

## Transcription - Levels of Customer Service

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today I want to throw out a bit of a challenge to those of you who are managers of front line staff or retail staff where you are not always accessible to their work place.

So it's not for managers who are perhaps in the hospitality industry who are there and see their front line staff all the time through different shifts. It's more for managers who don't see their staff interacting with the customer base on a day-to-day basis, or even a month-to-month basis at every time of the day where they might be doing that interaction.

This has been brought about, naturally enough, by an experience I had most recently, but it's not an isolated experience. This is why I thought it might be interesting to talk to you about it.

In one of my roles as a consultant many years ago, probably over 20 years ago now, I worked for an organization where the spread of hours, the working hours for the staff and in that sense dealing with the customers, was 7 days a week, five of those days it was 12 hours and the other days it was longer hours and there was also a component of it that went out into the community, the community outreach as we called it in those days. The community outreach component of the business had never had a manager go out and actually see what they were doing in all of the years that they've been doing it. And similarly, any manager that had been on site, had worked set hours, managerial hours, and not been there for the span of hours that it took to provide this service to the community.

So it was very interesting for me to actually do that. And I feel that I had to do that because I wouldn't know the business as well as I should and be able to suggest changes to it, without doing that activity. What came as the result of that was not just that the staff were one of two things. Either they were really pleased that I had made the effort to see what it was like at those times of the day and they felt more open about suggesting things, suggesting things that they felt would be good changes because of the fact that they were working at those times and had a history of what happened in terms of the customer interaction.

I got a chance to talk to the customer, the clientele that were coming in as well, and talk to them about what their needs were and what they saw as the shortfalls of the service that was being provided, as well as the benefits because for some, it was a great benefit had this after hours service. It allowed access to these

people at times that suited them rather than fitted into the standard of the way it was being offered. But what I also had a chance to do was look at the flow of people, through the building, through the service, all of the things that are peripheral to the actual service itself, but you need to see as a manager. You might be making decisions about a particular service and the efficiency of that service without having actually been through service from a client's point of view.

Certainly you're looking at it from a management point of view and that's what you're paid to do. But you do need to understand the service and there might be things that you can bring in to change the service once you walk the path of the client or the customer. And so, that's what I did on that occasion. More recently, what has brought it to mind is it seems to be the purview of the retail establishments that I go to. When I go to there, when there's half an hour left before they closing time or 15 minutes left before their closing time, they'll do one of two things. They'll either say, or they'll remind you every step of the way, that you've only got x amount of time before they're closing the door. Or they will say don't worry, you take your time. Your custom is important to me is what they are saying, whether they say those words or not. We'll be here for as long as you need to make your buying, your purchasing decision, whatever it is.

The worst I have had, was the most recent experience. Manager and one staff person standing at the door, as I walked through, they said we're closing in five minutes. And I said yes, I know, I know exactly what I want and I'm going directly to it. They made an announcement over store audio while I was a minute and a half into this transaction walking to where I needed to go and then when I go to the check out and paid my money, the manager, (the person on the cash register was quite pleasant), walked past and said "Very lucky" in exactly that tone of voice.

The fallout from that tiny interaction, seconds of interaction, means that I will not going to that store to buy again. I will not recommend people go into that store. In fact, I'll probably go out of my way to say don't bother going there because if that is the attitude of the manager who is there at the end of the day, then I don't want to go there because my business is obviously not as important as them getting away on time.

Now, I do understand that there is an issue about paying people for being at a venue longer than they need to be. I understand the management side of things. What I'm asking you to consider is, is this the attitude that you want your customers to go away with? The last point of contact, this last touch is what

leaves an impression, is the way that we will judge your business. If you don't know that that's happening or you will be concerned that it might be happening, then you need to observe that yourself and you might observe other things. You might observe that your staff are actually staying back and not claiming time, but are doing good things for the business and you need to acknowledge that. You need to say, I came in incognito and I saw that you helped this person, you did this, you did that, whatever it is and you're really making a difference for our business and I appreciate that. If there's other ways you can appreciate it, that's good but saying the words is as good sometimes as doing anything else.

So I think of that the good and the bad end of the spectrum. So I found in that first example that I talked about that when I went early in the morning, the staff were not as committed to getting up and going. It was because they weren't morning people, but had always been rostered on to the morning for whatever reason. Initially it was probably because they put their hand up thinking that would be a good time to start, but we had to sit down, me as the manager and them as the employees, and talk about is this the best time for you to be working? Do we need to rethink? Do we need to have a better roster? Should we schedule it so that it's not always you who opens, it's not always you who closes, whatever it is, so that there are options for people and they feel like they are being included in the decisions that are being made.

The other outcome from that activity, which was a good thing in the long run, but it was horrifying at the time. The Outreach Service that was offered was based on a bus that was geographically located a distance away and they went out and did a route around a geographical area. Well I went out to where the bus was supposedly stopping because they used to put in a claim form and report every week and I went out to see what they were doing. And it didn't turn up and it was nowhere to be found. When the following week, they put in their report, they said yes they had been out, had done this and they had done that. So I said that's interesting because it wasn't there when I was there and I had taken photos with date stamps and all sorts of things. That becomes a different kind of management issue, but if you're providing a community service, any kind of service, and it is expected at a certain time and that's not happening, you don't know that it's not happening because no one's going to complain, they're going to think oh well it isn't here, but they lose confidence in you, your business, your management style.

Kim, I agree that it is very important as a manager to be in touch and know first hand how your customers feel about your service and how you can listen to their needs and continuously improve to satisfy them. Of course, there's many

many ways to do that. There's tried and tested methods like surveys which can be done by a third party or at the point of sale with a touch screen. If you're in a position where you can go into an actual interaction area so you can see what's happening between customers and staff, that's also really good.

Another way, when people ring in for example, a call centre, maybe you can buddy on the phone with them. Don't say anything, just listen so you can hear firsthand exactly how that interaction goes. Likewise for outgoing calls to customers. Another thing that I really liked and from my experience worked really really well, was to have a daily morning meeting with frontline staff and pick one item to see what is working and what isn't. By getting the views of all of them you are helping them to share with each other what their experience was. In that very conversation you will be able to identify things that are not so good and things that are really good and learn from each other. So that's a success sharing type of arrangement. Then at the end of the day do the same. I know that sounds like a lot more work and time consuming but to me it was vital because I could act on it together with my team in real time.

What's even more important in my book is that you have to listen to your staff, what they are experiencing, what they are saying and feeling about how they can service the customers better. In other words having flexibility, do they have a certain amount of flexibility or they don't have any flexibility to move from the set process etc.

So I think, at the end of the day, it will be absolutely fantastic if you could walk amongst it and find out. All of these things, I think you need to be thinking about particularly now when we're looking at how we provide services differently to how we've done it in the past. So let's just make sure that as managers, we are checking to see that our service, the level of service that we would want to be providing, is actually being provided and if it's going above that, that we recognize it and if it's going below that, that we address it.

I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.