



Customer Service

is something that we can all identify with – we’re all customers and most of us have a story to tell; it’s unfortunate that those stories are usually negative ones.

The UK is pretty poor at delivering a positive experience to customers, whether on the high street, over the telephone to a service provider or any other instance where we are the customer. The increased number of large supermarkets hasn’t helped as we’ve now lost the personal service small independent retailers used to offer.

Having recently been appalled by Wayne Rooney’s outburst at frustrated England supporters during the World Cup it reminded me that he was actually attacking his own customers. Sports stars and celebrities all have customers – those that pay to read glossy magazines, buy expensive merchandise and pay to watch cable television etc. They too seem to have lost sight of who is being served and why.

Once again we seem to go to considerable lengths to create barriers between us and our customer. I’m sure we have all got annoyed at automated telephone systems that demand us to “press one for this” and “press two for that” only to get hung up on. What happened to good old fashioned telephonists that you could explain what you needed to and be directed in a courteous and helpful way? So many organisations are simply defensive – which isn’t particularly conducive.

If we don’t fit into a check list we are deemed a “problem” by those serving us. Have you asked for something a little different during a meal out to be greeted by “oh we couldn’t possibly do that” accompanied by that certain look of disdain?

“Stop putting up barriers to delivering outstanding customer experiences”

I’ve spent time looking at well known brands and seeing who is getting it right in terms of customer service. I found that time and time again Hotel Chocolat, Marks and Spencer and Timpsons (the shoe repairers) are spot on. The reason for Timpson’s customer service being extemporary is as their Chairman John Timpson writes in his book “Upside Down Management”. John explains how he gives responsibility to all front line customer facing staff. If you look inside their shops on any high street you will see a sign:

“THE STAFF IN THIS SHOP HAVE MY TOTAL AUTHORITY TO DO WHATEVER THEY CAN TO GIVE YOU AMAZING SERVICE”

How refreshing! Great customer service demands flexibility and understanding. I removed automated phone systems from our business and I know that Timpson’s no longer have EPOS (electronic point of sale) tills as they get in the way of serving customers. It’s that old adage “computer says NO”!

We need staff to be flexible, accessible, polite and give us attention – I do hate staff on cosmetic counters chatting amongst themselves whilst handing me my purchase. I shouldn’t feel that I am getting in their way. I think so many employees that deal with customers have forgotten the role of server and customer. We can’t blame them though if those managing them don’t ensure they know how important they are not only to the customer but to the company brand.

For anyone that has watched “Mary Queen of Shops” on BBC2 you will know that Mary Portas not only revamps the shop interiors but most importantly she works to understand how customers want to be treated and served. She looks

at the USP (unique selling point) and strengthens it. This is something that should happen for all businesses. Those that choose to listen to customers and taken notice of their feed back will do far better. Your customers are your best gauge of whether you’re getting it right. This is true of hospitals, large corporate, high street shops and celebrities.

With today’s ever evolving technology it’s very easy to see who is succeeding with the delivery of good customer experiences. The general public have become the critics – Trip Advisor and Ebay, among many, encourage ratings and feedback. Twitter and Facebook allow people to express good and bad reviews so it really is about time we started to listen. Customer complaints are acted on when you Twitter BT and it’s far easier than trying to telephone them.

“Social media brings transparency”

It’s time to lose the arrogance and barriers and really start putting customers first, just look at the US and how much pride is taken in ensuring you, as the customer, are important.

For more information you can visit <http://www.danisaveker.com> or <http://www.jeevesservices.com>.

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This is part of a series of business based features. If there is a subject you’d like to see please drop Dani an email.