

Purposeful Customer Service



By SHEP HYKEN

I recently posed the following question to a group of business owners at the International Franchise Association convention: How do you ensure a great customer service experience for your customers?

There were some commonalities among the answers. Even with the diverse collection of businesses, from quick serve restaurants to online businesses, most of them agreed that good customer service starts with people. Everyone recognized that a good hiring strategy is the heart of good customer service.

I asked one of the owners what his hiring strategy is. His strategy was purposeful. Even for entry-level positions, applicants are screened and must go through three rounds of interviews. He prides himself on finding a good personality to fit in with his culture. Then I asked my next question: What do you do after they are hired?

His response was what I expected to hear. He put the new hires through training. I asked him to elaborate on what they learned in the training sessions. All new employees must go through an orientation on how the technology works logistics and their business process. He also assigns a mentor to help the new employee through the first week.

I asked the others in our meeting what was missing. Most believed that customer service training was missing.

His response was quick. He defended his omission of any customer service training because he chooses his employees for the right personality.

He said, "I made sure that I hired good people. I *hope* they know what to do."

When it comes to customer service, *hope is not a strategy*. Customer service must be purposeful. You can hire the nicest people in the world, but you still must give them direction, teach the best practices, and continue to reinforce your customer service strategy so that employees are continuously reminded and motivated on what and how to deliver your brand of customer service. You must take what they already know and teach, very specifically, how to make it work for your business. And it starts with some initial training.

For example, Disney puts every employee (also known as Cast Members) through a training program known as Traditions. It doesn't matter if the Cast Member is taking tickets, selling souvenirs, helping people on rides, sweeping up trash or being brought into the corporate offices. All new hires learn what the traditions behind Disney are all about and how to "Manage the Magic," which is a very purposeful way of creating a connection with the guest.

Don't leave customer service to chance. Regardless of how good the employees' people skills are, you can't simply *hope* they will understand how to apply what they know to your business.

Train them and train often. Reinforce the positive and learn from any problems. Consistently amazing customer service doesn't happen by accident. It happens on purpose!

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