

WHY GOOD SERVICE IS NECESSARY

I can spend my money anywhere—online or in person. I have a choice. In fact, I have a misery of choices where I can spend my money.

The top three competitors in any industry share three common denominators. First, they all have pretty good quality. The quality revolution made sure of that. When the Japanese stunned the world with their superior quality, everyone else scrambled to close the gap, and they have for the most part. Even the Chinese are shifting their focus to creating better quality goods.

Second, they all offer a bundle of services—logistics and inventory control, customization, technical assistance, field support, special packaging, sub-assembly, etc. If one competitor offers a particular service, others in the industry will quickly imitate the concept and create their own version of that service. This is why there are only a few innovators in business and an abundance of imitators.

Third, they all value the same things. At least on their websites they do. I recently did an audit of major players in different industries and found common ground among their corporate values: integrity, sustainability, teamwork, innovation, and so on. It is as if a single consultant visited the corporate offices of every company and conducted the same planning session for all of them.

When everything looks this much alike, why shouldn't I shop for the cheapest price? It appears I will get the same value proposition wherever I go. In a word, people. People make the difference. People deliver the products and services. Therefore, I want to deal with the best people—those who will give me the best service.

I have had my fill of fast-food humanoids that barely acknowledge my presence or fail to thank me for my business. I hope to never call another technical service hot-line only to be connected to someone that I cannot understand because of their addiction to techno-jargon or their unintelligible accents. I loathe to do business with a company that has streamlined people out of the equation by routing my call to an automated response based on my pressing the right combination of numbers on my phone. I cringe when I think about my next flight on a cattle-car airline where passengers are treated as ticket holders, not people.

I resent being put on hold for ten minutes, only to be re-directed to a website to view FAQ's. I refuse to buy from a company that will not list their phone number on their website. I resist the impersonal nature of technology that's sole purpose is to save a couple of bucks for the seller. Just because we can use technology does not mean that we should use technology.

The shopping experiences I have just described are today's business realities. Consumers have a right to complain and to be frustrated. Why is good service so important? Because it can be the single differentiator between your company and a host of other supply alternatives. The one thing that your company has that others do not have is your people. When your people out-care, out-serve, and out-perform the competition, you have a distinct competitive advantage. U.S. companies spend three times more money developing new products that others will copy versus training and developing their people, which no one can copy.

You may sell products, but you serve people. In a world of look-alike products and services, it is your people and the way that they serve that is your uniqueness. Do you want to differentiate? Hire people who genuinely care, appreciate the opportunity to serve, are grateful for the customer's business, know what they are doing, speak clearly, and who treat customers like human beings with real problems to be solved. If your service does not solve the customers' issues, it could be contributing to their issues.

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