turn, may seriously inhibit the immediate action necessary to satisfy the customer, with the ability to use discretion and innovation in the interests of customer satisfaction being replaced by indecision and reluctance to act without approval of someone else who is prepared to accept the responsibility.

**CUSTOMER VALUE PACKAGE**

Increasing competition calls for a service which customers must perceive as excellent and of real benefit. The ‘value’ of the service package to the customer being dependent upon achieving both of these aspects.

Organisations that ignore this do so at their peril. The fact that customers are the only reason for being in business, must never become lost in the bottom-line struggle for bigger and bigger profits.

**POLICIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CUSTOMER**

The way in which the staff of a business approach customer service is, to a large extent, dependent upon the way the business treats them and the importance the management truly places on customers. It is well recognised that customers pay our wages. However, policies that work solely for the benefit of the business to the detriment of the customer, can be disastrous.

Customers must not be perceived by a business as problem creators or sources of complaints. However, from time to time some customers may have challenges for the organisation to overcome in order for them to be satisfied with a transaction. But, these must be accepted as opportunities, not blockages placed there to inhibit or restrict meaningful interaction.

**CUSTOMERS WHO COMPLAIN AND THOSE WHO DON’T**

Most organisations have a procedure for dealing with customer complaints. These procedures are often seen as a positive help and are welcomed by staff. But, while such procedures are an indication that customers feature in the thoughts of the organisation, these should not be construed as inflexible or something for staff members to hide behind during times of complaint.

Such phrases as ‘We are only permitted to …’, or, ‘It’s company policy …’ are the death of customer service excellence.
Interestingly, few businesses develop procedures for dealing with customers who have enjoyed their experience with them. Perhaps this assumes, therefore, that as long as customers don’t complain they are happy with the service being provided. If so, this is a dangerous assumption.

Those customers who don’t complain require just as much attention as those who do.

**CUSTOMERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE BUSINESS**

Every customer must perceive that the business is genuinely eager and willing to do whatever is required in order to satisfy their expectations. In doing this the customer service providers must:

- Keep reminding themselves that everyone is different and no two people respond in the same way to the same type of interaction.
- Keep in mind that every individual has different, and very individual, needs.
- Ensure that they respond in a positive way towards every different personality they encounter.
- Be aware that when they ignore or are rude to a customer, they are ignoring and denigrating the value of their job.
- Remind themselves that every customer will be encouraged to remain a customer of the business through the excellence of the service offered.

If an attitude of apathy prevails through to customer service, the value of that service will be questionable. Carelessness has no place in any customer value package.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE VALUE**

It is emphasised that there is customer service value in:

- Aiming for a standard of excellence.
- Staff using their discretion.
- Customer perceptions generating quality expectations.
- Making certain that the service provided satisfies the customer.
- Paying attention to detail.
- Adopting the attitude that no detail is too small to warrant attention.
- Ensuring that the customer service training undertaken by staff is meaningful for the staff, the customer and the business.
- Providing all the little touches that real professionals do as standard practice.
- The ability and willingness of staff to do ‘lots of little things very well’ in the interests of customer satisfaction.

Unless all these issues are endorsed by the business, the customer service offered may be just another invented story.
KEY QUESTIONS

1) How would you define a customer?

2) How would your company define customer service?

3) How many complaints do you receive during the average trading week?

4) Do your staff have the authority to use their initiative and discretion? If not, why not? If yes, give three recent examples.

5) What are the worst examples of customer service you have experienced (work-based or personal)?
The Points Of Influence Concept

Chapter Four

The Customer Environment

The customer environment is an important element in customer service. This is where every customer:

- Should feel special;
- Should feel respected;
- Expects the business to perform in a professional and ethical manner;
- Expects the business to provide a quality product or service; and
- Is influenced in a positive way with regard to the business.

The customer environment has no geographical or spatial limits. Any interaction - wherever this occurs - which involves a customer or a potential customer and the business, takes place in the customer environment.

For example, comments over a dinner table in one city that may influence dealings with a business in another city or country, have taken place within the customer environment.

Points of influence have a positive or negative influence on customer perceptions and, in turn, customer expectations and the customer environment. Thus, points of influence are defined as anything that can affect or influence a customer’s perceptions and expectations of a business.

Points of Influence ‘Categories’

These points of influence can be considered as falling into four interacting ‘categories’:

- Physical
- Human
- Organisational
- Service Quality
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