

TRUE CUSTOMER SERVICE DO YOU TRULY PROVIDE IT?

Ho, Ho, Ho!!! It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!!! Who coined this saying? Truly whoever coined this saying is not shopping at the malls or Outlets. Christmas or as the politically correct want us to term it "Holiday Season", brings out some of the crankiest people in the world. The shoppers are cranky, the sales clerks are cranky and the drivers, that's a whole story in itself. But let's think about a shopping experience. You're walking thru the corridor in the mall and you have a bunch of shopping bags and all the people around you have tons of shopping bags and you end up hitting into one of these people. What do you do? You make an effort to apologize, it may be a grunt or a quick sorry but you make the effort to apologize to this complete stranger. Yet when you get home whom do you take your frustration out on? As you walk into your house you take it out on the person you are closest to, your spouse, your kids, even your pet. Why do we do this? We want everyone to like us, don't we? We want the stranger we ran into to like us and so we must have to be nice. We don't have to be as nice to the people who already know us because they'll understand, right? Have you ever entered a place of business and you experience an employee who is just negative and a demotivator? Then you ask about that person and the managers says "Oh, John, he's been here forever, that's just the way he is. Everyone knows how he is." Is this right? My opinion is NO!

In business, as in our homes we have two types of Customers. There is the Internal Customer and the External Customer. So what is the difference? Well let's define the External Customer. This is any customer that can do business with you. They may already be doing business with us, it could be a person who sees your advertising or yellow page ad, it could be someone who sees an employee wearing your companies name on a coat or T-shirt. The External Customer is the person who truly pays your employee's paychecks. The External Customer is so important to any business. In most cases when a company talks about customer service they focus on the External Customer. They want the employees to go above and beyond to satisfy the External Customer so they will like you and come back.

Internal Customer, who is this? The Internal Customer is your associates. Yes, the people who work in your establishment are actual customers also. How do we treat these customers? Usually not the same as an External Customer, why? These are the people we see everyday and interact with at all times. They know how we are, they are the people we vent to. Isn't that the way we all are? We take the people we are closest to for granted. Think back to how I started the article. Why do we apologize to strangers but take our aggravation out on our family? We want strangers to like us don't we? If we are ourselves to them they might not like us. Everyone wants to be liked. But, when we treat our family or Internal Customer poorly do we hurt the External Customer? You betcha. Why? Who takes care of our External Customer? Our Internal Customers, if we are nasty to the receptionist and yell at them for the information that they gave us, who answers our phone? How do you think this receptionist will answer the phone? Will they be happy and bubbly when the next External Customer calls in? Most likely not. Is it only how we talk to our Internal Customers? No. Think about body language and the

tone of voice you use with your Internal Customers. This effects how they interact with the External Customer. Have you ever worked with that person that you just waited to see their mood before you determined what type of day you are going to have.

We will never increase the number of External Customers our business can have if we don't take care of our Internal Customer. Our External Customers know when they are dealing with a company that has happy Internal Customers. As I stated above, if we know that one of our peers might effect our day don't we avoid them. External Customers will avoid our businesses just as we avoid our peers. We see our Internal Customers so much more than our External Customers, let's treat them with respect.

Any of you in leadership positions must know that you have one of the most influential effects on the Internal Customer. Your Internal Customers follow your lead in how you treat both Internal and External Customers. My favorite story comes from a student in my class that solidifies the importance of your influence:

“I sit at the first desk in the office and I can see everyone pull in and park at our business. Each morning the boss pulls in and I can tell just by the way he parks what kind of day we are going to have. If he parks one way I get on the loud speaker and announce “Good Day” and if he doesn't park this way I get on the loud speaker and announce “Bad Day”.

This is just how you park. How you treat and talk your Internal and External Customers sets the tone for your entire company.

As I close I want to tie this back to Christmas, not only should we think about treating our Internal Customers better at work but also at home. Our families are our Internal Customers, let's treat our family with love and patience especially at this Wonderful Time of the Year.

Have a Happy and Safe Holiday,
Kim