



Creating a Customer Focused Culture

By Phil Harwood, pro-motion Consulting

It's easy to deceive ourselves. Bain & Company's research found that 80% of companies claim to have superior customer service while only 8% actually do, according to their customers. Customer service today is mediocre at best. Many times, we expect poor customer service. We're surprised by great customer service and are blown away by world class customer service, if we ever experience it at all.

Examples of terrible customer service abound. Even so, most companies really do care about their customers and want to treat them well. They just struggle to do so. Why is this?

Take a look at our front line employees – those who are responsible for delivering service on behalf of the company – and who are often the closest to our customers. Today's front line employees are a product of their environment and experiences. Soft people skills have eroded as our world has less human interaction than ever before. We download books, stream music, work from home, home-school our kids, attend webinars, go the ATM, shop online, pay at the pump, email, text, self-checkout, and drive-through.

Today's younger generation never learned how to interact with people the way your customers' expect to interact with them. They need to learn how. We need to teach them how. Some will get it and some won't. But, the burden is on us as employers, if we want to have a customer-focused organization.

Our employees only know what they know. Chances are they don't routinely travel first class, stay at 5-star hotels, dine at exclusive restaurants, and get catered to like the rich-and-famous. Their life experiences determine what they know to be acceptable or not acceptable.

We should not assume they should understand how your customers wish to be treated based on their own experiences and judgments. Companies need to focus their training on these areas – soft people skills and customer service – in addition to technical skills training.

Some owners or managers question the ROI of investments in customer service initiatives. According to Bain & Company, a 1% improvement in a company's American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) score results in an increase of 7% in free cash flow. The ROI is actually quite impressive.

I think we'd all like to work for an organization that is dedicated to world class customer service, but the real question is, "How do we turn our company into one of these organizations?"

Think about your best customers – the ones you want more of. What is their profile?



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We need to understand our customers' needs before we can meet these needs. There are 6 questions to be answered:

1. Who are they? Describe your ideal customer.
2. What does a typical day look like for them?
3. What types of pressures do they face?
4. Why did they hire you? What are they expecting to receive?
5. How might it affect them if you don't meet their expectations?
6. What can you do to separate yourselves from the competition?

In addition to developing customer profiles of our ideal clients, we need to take specific steps to implement specific practices in our companies in order to create a customer-focused culture. We need to put in the effort. There are six steps to be implemented:

1. Create a Service Vision
2. Create a List of Non-Negotiable Standards
3. Communicate at Every Opportunity
4. Training & Daily Reinforcement
5. Create Incentive & Reward Programs
6. Solicit Customer Feedback

There are some great resources to assist with the creation of a customer-focused culture. The following book recommendations are a good place to start:

How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life by Michael LeBoeuf

The Ultimate Question by Fred Reichheld

The Customer Service Revolution by John DiJulius III

What's the Secret? by John DiJulius III

I recently had dinner at a new restaurant concept in an airport. I seated myself in front of a tablet, where I browsed the menu, placed my order, and slide my credit card down the slot. After a few minutes, my food was dropped off by a person who never spoke a word to me. Is this where we're headed as a society? I hope not.

I believe that caring for customers is important and I'm going to do all I can to ensure that my organization provides great customer service on a consistent basis. How about you?

Now go forth.

**UNH Thompson School
Greenhouse Open House**

Friday, April 1, 2016, 9 am - 4 pm
Saturday, April 2, 2016, 9 am - 4 pm

NHPGA Awarded Grant to fund Plant Something NH Campaign

The NHPGA has been awarded a 2015 Specialty Crop Block Grant by the US Department of Agriculture through the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food to institute a Plant Something NH campaign. Plant Something is a national public awareness campaign to promote the planting of ornamental plants to improve the quality of people's lives. Its simple message is to, "Get your hands dirty and plant something."

The NHPGA will utilize the \$50,000 grant to fund and implement a sustained marketing campaign that will promote the vision of planting something, not specifically any one product, to excite and encourage the public to purchase plants and participate. The message is one that putting trees, flowers or shrubs in the ground doesn't just provide you with beauty and shade, it can also improve your property value, lower your energy costs, clean the air and water, even lower your heart rate. The intention is to provide the organization's members with a usable marketing campaign that can be integrated into their individual marketing campaigns.

NHPGA President, Jeffrey Meulenbroek said, "The NHPGA doesn't currently have an industry-wide message and the organization feels that Plant Something NH will provide this and help to increase sales and awareness of the green industry in New Hampshire. This message can be used by retailers, wholesalers, landscapers, landscape designers and farmers. All aspects of our industry can benefit."

The Plant Something NH campaign will be rolled out in the spring of 2017. Statewide advertising and internet marketing will get the message to New Hampshire residents. Events and promotions will occur at NHPGA member garden centers. Plant Something is already used in twenty states nationwide, including Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire in New England. For more information on Plant Something, visit plant-something.org or contact the NHPGA at executivedirector@nhpga.org.



Learn More about the NHPGA, visit NHPGA.org

