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Exceed Their Expectations & Differentiation Will Come



By Carolyn West Price

How often have you heard that a movie was going to be a sure-fire winner for an Academy Award, only to be disappointed?

Or, you hear a restaurant is fabulous, and you go there and leave disappointed?

Or, you simply call a company for information, and never hear back from them...leaving you disappointed and wondering why in the world they're in business if they can turn away a prospect that easily.

At the root of this disappointment is, of course, expectations. Some expectations are self-created—you expect something will be a certain way because of your life experiences and the way in which you were brought up (expectations of others' manners, ways of doing business, etc.). You expect, for instance, that a company will send you the brochure they promise just because that is the proper thing to do.

In other cases, the company's marketing is what creates expectations. They say they are the best, the fastest, the most detailed...whatever. That's what you, therefore, expect.

That's where the big disappointment sets in.

If a company tells us, via their marketing, to expect a certain level of service or quality of products, then shouldn't it be there?

Where is the breakdown between the management intentions or lip service, the marketing folks who write the enticing ad copy and marketing messages, and the worker-bees who interact with the customers who were enticed to try the business?

First start with the top. Does top management truly believe that what is promised to customers is possible to deliver? If so, how is management communicating that to the front-line folks, and how is it being reinforced? Are employees empowered and encouraged to deliver A+ service...and are they recognized for doing so? These are management-level decisions and actions.

The next step is to work with the marketing folks and the staff so the expectations that are being created for prospective customers are communicated clearly to everyone touching the customers. Everyone must be on the same page.

Customer service needs to be a passion from the top down and it must be an integral part of the company culture. Superior customer service needs to be infectious. But, all too often it's not, as we know all too well.

Unfortunately, many do not see the bottom-line impact that exceeding expectations can have. There is repeat business and great word-of-mouth marketing. Staff is happier and stays longer, keeping turnover to a minimum. To the bottomline, this all has a positive impact.

According to the Marketing Concept, the key to long-term profitability for an

organization is customer satisfaction. The key here is "long-term," and that's where too many people shoot for immediate gratification and lose sight of the pot of gold under the rainbow...just a bit down the road.

And, meeting or exceeding customer expectations is not just some promise down the road. It has implications even on the front end before a customer decides to try a company if used correctly. So often companies ask how can they truly differentiate themselves from the competition in an industry that offers many choices or in an industry that is a non-essential.

At first blush, their instinct is to compete on price, no matter how badly that erodes their profitability. In fact, while price is important, value is more important to most people. Create value with your A+ service and people will not worry about spending a few dollars more if the experience is greater than their expectations!

Remember, price wars attract buyers quickly, but they are fickle. Service will keep customers for life, as long as they perceive value for their hard-earned dollar.

So, I ask, what are you doing to ensure that the expectations you are creating about your business are more than empty promises? Keep up the good work...or start thinking creatively! Don't forget to use mystery shoppers for a true picture of the customer experience, too.

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