

Serving Up Qualitative Change



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Everybody quotes anecdotes of poor service encounters. There seems to be endless examples. Why do service providers treat me and other customers in this way? Who do they think they are? I am paying for this service, yet they make me feel as if they are doing me a favour.

My service encounters seem to be composed mainly of moments of insult. Why? We all want service quality. It pays. It is competitive. It is marketable. It is profitable. It is efficient. What is service? How to serve often can be identified, systematised and programmed easily into the actions of most service employees. That is the process. Efficient? Yes. Effective? No.

Service quality is more than the pursuit of standardisation. It is a state

of mind. Standardisation is needed at the most basic level and to improve productivity. If each individual service provider is not convinced of the need to provide quality, both personally and in the wider organisational context, the service can never be classified as true quality service.

All the service quality and customer care courses and the numerous service quality surveys won't make effective quality service happen if the service provider does not believe sincerely in the concept to serve. Sometimes, in India, people equate service with servility, but I am not talking about that.

And when it doesn't happen, it is obvious to the customers. They talk about it, make judgements, and use the ultimate weapon: word of mouth. In addition to answering the 'what' and 'how' questions, service marketers also need to address the questions, 'Why should I serve well?', 'Why is service quality good for the organisation?' and 'Why is it good for the service provider?'

When these 'why' questions are answered, service providers are far more



Not about being robotic

likely to buy into the 'what' and 'how' questions. It is possible to get service providers to say, 'Have a nice day', and 'Please visit again', without actually meaning any of it. But the customer knows they don't mean it. Why do they bother saying it? Only because they were told to say it. They were told what to say and how to say it, but not why they need to say it.

Marketers faced with the challenge of formulating and implementing integrated services marketing strategies must consider the motivationally

central 'why' questions before they tackle the more easily answered 'what' and 'how' questions. Answering 'why' is not easy, and it is not cheap. It involves extensive customer and employee research.

'What do customers want in a service?' is a basic question. 'What motivates service providers to provide that quality of service?' is another equally important and related question. Service providers are on the other side of the two-headed coin of service exchange. This area is ripe for investigation by market researchers.

High-quality service providers are faced with the challenge of delivering service quality to the real customers, the ones that come back. These customers don't want meaningless rhetoric. They want the real thing—service.

Truly effective services marketing strategies can be achieved only with a serious commitment to and investment in changing the mindset of employees. This means investing in a sincere implementation of changing the state of mind.

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