

THE SERVICE GENE PART 2

TOUCH POINTS THAT **WOW!** — DOES EVERYTHING YOU SAY AND DO EMBODY YOUR SERVICE BRAND?

SECOND IN A 2-PART SERIES OF ARTICLES FOCUSED ON CUSTOMER SERVICE AND FRONT DESK OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE.

Service, quite simply, is how people feel when they interact with your business. Their feelings may be good, bad or indifferent. Do your customers feel taken care of, respected and appreciated or do they dread doing business with you because it's just too difficult?

One of the best kept secrets about service is that *it's not hard to be great*. Think of all the service experiences you've had in the past day, week or month. From the grocery store, the dry cleaner, the cable company, your favorite restaurant and more. Do any stand out as off-the-charts phenomenal? Most were perhaps okay, while others were down right bad with a handful of good experiences mixed in.

In a sea of mediocre and bad service, taking care of people and making them feel great should be pretty easy — right? Why is it then that so many businesses fail? There are a variety of contributors: the wrong people, egregious policies, a lack of commitment and more.

For us, providing great service to passionate parents can be slightly more challenging. What is more important to a parent than their child? Nothing! When they believe you have the best interest of their family and children at the center of your decision making, they feel great and will sing your praises. Give them a reason to doubt your intentions and

a small blunder may be blown out of proportion.

Our first article recapped how great service starts with ensuring the right people are in place — hire nice people who live by the golden rule and love taking care of others. Once the people are right, make certain your operations reflect your service brand. Start by creating an environment where people feel welcome. Enter your business with fresh eyes as if you've never been there before (don't forget to do this at night when it's dark). Take in the experience with all of your senses. Begin in the parking lot. Is it free of litter? Are the flower beds weeded? Does it feel safe? What do you come across when you walk up to the doors — are they clean or full of fingerprints and leftover tape? What do you hear? Is music playing — if so, what type? What would you change? How do you think a first-time customer will feel?

Once inside, is your front desk team present — literally and figuratively? They are the first people customers see and relate to as the face of your business. Are they approachable, positive and helpful? Do they look up with a warm smile on their face, make eye contact and say hello? If not, why not? This team affects profitability and growth purely by the way they treat customers. Make sure they are right! If they don't get it, role play or ask how they feel when they aren't greeted when they walk into a business. How do they want to be treated? You may have to start with a refresher class on the basics and if that's the case, give the "why" along with the "how to".

Continuing inside, is your lobby neat and sparkling? Are the mats in your gym clean? Is your space light

and bright? If you've hired the right people, you don't need a daily checklist of basic housekeeping tasks. Your "service gene" folks will naturally clean the glass doors when they are dirty, pick-up stray paper towels in the bathroom and wipe down the counters because they care about the customer and their experience. They want their workspace and the customer's experience to be delightful, not dirty. If they don't have the service gene, you may want to provide a small checklist of things to do throughout the day; your hope is that eventually these tasks will become second nature, even for those that don't have it in their DNA.

What about the telephone? How do your people react when the phone rings? Is it a nuisance or interruption to their day or the task at hand? Or do they see it as an opportunity to be helpful, answer a question and make someone's day a little easier? How can you tell? Observe their body language — it will tell you everything you need to know. You may also want to create a standard greeting everyone adopts — it can be as simple as *"Thank you for calling ABC Gym, this is Emily, how may I help you today?"* Role-play and teach your front line how to have a smile in their voice as well as on their face — even when there are 15 people standing

at the desk demanding their attention. The caller on the phone can't see the chaos and they shouldn't feel less important because of it. Answering the phone during busy times takes practice — you never want your team to practice on customers. Have them role play and practice with each other and remember perfect practice makes perfect!

Service extends beyond how people feel when they walk through your doors or call on the telephone — they want to feel special and taken care of throughout every step of their journey. Trust and empower your employees to think of the customer first. Teach them to do what's right for the customer and right for the company by using good judgment. Never punish them for their decision making and if their resolution wasn't in line with your expectation, use it as training opportunity for everyone. Your front desk manager should constantly gather "real life" situations to use as thought proving training sessions in which everyone gets a chance to share ideas.

Great service doesn't have to be a grand gesture; it can be small and full with human kindness. For example, when someone asks where the washroom is, walk with them instead of pointing and saying "over there". ▶

FEATURE

...THE SERVICE GENE, PART 2 ...CONTINUED

In the book *Lessons from the Nordstrom Way*, Robert Spector, through a series of examples, shows that entrusting and empowering your employees is essential to a culture of great customer service. He examines a variety of businesses that provide great service, one of which is Mike's Carwash. Mike's boiled the rules down to the Big One: The Golden Rule. In this book you will learn successful service companies have thrown out their lengthy service manuals. Instead they teach people to trust the theory that everyone knows how they like to be treated and to use that "feeling" as the compass to problem solving.

**CUSTOMERS
DON'T EXPECT
YOU TO BE
PERFECT. THEY
DO EXPECT YOU
TO FIX THINGS
WHEN THEY
GO WRONG.**

—DONALD PORTER, V.P.,
BRITISH AIRWAYS

Commitment to good service must permeate throughout your organization. Everyone must "walk the walk" and it is equally important to "talk the talk". If service is important to you, talk about it and talk about it often. Provide training full of robust, real life examples. Start every meeting with a great service story. It can be an example of a recent service challenge from within your business (ask if anyone has a great example of how we "made someone's day") or an example of how another great service company provided a WOW!

Lastly, find opportunities to praise employees for great feats of excellent

service. When someone does a great job, send an email for everyone to see. Write a letter home to let their family know how much you appreciate their mom, wife or daughter — describe their act of kindness and thank them for their continued support!

At the end of the day, it's about a feeling — good, bad or indifferent. It's up to you and your team to create a contagious culture of great service!

"They may forget what you said, but they will not forget how you made them feel." —Carl W. Buechner ✕

SOME GREAT BOOKS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE:

- *The New Gold Standard — 5 Leadership Principles for Creating a Legendary Customer Experience* Courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company — Joseph A. Michelli
- *Lessons from the Nordstrom Way* — Robert Spector
- *Broken Windows, Broken Business* — Michael Levine
- *Setting the Table* — Danny Meyer