



December 2006

Exceptional Customer Service is No Longer Optional

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Where would you least expect to find great customer service? At or near the top of anyone's list, you're likely to find government services...long waits, indifferent staff, and lots of confusing and seemingly archaic forms to fill.

Not any more. Recently, Terri Lynn Land based her re-election campaign for the position of Michigan's Secretary of State on a platform of providing superior customer service. All of her TV commercials focused on her goal of continuing to make it easy to obtain license plates and drivers' licenses. When government agencies understand that they need to provide exceptional customer service, it's clear that we all must do the same.

So what can you do to provide this kind of focused service to your customers?

Redefine your business:

The first thing you should do is redefine your business' purpose. How you define your business impacts how you develop all your policies and procedures. These policies and procedures create the backbone of your customer service.

Ask yourself this question, "What business am I in?" Hopefully your answer is, "I am in the business of providing exceptional customer service." If that was not your answer, you need to re-align your focus to reflect an emphasis on customer service. No matter what business you are in, you need to be in the customer service business.

Zappos, an online shoe store, refers to itself as a service company that happens to sell shoes, bags, etc. Look at your business. What do you need to do to become a customer service business that just happens to (fill in the blank)?

Imagine a local bakery that offers customers the opportunity to buy its cakes "in components" -- cake layers, frosting, etc, so that their busy customers can create a "hand made" cake for their friends and families. If they were in the bakery business, they would only sell their beautiful, finished cakes. But because they are in the customer service business, a business that just happens to sell baked goods, they can meet the needs of their customers in a unique and surprising way.

Or, consider perhaps, a bank that opens 15 minutes early to help out customers who are in a hurry. If they were in the "banking business," they would have to adhere to "bankers' hours." But because they are in the customer service business, a business that happens to deal in financial services, they can do the right thing and have hours that better serve their customer.

Make it easy for people to do business with you:

One of the best ways to become a customer service business is to make life easy for your customers. Customers value "easy" even more than they value "cheap." In our society people are constantly on the move. Multi-tasking is a way of life. To win over customers, we need to take the hassle out of doing business with us.

Think about your own experiences as a customer. Haven't you been amazed at how hard some companies make it for you to be their customer? How do you feel, as a customer, when you have to deal with a phone system that takes minutes to get you the right person, or when you have had to fight to get a problem resolved fairly ?