



'YOU WILL RECEIVE A CALL from us within two hours,' said the customer service representative at the service centre of a global mobile phone company, with confidence.

Unfortunately, there was no call back from the company for the rest of the day. Repeated calls to the service centre were futile, as no one answered.

How many times has this happened to you? More importantly, how many times have you been left thinking, "They will never call back."

Customer service is something that makes or breaks a company. All the millions of ringgit spent on marketing, branding, promotion and PR all come to naught if frontline customer service personnel do not deliver high-quality service. It is all about a simple act of meeting a customer's needs and expectations. It is really simple and straightforward, yet we complicate it by not doing some very basic things.

By informing the customer to expect a call within two hours, the customer service person has done one of two things:

1. Quickly get the complaining customer off his back by offering to call back in two hours and get on with some other 'more important' work, and
2. Genuinely intends to call back but has no hope of resolving the issue in that timeframe she has set herself/himself. Either way, the expectation has been set in the customer's mind. Not following through on the expectation leaves a worse impression on the customer and therein begins the most powerful marketing campaign 'against' the company – word of mouth or WOM.

This impact is so often underestimated. Understanding customer service and how to deliver it is at the heart of the matter. No matter what rules and regulations are put in place at the corporate level, it is the individual role of the customer service person

Appreciating Good Care

Customer service is something that makes or breaks a company. So it makes sense to go the extra mile.



that matters in the end. Offering a two-hour turnaround is something that is mentioned in the annals of the organisation's procedures and is parroted to the customer by employees. However, emphasising the follow

through and its measurement is what is needed at the heart of good customer service. If not, it is just lip service.

Defining customer service

So, what steps do we need to take to

enforce this follow through? First at the corporate level, organisations need to get serious about Customer Service. It is pointless to have an employee procedure manual saying 'call the customer within two hours' if the organisation is not serious about it.

If the organisation is serious about calling the customer within two hours, implement another procedure that enforces this act and rewards the right action by the employee. Only then can we begin to meet customer's expectations. More often than not, organisations are trying to exceed customer's expectations when they have not even met the customer's minimum expectations. The irony is that the minimum expectation is set by the organisation which it then fails to deliver.

Excellence or nothing

Once organisations get serious about customer service and meeting customer expectations, the next step is to empower

people to act. This is the challenge facing the global market place – how to personalise the customer experience, how to go beyond the 'transactional' mindset to the 'individual' mindset.


Employees are the main differentiator of an organisation in this transition from 'dealing with' a customer to 'engaging with' a customer. These skills need to be second nature to the employee. It requires deep understanding of the four dimensions of human relationship development – the dimensions of Fact, Emotion, Meaning and Decision. Where excellence through process was once a key focus with systems such as Six Sigma, today our task is to bring in an equally rigorous process for excellence through people.

This can be achieved by skills and capacity development in personal branding and people skills. In addition, apply the right controls and reward systems to unleash the power of people within the organisation to be more accountable, innovative and committed

to the customer.

A caveat to remember is that only through their own choice will employees deliver their best. If the controls are too regimented, it will kill innovation. Getting the balance right is critical.

In conclusion, what we are seeing in our current marketplace is a transition taking place from the 'buyer and seller' mentality to the 'partner and partnership' mentality. This is being driven by the customer, who now interacts and operates globally and has an international benchmark with which to measure what is mediocre, good or excellent.

To meet these changing expectations and a desire for excellence in customer perceptions is the exciting opportunity facing progressive organisations in Malaysia. Those who rise to this challenge will thrive. Those who do not, well let us watch this space! 

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