

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

18

MANAGING SERVICE DELIVERY

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PROLOGUE:

Customer Service is at the heart of successful business: and often times: defines good organizations from great ones with regard to customer perceptions and loyalty. GREAT customer service is never about just one thing: and is a rather painfully crafted hegemony of different aspects of an organization coming together to offer a truly 'hassle free' and often 'unique' experience to customers.

It all starts with MINDSET: but it is never ONLY about mindset.

As with all things, within an organizational setting, leading a shift in paradigm requires concerted leadership : and management structures, processes, organizational design, policies, processes, systems, and also, people and culture all coming together with the customer at the epicenter of it all. This is no mean feat : and is actually a journey : never a destination. Those who take this journey find that there is ALWAYS something MORE we can all do : and continuously improving everything around you to ensure the customer truly, truly is delighted, becomes an organisational undertaking that defines the way you do business.

Management has a huge role to play in this. We, specially us in this part of the world, often rely on those 'in senior positions' to lead the way : and set the example. Also, don't forget that,we, in management, are the only ones with 'legitimacy' and 'power' to truly bring about the changes we want : and it is wrong to expect the 'juniors' to 'find ways to do things' without you creating the environment and the opportunity to do so.

Service Delivery is a reflection of Leadership. It is a reflection of your collective commitment and ethos. If there is poor service : and customers are often complaining frustratingly : remember : this is YOUR fault : no one else's. So, make sure you own up to the role you have to play in ensuring your customers are made to feel that much more special than your competitors are getting them to feel : unless of course, you are absolutely confident that you can have healthy profits and growth without serving the customers right : a mistake you will pay very, very dearly for in the longer term...

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Chapter 1

The Role of a CS Unit

I. The Primary Concern : Addressing 'Issues'

When asked to picture 'customer service', if it's the image of a call centre with a young boy or girl handling a difficult situation with a customer, that comes to your mind; then the problem begins right there. However, this is what customer service has been mostly confined to and mistakenly seen as: a departmental role. Undoubtedly, addressing issues is a need; but it's not confined to a department alone, and most importantly, the role of CS is much larger than that.

Hence, addressing issues is an organisation-wide concern but possibly diverted to the CS team, following initial contact.

II. The ACTUAL primary objective : Eliminating Churn

From a larger perspective that better defines the role, CS results in more stickiness that saves an amazing amount of money spent on acquisition, and also generates rich input for organisations to know their customers better. The second point is no longer relevant given the present context of uncertainty in local and global markets. For example, we all know how companies had to revisit their business model post COVID-19 pandemic as in the case of Airbnb who pivoted their business based on the information they had at hand. Regardless, the more we know and are connected the better our chances of evolving.

III. The REAL value addition : Cross Selling and Upselling

Milton Friedman's famous book There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch is testament to the fact that nothing is for free. If it is, either someone paid for it already or else your information is being sold. The point being made is that there is no evil intent in making more money and nothing to feel bad about as long as you focus on delivering value.

The result of managing your service delivery well is the blessing of a pool of clients, whose continued patronage of your services, helps you gain more ROI per client, beefed up through cross selling and upselling initiatives. Let it not be misunderstood; acquiring new clients is like BREATHING and you need to keep the flames going anyway. What we're trying to emphasize is the creation of velocity of growth in the business.

IV. The benefit no one sees : Augmenting the Brand

Who OWNS your brand? From the legal lens it's held by the company but the TRUTH of the matter is that your customers own it. They decide its value, its relevance, its equity and how much stretch it has and more. If that's the case, what do you think needs to be done? Where do you think your money needs to be spent in building your brand? Take the top brand rating agencies and ask them how they value your brand. You'll be told that most of it is through primary research assessing your brand's acceptance in the market. Yes, financials matter but customers gave you their money.

Here are few points for reflection.

- a) Word-of-Mouth – Word gets around fast when you manage “meaningful” moments.
- b) Ratings and reviews – Having a strong feedback mechanism that's simple to engage will create ripples in the market.
- c) Referrals - the magic of recommendations of your work
- d) Renewals - seemingly easier, less negotiated renewal of contracts
- e) Employer brand – Everyone wants to be part of a winning team.

Chapter 2

Setting up the Frameworks

I. Start with the Customer : and their 'convenience' : NOT your convenience

IF you are serious about superlative service delivery : ensure ALL your systems, processes, policies and procedures have your CUSTOMER at the very heart of it. START with the CUSTOMER in mind : and ensure THEIR requirements, ease, needs, unique requirements and difficulties are all brought into play. UNDERSTAND : truly, truly understand the different needs of the different customer segments : and NEVER make the mistake of thinking ALL customers have the SAME requirements. Carefully detail out the requirements and appreciate that trying to have the same policy, procedure and process for ALL customers become a hopelessly ineffective way of trying to deal with customers and the required services that would truly bind them to you.

The issue is that we look at OUR convenience rather than the CUSTOMERS' convenience. NEVER make the mistake of thinking : ease of process and management for ourselves, and build frameworks around them : this generally leads to customers feeling utterly alienated. So, ensure you start with the customer first : and identifying their needs and limitations : and then work backwards.

II. Link all functions : ensuring they are part of the PROCESS

Customer Service cannot be delivered by one department : it just cannot be done. The ENTIRE organisation needs to come together to ensure the customer is 'taken care of.' The key is this : link ALL departmental functions with one COMMON THREAD : which is 'customer satisfaction.'

Try this : get the 'internal customer' of a department to weigh in when it comes to writing policies, procedures and processes. Have a simple rule : No Policy, Procedure or Process is to be 'signed off' unless the 'internal customer' signs off on it first. This FORCES you to ensure that the frameworks you create don't make it 'difficult' for others (though it will certainly make life easier for you!)

Try this also : FORCE the process to actually be refined to make it :

- Simpler : the number of steps in the process/procedure reduced by at least 20% to what it is currently

- Cheaper : Force the 'cost' of running the process to be at least 10% cheaper.

- Faster : Force the 'cycle time' of the current process to be reduced by at least by 10% to 20% : making things far more effective and efficient overall.

So, the lesson to learn is this : ALL processes must be aligned to the customer service delivery standards : and HELP make that happen. ANY process that conflicts with the service delivery standard needs to be relooked at : and reworked : no exceptions.

III. Setting Objectives : and making sure they are meaningful

What gets measured gets done : no different in ensuring Service Delivery.

- START by setting clear objectives that focus on overall Customer Satisfaction: make sure that all other business objectives, INCLUDING profitability, are a subset of this. For example : How do we make a profit THROUGH customer satisfaction should be the mindset : not to look at customer service separately and profitability separately : which often leads to two competing KPIs rather than complimenting KPIs.

- Link objectives on Training, Budgets, R&D, etc., to the overall CS objective. EACH of these objectives needs to be done up to actually SUPPORT the service delivery : and help make it happen : rather than as 'stand-alone' objectives.

- Don't set objectives that cannot be measured : remember, you need to have definitive data sources to ensure that the objectives set have a regular update feed : based on actual data rather than opinions.

- Ensure there are custodians for each objective : and that COLLECTIVELY, the Senior Team is given responsibility for the overall organizational objectives rather than their own KPIs only. Ensuring the overall Senior Team is RESPONSIBLE for the CS standards set makes all the difference in the work in setting the stage for the organisation to be aligned towards one objective.

- Give a rather large weightage for the CS goal : so that should that fail , NO ONE will get rewarded. This presents a rather significant incentive to take CS 'seriously'.

IV. Building the team structure : and creating agility in the structure
Build Teams that are agile : and can function independently rather than simply 'waiting for instructions.' This requires significantly more effort and training than traditional hierarchies. Don't forget that 'hierarchy' is NOT the issue : it is how you setup within the hierarchy you have. EVEN within a rigid hierarchy you can put systems and structures in place to ensure you encourage quicker responses, empowered decision making, and more ownership. So, don't make the 'hierarchy' an excuse : you ARE the hierarchy : and if you don't quite like it : you can ALWAYS change it !

Here are some quick tips :

- Create small teams.
- Cross train everyone in the department to be able to be truly multi-skilled.
- Create 'problem solving teams' and make them as cross functional as possible.
- Get CS team members to understand other processes and functions.
- Create opportunities to lead : and make it 'non-hierarchical' (in that, even the most junior person in the team can actually take the LEAD in an initiative).

V. Creating clarity of jobs : JDs and Core job Objectives

Having Agile Teams does NOT mean making it completely rudderless.

It IS important to have formal structures (especially in larger organizations) ensuring that the job roles, responsibilities and expectations are clearly laid out. What is important is to ensure that everyone understands that this is a GUIDELINE - and it MUST not be considered the 'be all and end all' of things. WITHOUT the clarity of a JD, there is often the clear case of duplication of work, ambiguity which leads to everyone 'waiting to see' (whose job it actually is) and lots of feelings of 'he/she has far less work than I do' (which is what often leads to huge dissatisfaction and eventual attrition). So, take the time to look at the 'load' of each job : and take on the rather painful, but absolutely necessary and prudent task of defining roles and responsibilities in line with the position, title and designation.

Sound paradoxical : yes : it IS paradoxical : but managing this paradox is indeed the key role of leadership. Having agility is NEVER at the cost of a solid structure and a definitively clear purpose and role for each job. NOT doing it either means you don't know how : or you honestly don't care : both of which are true management sins.

VI. Key Policy Frameworks

Try not to overdo the policy frameworks : but just like organizational structures : this is truly a 'necessary evil' to govern and manage an organization : so, take the time and effort to do it right. Once again : the key is to ensure that the Policies are actually LIBERATING rather than RESTRICTIVE. HOW you write a policy actually is in YOUR hands : so, you DO have the opportunity, and in fact, the MANDATE to really make the policies you create ENABLING the organisation and the teams.

VII. Creating Monitoring Frameworks

Monitoring Frameworks play a crucial role in both proactive and reactive CS interventions.

- Daily monitoring will highlight key 'issues' that need addressing immediately.
- Monthly monitoring will allow 'patterns' to emerge : which enables you to understand what can be done proactively.
- Regular monitoring enables better forecasting : and also, appreciating whether the key interventions you are driving are actually yielding the right results.
 - Monitoring also helps each team member and group take full ownership of the results : taking responsibility for their improvement.

VIII. Systems and Digitization

Creating a system : or buying it off the shelf : here are some considerations :

- Make sure your processes are refined BEFORE investing in a system. If your processes are sub optimal : the system will also be sub optimal. NEVER make the mistake of thinking the SYSTEM will improve your processes : It practically NEVER happens.
- Understand EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT out of a system in the first place. Have a system in place BEFORE you actually look at DIGITIZING. Analog and 'basic' systems are much easier to 'change' than digital platforms : so, take the time to refine 'systems' before going digital and investing in a fully-fledged IT system.
 - Don't get caught up in the 'features' or the 'possibilities' : work backwards from NEEDS and then figure out the features you need. Otherwise, you become like a 'fancy phone' : tons of features : but only one or two REALLY used (but paid a premium to actually buy !).
- Get the users involved - and we mean INVOLVED in the design stage itself : the system may have been MADE by IT experts : but they are USED by 'normal people' : NEVER forget that.

- ALWAYS pilot with actual practitioners : and TAKE THEIR FEEDBACK SERIOUSLY. What good is a system if it is of no use to those who ACTUALLY use it...
- Ensure you have 'minimal clicks' : this ensures that people actually USE a system on a daily basis.

IX. Creating Continuous Improvement within the Process Improvement

Continuous Improvement is NOT a fad : it is a MUST. Build in a simple, yet robust mechanism to improve things on a regular basis. It is actually a dead simple thing : just do these things and you will find that it helps :

- Ask for whatever policy procedure in place to be 'refined' quarterly.
- Force each 'person' to improve what they do : in that, to increase output (which will necessitate them to look at their own processes by default).
- Make a 'game' out of what is improved and how : have a small reward and recognition structure.
- Make 'improvements' a MUST when you consider members for a promotion. NEVER promote someone who has not made something 'better'.

X. Ensuring there are 'rituals' in place as much as 'processes'

Ultimately, great service is actually a ritualization of simple things. So, take the time to set the 'things that matter the most' into rituals : that happen 'unconsciously' every day. Till the rituals are set, you will need to prod : but once they are set, trust us, they will happen. Unless you make 'following processes' about 'rituals', it becomes a 'pain' : so, focus on ritualization : NOT about 'following the process'.

Chapter 3

Augmenting the Team

I. Creating a Training Plan

The training plan discussed here is different to your functional training plan. Consider why you are doing this and what you want to achieve in the end. For example, for you to achieve superior service delivery across the organization, what KPIs will you set? Your training plan should help you in achieving those KPIs. There is no point investing in random training programs on 'Customer Service' or 'Exceptional Service Delivery' as you will not achieve any result out of those randomly conducted programs. It is good as a tick box exercise.

- Go through all the KPIs you have set for the organization to achieve superior service delivery.
- Understand the linkage between departments / functions / different teams.
- Do a skill assessment against those KPIs to understand training needs.
 - Devise a training plan to address those training needs.
- Understand skills / areas that need to be improved / reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- Add periodic training sessions to the master training plan, considering outcomes of the above point.

II. The role of Coaching

Achieving consistent superior service delivery is a result of ongoing continuous improvement efforts in an organization. As most of us are not born with a 'Service Attitude', it is imperative that continuous reinforcements are given to employees to walk down that road to achieve superior service delivery. As part of reinforcements and guidance framework, Coaching plays a major role.

Employees will need to be reminded of the expected outcome and guided through coaching to take course corrective actions, as and when required. Keep in mind that the coaches need to be people who have experience, knowledge, and the ability to coach. Otherwise you are just paving the path for a bigger issue which could ultimately leave your employees frustrated and result in attrition.

III. Peer Learning and Reviews

People tend to learn exceptionally well from their peers. During school days, remember how we used to always lean towards the friend who sat next to us, when we did not quite get what the teacher was explaining about? Peer learning and reviews can be established as part of the training plan.

As in anything else, you need to have clear processes, systems, and timelines if you are serious about this. Otherwise, the learners will have their own chit-chats and you'll be misled to think that peer learning is taking place. Further, a framework will also need to be provided to obtain and provide peer feedback. Finally, a time needs to be allocated for peer learning to take place.

IV. Creating an Internal Training Team

Focus on creating an internal training team so that you have a group of people whom you can rely on to keep the momentum going, which is created by external experts . Select a cross functional team of people who are willing to be part of the internal training team. These must be people who are willing to go the extra mile for the benefit of the organization, as the responsibility of being part of the internal sales team gets added to their usual work responsibilities. Involve them from the beginning in your training discussions with the external experts.

This involves defining the purpose / scope of training, training plan, developing training material, discussions about training techniques, etc. Get external experts to train your internal training team through a 'Train The Trainer' session(s) and also get support from external experts in certifying your internal training team in real life training scenarios. This boosts the confidence of your internal training team and provides you with the assurance that they are fit for the selected job.

V. Best Practices : picking them from EVERYWHERE

As a ritual, get people to pick best practices from virtually everywhere.

The word ‘everywhere’ is used intentionally here for the meaning ‘wholeheartedly’! We come across many best practices every day which could relate to our work, whether it is from home, different industries, different organizations, etc. For example, you do not need to go further to understand that different customers have different needs and the approach should be varying from one to the other.

Consider the different ways in which we deal with our father, mother and siblings.. Should we look further to understand this? No, right! As another example, let’s consider that you are in the banking industry – you can learn from world class courier service companies when it comes to document delivery (e.g. Credit Cards), you can learn from the hospitality industry in dealing face to face with customers, etc.

VI. Setting up continuous improvement for the team

As we have highlighted before, this is a journey and not a destination.

So ‘Continuous Improvement’ becomes key in this journey. You can leave this to be another word in your corporate dictionary as most organizations work towards it. You must have processes and mechanisms in place if you are serious about it. You cannot leave it to chance and hope for the best. For example, you need to be able to do analysis with certain data, about your processes, about people, etc., if you are to continually improve your team from where they are now.

Chapter 4

Getting Stakeholders involved

Though this may seem a little off, stakeholder mapping is also an important aspect of the service delivery scope. Why? Because perceptions and positive frames of reference matter. Ever heard of the concept of a “wing-man” at a bar or other social gathering? For those of us who might not be familiar, they are those who make us look good in the minds of our target so that there is acceptance and less resistance. Managing these perceptions matter to build enviable “social equity” so that it eases the stress on employees and systems as well as help in any crisis management situation.

I. Shareholders : and the case for ‘investment’

We think shareholders have been painted black and demonised all these years. Times have indeed changed and shareholders today realise that sustainability is key to making money. With business cycles becoming more volatile and under continuous shocks, it is now more important than ever to create value and get closer to customers.

Some possible tips for this:

- a) ROI measurements vis à vis cost of acquisition
- b) KPIs on cost of servicing (use of Activity Based Costing method for analysis)
- c) KPIs on cost of resolving issues
- d) Qualitative KPIs that can be understood by the frontline that translate into meaningful financial ratios
- e) Hybrid models to measure and manage customer profitability and management of key segments

With a little bit of effort, it can be made abundantly clear what projects shareholders need to be investing into.

II. Key Departments : and alignment

We did begin this topic saying that customer service cuts through any business, but some departments have more to do with the job than others. This also creates a lack of ownership when the customer service department needs to get projects off the bat! Every department will have a role to play in the final delivery of value to customers but some have more relevance than others for sure.

A possible work-around for this and a sure way to bring about alignment to the cause, that we now know to be true, is to have a cross functional team that sits together on the subject more often so that the departments are not disturbed or overburdened. This also enables the key function of customer service to co-develop projects and execute them easily.

However, none of this will see light until there is a binding force, leadership!

III. Front Line Staff : and insights/intelligence

Your frontlines are the best to gather information on the customer and market firsthand. There is simply no substitute for this. However, any rich input is lost either due to:

- a. Poor communication
- b. Lack of interest of the frontline staff or operations, and
- c. Inability to spot vital information.

This is hurdle you really need to overcome with coaching and training. Meanwhile, with a structured approach, your frontlines can be equipped to play the role of scouts and provide key inputs on revenue generation and cost reduction projects. With time you will come to realise that your speed and knowledge have improved to give you a definite advantage.

IV. The government : policy frameworks and 'pressure' for industry specific frameworks and regulation

With time, regulators keep setting new standards to protect the interests of customers. From a macro point of view, this is good; but your people should stay abreast of the changes. Consumer protection, payment/ credit controls, public liabilities, environment and sustainability are all themes that emerge within this domain.

Regulations provide a level playing field for industry players, and if done right, could also help sustain the industry. You should look at your industry and how regulations can guide you to build a sustainable eco-system for yourself and the industry. Let's take the example of a price war, if the regulator does not step in and control it, disaster could happen. Left to its own devices, rate cutting could seem beneficial to the customer at first, but hurt companies to the extent that they cut down on quality of service, which ultimately results in a bad experience.

What's worse, a few companies could shut doors not only leaving customers underserved, but also many unemployed. The same may apply to regulations on aspects of quality and more.

V. The Community : positioning the organisation and its service expectations

We're sure you've heard the term 'under promise and over deliver'. Managing services are essentially about managing expectations. These expectations are not only held by those who transact with you, but also the wider population who hear and know about you, including those customers of your competitors.

Some key aspects of managing expectations are:

- a) Value proposition – clear solution backed by testimonials
 - b) Quality - ratings and accreditations
 - c) Convenience – accessibility and processes
 - d) Delivery timelines – Responsiveness

VI. Key Influencers : and Currying Favour

Who are these people? Well these are the people who:

- I. Have a say in purchase decisions
- II. Watch you closely to make sure you don't mess up
- III. Those who celebrate you

In relation to the spheres of influence above, the list of these influencers can include but not be limited to friends and family of customers, critics and reviewers, media, pressure groups, fan clubs and those you have helped through social service initiatives. This list can be more extensive, but the point to take home is that they all create the perception that drives purchase and attitudes towards your business. Therefore, getting them onboard is more than helpful.

Chapter 5

Getting the Customers Involved

Whether you want to market your product, get feedback on a new line or simply grow your customer base, the best approach is to get your existing customers involved. After all they won't lie to you since they are using your products and services. They will also be the best ambassadors to promote your new and existing products. So always involve your customers.

I. Focus Group Discussions for ideas

There are many ways to approach this, and each will depend on your reason for involving your customers. Inviting small groups of customers to have focused discussions will encourage more participation and interactions. Plan for a number of small groups and you can then look at the feedback/suggestions and make your decisions.

II. Design Thinking : with customer at the center

At the end of the day, your products and services should serve the customer and NOT you! Whatever decision you want to take with regard to your product or service, always ensure that the customer is at the centre of your design thinking. After all, it is the customer who will pay for it and use it!

III. Pilot Testing Ideas

From designing a new product to identifying which model to actually launch, always ensure the customer is right there in the middle of it all. The same applies to pilot testing. Who better than your own customer to give you a brutally honest answer? The challenge, however, is that you must be ready to accept the feedback without being offended. We rarely use our own products, and even if we did, we would be biased.

With a customer, you will hear it as it is!!

IV. Getting insights on Processes

While the focus is always on revenue generation, companies that balance this with value creation, always do well in the long run. The process involved in providing the value added service to the customer can always be improved. Involving your customer in the process of real time service and response can help you identify timewasting and non-value adding steps. With the insights coming directly from the customer, you will always find better ways to deliver. This will also create a better image of your organisation as your customer now will automatically become your brand ambassador.

V. Getting Customers involved in Solving Other Customer issues

Another area that would do well with customer involvement is the complaint department. Organisations are always struggling with customer complaints and spend quite a bit of time and money in many instances to solve these issues. Involving another customer to relate to the situation and to identify solutions or to endorse the provided solutions will give you a better perspective. A customer, who recommends a course of action to rectify a problem, will also stand by the suggested solutions.

Chapter 6

Creating CS Related Differentiation

I. Generating 'advocates' and 'ambassadors'

Remember we discussed about mindset change as to 'how do we make a profit through customer service?'. This is how you do it. Superior customer service should provide you with self-made brand ambassadors and advocates. Why I used the word 'self-made' is that customers will become ambassadors of your brand by themselves if your service is superior.

Which means you get positive word of mouth promotions, free of charge. This goes a longer way than your organisation creating promotions. Further, your employees are also your brand ambassadors as they genuinely believe in customer service and feel happy about being part of the journey. Carefully laid out customer relationship management (CRM) systems will help the organisation in creating more brand advocates and ambassadors without making a dent in your bottom line. This will generate more sales as it is something which every organisation cannot pride themselves with or replicate easily.

II. Using 'lessons' to learn and improve : and leapfrog the competition

We are not perfect human beings and we don't live in a world where everything goes as planned. Therefore, mistakes are bound to happen. The key here is: How do we learn from those situations / mistakes and then improve to be better versions of ourselves? As the saying goes 'every dark cloud has a silver lining', every lesson has something for you (organisation) to learn.

You can use it for your advantage if you learn from it to improve. As for any other aspect, you must have proper processes / mechanisms in place to do this as well. Otherwise, an organisation will always be where it is as it never 'learns' from its mistakes.

III. Creating ‘internal customer satisfaction’ to serve ‘real customers’ better

It is imperative that you have your ‘internal customers’ satisfied if you really want to satisfy your ‘real customers’. Think about this for a moment, will an unsatisfied person be able to bring satisfaction to someone else? Unlikely, right? It could happen sometimes, but it will not happen all the time.

Therefore, you need to keep your internal customers satisfied first so that they can delight real customers. Periodic customer satisfaction reviews, usage of proper HR tools and mechanisms will help you in achieving and maintaining internal customer satisfaction. You should have the satisfaction of subordinates as one KPI to people managers.

This way, it becomes part of their responsibility and they have to become serious about it.

IV. Making Customer Service part of the Employer Brand

Be bold and make customer service part of your employer brand. This way, you are forced to consider customer service as a strategic pillar in your business. It also brings the focus of the entire business to this element, which is vital for you to maintain exceptional service standards. As discussed earlier, you must include customer service related KPIs to everyone’s performance appraisals, from CEO to the security guard at the front door. These KPIs must be measurable and they must have a link to their job roles.

Chapter 7

Creating a CS Culture within the Business

I. Aligning Organizational Values with CS Values

Most organisations have established a 'set of Values' which personify what they stand for : sadly, most of these Values have no relationship to the focus on Customer Service. If you are serious about driving CS within the organisation, and ensuring that there is a 'culture' of CS : then, ensure that the Values are actually linked to Values that can drive CS as well.

Ask these questions :

- Do the Values put the 'customer first' ?
- Do the Values support internal customer perspectives ?
- Do the Values enable flexibility, adaptability and agility that are essential for excellent service delivery ?
- Do the Values help foster oneness : and help break silos ?

Values build a culture: a culture either supports or detracts you from the organizational delivery of service.

II. Pegging CS to the overall KPIs

As will has been discussed a bit more in detail : ensuring you have a system of aligning all organisational performance indicators towards customers and service delivery standards, become critical. Often times there is a CHOICE to be made : to make profit OR ensure the customer is 'sorted' : and this is a fruitless debate to have, Bottom line is that one should feed the other : always. Customer Satisfaction at the cost of profitability is as bad as Profitability at the cost of Customer Service : both are not sustainable in the long term.

III. Pegging CS to Process Improvements, Key Initiatives and Digitization Efforts

CS needs to be at the heart of continuous improvement projects, key initiatives and digitization efforts. Often times, none of these key things are actually 'aligned' and 'complimentary' to customer satisfaction and delivery standards : and often times : it is at the cost of CS and Delivery. Making things as easy as possible for the entire organisation to wire themselves towards service delivery is a process of 'design', not chance...

So, make the conscious decision to ensure that every single major project that happens inside the organisation has the customer at its very heart.

IV. Taking decisive action, when required, to ensure the 'wrong' precedence is not made

No matter what you do, there will ALWAYS be the detractors : and those who never quite see it the way it needs to be seen.

Though every effort needs to be made to ensure you 'win them over' it is important to have a zero tolerance approach to detractions from the set policies, procedures and processes : specially when it impacts a customer negatively. Take action swiftly : and decisively : and ensure the entire organisation understands that the customer being 'hassled' or 'let down' will not be tolerated.

Chapter 8

Key Challenges and Overcoming Them

I. Championing the Customer's Cause

Remember : as the Leader of a CS team : you ARE the voice of the CUSTOMER within the organisation. Now, this clearly does NOT mean you blindly parrot out what the customer wants and insist on it like a spoilt two-year-old ! Rather, you need to be able to champion the cause of the customer WHILST taking into consideration the demands and limitations of the organisation and its structures.

If not YOU, who ? If not NOW, when ?

II. Managing the change and Resistance

Remember : just because it makes sense to YOU, it wouldn't make sense to everyone ! Empathise with this. CS is NOT everyone's priority : though it IDEALLY should be. But hey : what is IDEAL and what is ACTUALLY THE CASE are quite different aren't they ? So, don't EXPECT there to be no resistance... Dealing with change and resistance is a subject by itself (yep : we have a book on that too : so, do pick it up : we are not going to repeat its contents here !) but here are some basics :

- Explain, explain, explain : communication is key. Keep talking about benefits, keep talking about the WHY and keep talking about the FUTURE STATE once the changes are done.
- Talk openly with the naysayers : respectfully draw them into debates : so that you can lay out your case in the open.
 - Garner support from the 'influencers' within the organisation.
- Make sure you have some quick wins to ensure that the naysayers are silenced.
- Own up when mistakes happen : never cover up : because this is what leads to 'conspiracies'.
- If any of the naysayers truly come on board : get them FULLY involved.

III. Making Customer Service BEYOND the budget : and driving CS even in zero budget environments

We are often challenged with budgets : so, never make Customer Service about the money. Find solutions : always : never make budgets an excuse. There are always 'little things' that can often bring 'big results' : find them !

EPILOGUE

Customer Service is NOT a department.... It should be everyone's job!!

Managing Service Delivery involves creating processes that would involve everyone in the organisation working towards creating a product or service that would benefit a customer...not because you think so, but because that's exactly what the customer wants!

Many organisations fail because they spend time and money amongst themselves while identifying and launching a product. They almost always miss the key players a component whose input is critical to success – The Customer!

Managing Service delivery is a continuous process and one that should always involve your customers, which will, in turn, foster a strong bond.
Many organisations often forget this aspect.

Always keep the communication lines open and transparent and ensure that, as an organisation, you have the right culture. Failing which, we will always play catch up and never actually get to being ahead of the game.

The culture should always focus on the customer being in the middle of it all. Our purpose is to provide the customer with the best product and service with a focus on value addition! If you, as a leader, can adapt to this line of thinking, you can rest assured that the benefits will far outweigh the pain of going through the process!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



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