Leading a Service Team

If you want to be a leader in a service driven organization, you have some special obligations. So often leaders ignore their responsibilities for customer focus or relegate them to the bottom of their to-do lists. If you and/or your organization declare your intentions to provide excellent customer service, here are five areas that need your attention.

1. **What kind of example are you setting?**
   If you are committed to leading a service organization, you must walk the talk or your efforts will quickly been seen as just another program. A great place to start is to practice MBWA (Managing By Wandering Around). While you're walking, try asking this question, "What can I do to enable you to better serve our customers?" and then act on the information you receive. Next, spend time checking out your competition. Don't just watch their prices; watch your competition's people.
   - What do you do on a daily basis to show how important serving the customer is to you?

2. **Are you hiring the right people?**
   For years the practice of hiring the right skills has been the norm. Even after years of the Disney message of *hire for attitude and teach skill*, organizations still pursue skills - often to the exclusion of digging to uncover attitudes. Several years ago the authors of a customer service book went searching for the best frontline customer service providers they could find. They were astounded to discover that most of the shining service providers were hired despite the fact that they didn't meet the organization's hiring policies. Organizations that are willing to take a chance on a person with the right attitude and then invest in skills training were well rewarded.
   - When was the last time you reviewed your hiring process?

3. **Are you teaching problem solving?**
   Xerox research concludes that *extremely satisfied* customers are six times more likely to buy from you the next time than are customers who are *merely satisfied*. Extremely satisfied customers are created by problem solving employees. An employee who is not involved in problem solving is an employee involved in problem making.
   - When was the last time you reviewed your training programs for new employees?

4. **Have you defined what empowerment really means?**
   To your customer, the employee they are interacting with at any given moment IS your company. Armed with that belief, the last thing a customer wants to hear is, "I can't do anything about…" Empowerment does not, however, mean anything goes. That's too risky for even the most entrepreneurial organization. Empowerment means learning together how to take smart risks. Leaders and their teams need guidelines to work within.
   - Does your organization have simple-to-understand, customer-friendly policies?

5. **Do you reward the right behavior?**
   Employees will work on those things that get measured, recognized, and rewarded, not things that are mentioned once or only treated with lip service. If you say you want to build relationships with customers during a call but measure your customer service reps by how many calls they take during an hour, you're in trouble. You should be measuring resolved calls per hour. Measurements, recognition, and rewards do not necessarily take large investments of resources, but they do require you to invest your time and creativity.
   - When was the last time you reviewed what you measure and reward?

Leaders who take customer service seriously recognize their days may look different from other leaders. They usually have more questions than answers. They spend more time with their people listening and learning. They get excited by opportunities that allow them to get close to their customers. They understand that their bottom line will be better because of their brand of leadership!

Sidebar

The Phone

In most organizations, everyone answers a phone and you can't ever be 100% certain it's not a customer on the other end. Make sure that your new employees orientation contains a lesson on your telephone answering expectations. (A general review every so often wouldn't hurt either.) Most customer service experts agree that the following are minimum standards.

- Answer your phone with a standard, well thought greeting within 3 rings.
- Don't ever put a caller on hold without asking their permission (and waiting for their reply) and then monitor the time you've left them on hold.
- When you transfer a call make sure you transfer the caller's situation as well as the caller so they won't have to tell their story again.
- Voice mail shouldn't make message taking a thing of the past. Let the caller decide whether or not they want to continue talking to you (a real person) or enter the world of *press one for*…
- If you take a message, make sure you get accurate information and deliver it on a timely basis.
- When you end a call, make sure to say thank you and wait until the caller hangs up before you hang up.

Sounds too simple to be mentioned doesn't it? Until, of course, you try to remember the last time your call to an organization was handled this way.