

Getting to WOW

Last issue was a primer on the difference between satisfaction and delight, or OK and WOW. This issue is devoted to helping you move your staff from adequate to incredible and removing the obstacles that are keeping them from being superstars. Pay attention to the following four elements:

- A Service Strategy highlighting your reason for being
- Employees who are Caring, Trained and Empowered
- Policies, Procedures, and Systems that are customer-friendly
- Getting the Voice of the Customer into your Organization

SERVICE STRATEGY

Most organizations have what they think is their service strategy: making heaps of money to appease shareholders. Consider that's really the measurement. If we focus on making lots of green, purple, blue, red and brown stuff, it's easy to deviate away from the customer experience. Matter of fact, a money focus eventually leads to people thinking, "if these damn customers would just get out of my way, I could get my work done". Don't get me wrong; I'm just as entrepreneurial as the next guy, as the owner of my own company with a mortgage, kids in school, ailing parents, and dreams of traveling the world. The key is not to get the goal and the measure confused. When you're thinking of your organization's service strategy, don't farm the assignment out to a consulting company who will create a poetic banner by looking for the magical mixture of the right words. Instead, search your heart and think about the contribution you're making to the world... what's the difference you want to make for people... how do you want people's lives to be enhanced by a little dose of your organization. Draw a picture, think of a metaphor, build a story. It's about sincerity, not professionalism. Gather your people together and share the story. Ask them to make it their own. Ask them what they see. Millions of people have heard the saga of Seattle's Pike Place Fish Co. where employees hurl fish through the air like Dan Marino and John Elway in target practice. The owner, John Yokoyama, made a conscious decision to go from the business of selling fish to providing an experience of joy, inspiration and fun to both customers and employees. Fish was the vehicle but not the goal. Their

videos, "Fish" and "Fish Sticks" have inspired multi-million dollar organizations to take a new look at business.

TRAINED, EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES

It always begins with people. Take a look at the people who work in your organization, whether they're customer facing or hiding in a back room. Was your unconscious hiring criteria to find the cheapest, most technical person? What's the average E-IQ (Emotional Quotient) of your collective group? This is a term coined by author psychologist Daniel Goleman whose studies show that emotional stability is more important than standard intelligence in determining an individual's success in life. What is E-IQ? Self-reliance, self-confidence, self-direction, persistence, challenge-embracing, committed empathetic people who are comfortable with themselves, others and the chaotic world they inhabit. Consider the power of an organization of high E-IQ workers! It won't be a place of obedience and "yes boss" answers, but creativity will flourish with an accumulated mass of energy directed at customer success. Take this powerful raw material, train them with the technical areas of product information, industry background, and competitive knowledge and the human elements of communications, listening, exploring, and selling, and then add a final dose of empowerment. Let them know that their sandbox to play in is as huge as they want to make it. Don't constrain them with job descriptions ...invest them with the expectation that their role is to be an ally, consultant and communicator to the customer. Don't punish them if they make a "bad decision", but use the experience as a teaching exercise to what was learned. Give them the resources so that they can access information. The military model of obedience and hierarchy may work in a war-torn situation, but our customers aren't the enemy! It's scary to give away power and to accept it. Consider that the less tactical decisions you as manager have to make, the more time you can spend on creating visions, and growing your organization as a place that customers can't wait to visit, employees can't wait to join, and shareholders can't wait to invest in.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND SYSTEMS

It seems to be an immutable law: the

bigger we get the more policies we need. Lawyers and insulated specialists create policies to protect the fabric of the organization and as they get woven, they grow from mitten size to a king-sized quilt. Don't walk on the grass, No More than 3 Articles in the Change Room, Valid Purchase Orders Must Accompany ..., Minimum Quantity Orders Are... All grew from valid business reasons, but over time, the mass of "thou shalt nots" creates a bureaucratic web which strangles customers who do business with you. Do your policies serve you or do they serve your customers? Stand back and experience your organization as a customer might. What are the hassles they face? Where are they caught up in red tape? How many rules must employees memorize? Once you've identified all of the nightmarish elements of experiencing you, gather your talented, emotionally-powerful workforce and ask: Which are really serving us well and which are getting in everyone's way. Which have we kept out of habit? Those that we must keep, how can we rephrase them so they're more customer-friendly? Excise the rest and allow individuality and judgment to reign.

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

Repeat after me, "we're in business to make the customer's experience better for knowing us". Rather than systems that get in the customer's way, consider designing human systems and processes to get the voice of the customer into the organization so that it's heard, felt and understood by all employees. There's no quicker way to humanize a customer who might be seen by the invisible stockclerk as an unreasonable pain-in-the-butt, than to expose all people to customer's expectations and experiences. Ask them what delight might look like, find out what most drives them crazy when they deal with your organization, seek out the best buying experience they ever had, whether it's in your industry or not, encourage them to share what they want you to continue to do, start doing, and stop doing. Train all of your employees to seek these insights and develop systems so that the voice is shared and acted on.

Will you make mistakes? Undoubtedly. Might you give away too much authority? Probably? Will it cost you? Likely. Will it take courage to get started? Guaranteed. Is it easy? No way. Is it simple? Absolutely. Will you do it? Your choice!