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Customer service shortage

IT HAS ALMOST BECOME THE NORM to give someone good service only after they have demonstrated a significant degree of customer loyalty. Think about it. How many miles do you have to fly with a given airline or how many nights do you have to spend with a given hotel chain before you really start getting great service? How many dollars do you have to spend to demonstrate customer loyalty before you are seen as a person rather than a piece of meat with money?

Customer service has declined significantly over the past 10 years. While there are a few organizations out there that still know what truly excellent service is, these organizations are getting harder to find. It's easy to complain about others; however, it's more challenging to be honest with yourself as you evaluate the level of service you provide your own customers. Are you attempting to provide higher levels of customer value, even though most of the people around you don't see the need to do so? Do you assume that you're providing good service simply because no one complains?

One of the key result types that we require from any of our processes should be customer service. After all, don't all of our processes exist solely for the purpose of providing customer value, and in turn, new or repeat business? Do we come to work each day solely to make our boss happy, or do we see how our daily job affects additional customer groups outside of our official supervisor? Even though our processes primarily exist to keep

customers, most of us don't see the work we do each day from this perspective.

There are possible systemic explanations for this general decline in customer service levels. First, it appears that most people don't really know who their customers are, let alone what their key expectations are. Are the customers for the processes you own and execute regularly clearly defined? Do you know what your internal and external customers expect from you, and can you prioritize these expectations by customer type?

Second, we have somehow adopted the belief that you can have great external customer service even though you don't provide very good service to your internal customers. It's gotten to the point where we think we can threaten our own people with disciplinary action if they fail to treat the external customer properly. In other words, it is OK for us to treat our internal customers like dirt, but they can't allow this treatment to affect our external customers.

Finally, too few of us have truly effective means for listening to our customers, especially in a proactive manner. Outside of the sales and marketing group, most of us rely on customer complaints to gauge our level of service performance. Great organizations, however, not only listen to their customers in a variety of ways, they also watch them and ask them expectation-based questions.

The definition of great service has disappeared. Without a clear perspective of what excellent customer service entails,



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it becomes difficult to model or teach others about excellent service. The same decline we are seeing with external customers is affecting our internal customers as well. You may not measure it, trend it or even track it, but dissatisfaction is out there.

People who will succeed in tomorrow's workplace will know how to define customer expectations, listen to customer concerns, and, most importantly, redesign their processes to increase likelihood that these expectations will be consistently met. ~

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