

There is No Business without Customer Business



**7 powerful ways to create
exceptional customer experience**

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There's No Business without Customer Business

7 Powerful Ways to Create Exceptional Customer Experience

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Executive Summary

Obviously you cannot have a business without customers. Yet there is so much more to business than just having customers. Indeed to survive in business in today's competitive climate you have to provide a superior customer experience and that involves just about everything other than the customers, although they of course shape everything you do and remain the final judges of your performance.

Shaping your customer experience is ultimately all about people, because it is your people and their behaviours that determine the experience your customer has. This makes your life much more difficult, because the more successful you are the further away you actually get from your customers and the more dependent on your people you become for maintaining the standards of customer service you promote. Even more ironic is that - as you probably know from your own experience as a customer - is that you as 'management' invariably get blamed when service is unsatisfactory. So despite your remoteness from your customer your customers' experience is ultimately your accountability.

The good news is that creating a good customer experience is ultimately about building good teamwork, and as everyone knows you don't even have to have the best people to be the best team. It is simply a case of enabling your people to be the best they can be. This is not rocket science, and simply entails:

- Having a clear purpose;
- Having clear values;
- Constant reinforcement;
- Having a multi-dimensional customer outlook;
- Building a team ethos;
- Respect for the individual;
- Allowing them to feel they are contributing to changing the world.

These are expanded in more detail below, and will all contribute to having a more engaged workforce, which is essential for your sustained success. However, they are not all that you need to do to better engage your people, and you need to focus specifically on making the best use of your people if you want to build on this and the other 4 capabilities - sense and respond, retention, innovation and productivity - that are all in any case inter-connected and combine to build the platform you need for your long term, sustained success.

The Zealise Assessment Programme will help you with this. It builds on the corollary that any shortcomings in these capabilities are de facto evidence of existing employee engagement problems and thus provides you with a mechanism to very quickly assess their scale and identify what action you need to take to redress them. It offers you an extremely cost effective way to stop haemorrhaging the costs associated with poor employee engagement, short-term bottom line gains, and a second-to-none means of addressing the problem to reduce the threats against your sustained success.

Contact us now to find out more about how we can help you.

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An obvious truth - or two

It would be hard to find a more obvious statement than saying you don't have a business if you don't have any customers. (Even the colour of the sky is subjective!) Consequently, unless you have a global monopoly with the means to prevent anyone else setting up in competition, it is equally obvious that if your customers do not enjoy the experience of dealing with you, they will not continue to do so. That is why keeping your customers happy has to be one of your highest priorities as a business leader.

You would think that this would guarantee good service wherever you went. Yet, I am sure, like me, you have - possibly even quite recently - experienced service that has you calling upon all your reserves of self-discipline and self-control to stop you losing your temper. You must wonder how it happens, and how 'management' can have let things get so bad. However, have you ever paused to wonder whether your own customers might be having a similar experience? After all, I am sure that the manager of that very organisation that sprang to your mind when my earlier statement invoked your bad memories never for a moment thought that any of his customers could have had the sort of aggravating experience you had.

The fact is that, the higher you rise in an organisation, the more remote you get from day-to-day, direct contact with customers. So you actually have little or no idea of how your customers are being treated. You are totally dependent on your people and rely on them completely to serve your customers, to an ideal standard, which you may or may not have communicated properly, and which you are now too busy to check. Even so, common sense would suggest that nobody intends to give that kind of service. After all you are paying them to do a job and nobody in their right mind deliberately sets out to do a bad job. Thus you think it is not likely to happen. Yet, as we have agreed, it does. So, how does such bad service come about?

It a people thing

Perhaps it is because, in the same way you have lost touch with your customers, you have also lost touch with your people. The line of sight between strategy and operations, or between values and culture, or manager and employee, may have been lost and things have simply become blurred. Or perhaps it is just because they were having a bad day and, being human, let their feelings show. The problem is you have no way of getting inside their head and knowing, and neither does the customer. Which makes it a bad day for everyone and a disastrous one for your business; for not only does your customer vow never to come back, but he tells 5 of his friends about it and so they now 'know' to avoid giving you their business.

This illustrates just to what extent business is all about people. And what makes it even more difficult is the fact that these situations can be caused by poor service at any stage in a transaction and be instigated by people in your organisation who never go anywhere near a customer. As a business leader it is impossible for you to do everything yourself, and so you have to rely on others. Consequently, if you want to have a successful business you have to have good people management, and you have to find a way to get your people to act as though it was their own business and their lives depended on it.

Do you remember earlier, when invoking your bad experience, I envisaged you querying, how management had come to allow such poor service? That is because at the end of the day, everyone blames management. You have to see that you *are* actually responsible for bad service.

The buck stops with you

As long as you remain in your role there is no getting away from it. The words of that classic bumper stick describe your situation perfectly: *"I have a responsible job. If anything goes wrong around here, I am responsible!"* Whether you are the owner/manager or merely a manager with the fiduciary responsibility to safeguard the assets of the business, you shape the business and are responsible for ensuring its survival, including looking out for your customers. Even though you cannot do everything yourself, you have to create an environment in which you can have every confidence that things are done at least as well as if you had done them yourself, if not better.

Poor service is a primary indication of disengaged employees. And disengaged employees are the consequence of poor management. So if you have disengaged employees or deliver a service inferior to your competitor's it is your fault. And it is your responsibility to fix it. Remember, if you have no customers you have no business, so, if the business is to survive and thrive, you need to ensure that you do all you can to ensure your customers have a great experience in every aspect of their dealings with your organisation. That means engaging your employees, for it is impossible to deliver an exemplary customer experience with employees who are not engaged.

The good news

The good news is that it need not be as daunting as it seems. The key, however, is to recognise that your organisation is a team, and therefore your task is simply to build a good team. The key here is to remember that your team does not actually have to be the best people!

You might find that a surprising statement, but just think for a moment. It isn't necessarily the team with the best players that wins the league, but rather the one that plays best as a team. Furthermore, unlike the sports arena, business is not carried out in front of a huge crowd of cheering fans. Nobody really knows who the best people are, for the team effect makes it difficult to see the trees for the wood. Your customers will never dream that you might not be the best as long as you:

- Have good people; and
- Give them a great experience.

If you do that they will never even be tempted to try out the competition to compare. So the only people who really care are your competitors, and that is because they will think it's you, simply because they feel inferior due to their inability to lure your customers away. If you doubt that, just think about all the 'stars' who have been lured away from successful organisations, only to fail when they got into a different environment.

The right focus

Any top athlete will tell you that they compete best when they are "in the zone": when they focus on what they know they have to do and ignore the competition. Also, weren't you taught when you raced to never turn your head to see how others were doing? You need to apply the same principles in business. Forget the over-emphasised analogies to war that have been drummed into your head and that are so prevalent in the business world and business schools. To compete effectively, all you need is a good team and focus.

You don't need me to tell you where the right area to focus is, do you. Of course you already know it's your people!

Don't tell me you still thought I was going to say your customer. I know that might seem to be the logical assumption, in a paper on creating exemplary customer experience and after being told that this is critical to your business survival. But you have forgotten the

key point, that poor customer service is the primary indicator of disengaged employees. So if you want to build exemplary customer service you have to put the customer second, and start building that great team ethos we were just discussing.

Getting the focus on the customer experience

This is not rocket science. You will find nothing daunting here, and will be pleasantly surprised to see (again?) how simple it actually is.

1. A clear purpose

Remember why you are in business. What is the essence of your business? As we have seen all too clearly recently, businesses fail when they forget their *raison d'être*. Your business exists to provide a product/s or service to people or businesses that have a need or desire for that product and service. That's it! No more and no less. Recognise that and always keep it mind and you will not go wrong. A clear understanding of what you are in business for makes you more responsive to your customers and thus actually enhances your adaptability. On the other hand, get side-tracked and start pursuing greater profits for the sake of greater profits and disaster becomes inevitable, even if you have been in business successfully for hundreds of years.

2. Clear values

So closely aligned with a clear purpose as to be almost integrated, clear values are the glue of the corporate culture and what you need to hold your team together. It is impossible to build a lasting team or sustained success without them and the minute you start to lose sight of them, you sow the seeds of destruction. Loss of values is the acid that erodes ethics and destroys your moral compass. It erodes your sense of direction and you end up drifting hopelessly in stormy seas.

The analogy to glue is actually very appropriate for you could say that a clear purpose and clear values are like the diepoxy and diamine that combine to form an epoxy resin. Each on its own does nothing, but combine them and you create a hard, adhesive substance that is incredibly strong and cannot be processed, moulded or shaped. Your purpose and values should be the same.

3. Constant reinforcement

You need to ensure that every person in the organisation understands, agrees with and is committed to your purpose and values. You should look to embed them into everything you do, and to validate all new initiatives, policies and procedures, as well as build them into all performance measures, wherever possible.

4. A multi-dimensional customer-centred outlook

One of the primary motivators for everyone is the desire to make a difference. You can develop on this by building a service philosophy whereby everyone in your organisation is encouraged to see everything they do as a service. You achieve this by instilling a multi-dimensional view of service that, amongst other things incorporates: should have a clear understanding that everything they do must be seen as providing a service and delivering value. This requires a multi-dimensional view incorporating all the following aspects, as applicable.

- a) A clear understanding of how what they are doing adds value to your customers.
- b) Identifying who the customer is - whether for an internal or external customer and a clear understanding of:
 - i) Who the customer is.
 - ii) What the customer wants/needs.

- iii) Why the customer wants the product or service
- iv) How the customer is going to use the product or service
- c) Developing a clear idea of the customers expectations, including:
 - i) How to best meet their requirements (including questioning whether there could there be a better way of meeting them?)
 - ii) When they expect 'delivery' i.e. timings
 - iii) Where they expect delivery
 - iv) What are the consequences to them of the product or service not meeting their needs
 - v) What are the consequences of early or late delivery.
- d) A clear understanding of the fact that there is a relationship with the customer that needs to be developed and nurtured. This could include such things as:
 - i) Having regular meetings with them to ensure expectations are being met and (wherever practicable or possible) exceeded.
- e) Including a strategy session with them to understand their business direction and explore how you can play an ongoing part in helping them succeed.

Of course this list is very idealistic and you will need to tailor it to suit your business and what is possible. However, the ideal should always be your starting point, and the object here isn't to provide you with an exhaustive list, but to simply illustrate how you can build a service mentality that will both engage your employees and embed entrepreneurship, whilst ensuring you deliver outstanding customer experience.

5. A team ethos

Remember your organisation is a team and you need to constantly reinforce team-thinking. The customer centric approach will actually create a very strong foundation for this, because it will foster a greater alignment. It will also enhance the likelihood of people stepping in to the breach to help their colleagues whenever they sense the need to do so. You will, however, need to find other ways to reinforce this. Some ways in which you might do this are:

- Ensure that you are not too remote from your people and seen as aloof.
- 'Open the books' i.e. tell your people how the business is doing, let them see the figures and encourage them to ask questions.
- You may consider that you are 'paid the big bucks' to bear the burden of worry, but be more open about the challenges you are facing and the problems you are dealing with. Remember that you do not have to come up with all the answers yourself and by sharing a problem you might find someone else has an answer that you might never have thought of.
- Ensure that you are alert to and break down any barriers or silos that might start to evidence themselves.
- Look for ways to acknowledge success that recognises collaboration more than individual contribution - especially in incentive remuneration which should be more connected to overall organisational performance e.g. more profit sharing
- Reinforce collaborative/team behaviours and efforts

6. Respect for the individual

It is impossible to build a people-centred organisation with the customer and team ethos you are seeking without ensuring that respect for the individual is enshrined in everything you do. Some ways you can build this are by:

- Always greeting people
- Showing an interest in them as people
- Listening to them when they speak and demonstrating that you have been paying attention
- Never shooting the messenger
- Demonstrating that an open door policy means that you are there to listen and help solve problems

- Being sympathetic to personal circumstances
- Moving away from traditional concepts of time-based employment and
 - Judging performance on results rather than 'face-time' (time spent in the office).
 - Encouraging home-working wherever this is possible/practical

7. Change the world

Recent surveys indicate that one of the biggest factors in engaging people right now is the ability to feel that they are helping to change the world and improving global conditions. This is the 'extreme end' of the 'making a difference' described earlier, but it means that you *must* have some kind of corporate social responsibility programme and that without that, many of these other things might not help. Hopefully you already have such schemes in place, but you might look to collaborate with your customers (and suppliers) to extend your reach and ensure your measures have a greater impact. I therefore suggest that you actively pursue such opportunities and use this as a chance for people, ideally some who non-client facing roles, to work more closer and build up stronger ties with your customers.

Well, there you have 7 very broad and powerful suggestions which will help you engage your people **and** at the same time facilitate a more addictive customer experience. The list is by no means exhaustive, and you should actively look to identify and build on others as well, but these should give you a good start.

Survival Critical Capabilities

Customer experience is only one of 5 critical capabilities I have identified as being essential for sustained success and hence long term survival. You might be able to better remember the 5 through the mnemonic SCRIP of which customer experience is the first. The others are:

- Sense & Respond;
- Productivity;
- Retention - of both customer and employees;
- Innovation.

It is outside the scope of this paper to explain these here but you can find out more from my paper, "Empowering Employee Engagement: 5 Essential Capabilities for Sustained Business Success" which is available upon request or as a free download from my website www.zealise.com Suffice here to say that each has both the complexity and the simplicity you have just seen for customer experience, and each is equally affected by the level of employee engagement in your company.

Employee Engagement

In fact employee engagement is unquestionably the single strongest thread running through your mission to build sustained success. Ultimately, business boils down to people. It does not matter how good your plant is or your product, your business is ultimately dependent on your people and they way they support its objectives in their dealings with customers and potential customers (as well as other stakeholders.)

So not only are people the greatest asset you claim them to be, but they are your most important asset. Thus your ability to sustain success is ultimately dependent on your people. Consequently, you could say that these 5 capabilities are not only a useful barometer for measuring your ability to sustain success, but also the key to measuring just how engaged your people really are. Why? Because the extent of shortcomings in your measures here is indicative of the extent to which your people are failing in these

areas, and *any* failure here is because there is a gap in understanding of what your business needs to do to sustain success and/or a commitment to meet those needs.

In light of this it is hardly surprising the employee disengagement is estimated to cost the US economy \$300 billion a year. And remember that figure is an aggregate, made up of its effect on all businesses in the US economy. And survey results indicate that employee disengagement is just as much, if not more, of a problem in other major economies. So what is it costing your business and to what extent is it putting your long term prospects at risk?

Don't take a chance

Of course it is no good identifying all these capabilities that are essential for sustained success without have a way to measure yourself against them. That is why I have used them to build a high-powered, cost-effective assessment tool that will enable you to:

- Assess your position; and
- Develop a targeted action plan to address any shortcomings.

Now is the perfect time for you to conduct a review. There are many who say that there are more nasty surprises in store and that the economic climate is going to get worse before it gets better. Not only will an assessment help you to ensure that there are no nasty surprises lurking in your business, but it will simultaneously help ensure you meet your executive accountabilities properly. It will also position you for both the short term and the long term and thus to lay the foundation for your future sustained success.

Are you getting rave reviews from your customers?
Are your customers your best ambassadors?
Do you have a customer-centred ethos in your business?
Are your people alert and responsive to customer needs?

Undertake an assessment now to help you answer these questions, or others you may have, or just to assess how engaged your people really are. To find out more please contact us directly now.

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About Bay Jordan



Bay Jordan is the author of "*Lean Organisations Need FAT People*" and "*A Feeling of Worth*" and the founding director of Zealise Limited, a consultancy he is building on his recognition that the failure to fully recognise the human element in managing change has been a primary cause of increasing employee disengagement, and the reason why so few ICT projects have ever realised the full benefits projected for them. He recognises that sustained competitiveness is impossible with disengaged people. Accordingly, he has an innovative new approach to flushing out and rectifying these problems. He fully expects his solutions to potentially to improve your bottom line results by *at least 20%*.

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