

Wow vs O.K.

Delighting your Customer

I'm getting awfully tired hearing the word "satisfaction" used in the world of customer service. "Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded". "Our promise is customer satisfaction". "We want to satisfy you". It's a word devoid of meaning, power and memory.

Why do I feel so passionate about a weak word like "satisfaction"? Think of the millions of times when you frequented a service provider and felt satisfied. Let's take a restaurant experience. You likely entered a nice-looking restaurant and were politely greeted after little waiting. You would have been seated, handed a non-tattered menu, scanned the prices which were in keeping with your expectations, received answers to your questions about the specials and food preparation, received a hot meal of good quality which was attractive, and received an accurate bill upon request. In other words, it was "fine". Did you like it? Yes. Would you go back? Sure. Now comes the really important question: Would you return here rather than try other restaurants? No. Why? It was fine, good, O.K., but it didn't stand out.

We customers are always making assessments about our customer experience. The customer experience composes not only the product an organization is selling and the services it provides, but the intangible service as well. Those assessments are based on two factors: our expectations about the product-services-service triangle and our perception of the quality of that triangle. There are three possible outcomes:

1. Dissatisfaction: The reality of the experience doesn't meet our expectations in the three areas. Going back to the restaurant example, some aspect (food quality, temperature, treatment, parking, hours, seating placement) didn't measure up to our mental picture. So, this one is easy. We won't likely return.

2. Satisfaction: Our expectations are met. While there's nothing wrong with this in principle, the problem becomes a comparative one. Satisfaction means O.K. You flick the light switch and the light comes on. You use the washroom and it has TP, soap, and towels. You're not disappointed. It's not offensive, but the results in some ways are even worse... it becomes a totally unmemorable event.

Forgotten in minutes. Satisfaction attracts nothing, certainly not loyalty.

3. Delight: Our expectation of the product-services-service triangle is exceeded by the actual experience. Let's return to our restaurant example. When you're greeted at the door, the host smiles genuinely and calls you by name. He takes you to a familiar table and comments that he thought you would like to sit there again since you commented so favorably on it last visit. As the server recites the specials du jour, she offers candid recommendations about what she believes would be your personal taste reactions. She suggests a new wine within your price range, that she believes appeals to your palate. She asks you in advance whether you want a long, lingering, leisurely meal or whether you have other obligations. She confides that the chef has taken some of your suggestions last visit to heart and they have been included in the new menu. She asks about your son/daughter/dog/cat and recalls a previous story, proving that she had really been listening. After the meal has been served, which you hate to put fork to and destroy the aesthetic appeal, the chef personally visits your table and asks for your opinion. When you mention that you would love to know the recipe, he shares conspiratorially some of the secret ingredients. The following day, the owner calls you to get feedback to help them become more indispensable to the lives of their patrons. He asks whether the timing is appropriate and he queries you on what the restaurant might start-stop-and continue to do. He gauges your responses to food quality, presentation and service. He asks what might be the niggling things that shadow the experience. When you mention the difficulty of parking, he asks questions to gain better understanding. To conclude, he reminds you that his goal is to take the dining experience to a higher level. He asks if you have any questions in the world of food and drink that he might answer. When you reveal that you are hosting a party in a few weeks and would appreciate some advice on food and wine combinations, he volunteers to have his chef call you back later that day to provide some expert advice. In other words, you've died and gone to customer heaven! Why would you want to go anywhere else?

Now that we know what customer delight consists of, how do we reach it? Consider that there are four phases in our quest of the Customer Holy Grail:

1. Phase 1 – Make the decision to delight your customers.

2. Phase 2 – Determine what delight looks like in your business.

3. Phase 3 – Train everyone.

4. Phase 4 – Do it! Practice, practice, practice!

A FEW WORDS ON EACH PHASE:

Phase 1 – To delight is a choice to change our mindset and attitude about our business and our customers. Keep this decision ever-present to yourself, your staff and your customers.

Phase 2 – Involve your customers. Find out all the little things about your products and services that they love and hate. Ask them questions around the whole experience of doing business with you. What policies get in their way? What attitudes and behaviours upset them? Encourage them to be free-wheeling with their comments. Discuss everything personally and avoid all electronic communication, even if you think it would be quicker and easier.

Phase 3 – Any person who touches the customer, or any worker who touches a worker who touches a customer needs training. Explain to them why you're different from all the other similar businesses. Share what you've discovered about satisfaction and delight. Give them the skills to connect with customers and to ask questions. Build their competency on your products and services so they can provide options to clients. Remind them that they have total control over their actions with customers.

Phase 4 – Get started immediately. Fine-tune as you go along. Hold yourself and your staff accountable for providing delighting service. Ensure proper consequences, tangible and intangible, formal and informal for acting out of delight. Coach staff on what they're doing right and what they could do differently. Ensure resources are available to consistently give customers a delighting experience. Constantly stay connected to customers. Check out your competition to see what they've chosen to copy from you. Get insights from mystery shoppers to ensure delight has become a way of life.

There are lots of companies in retail and service trades who survive by being ok. The real winners though, are the companies who profit by delighting their customers.