

ELEMENTS OF EXEMPLARY SERVICE

There's no magic formula, no perfect path to success, and no pixie dust to throw up in the air to ensure the delivery of exceptional customer service. Service leaders persistently and consistently work hard every day to create memorable **service experiences** for their customers.

There are, however, common core elements among service leaders that yield uncommonly exceptional service:

- 1) **A service-driven culture:** Service leaders create and communicate their vision of doing something so valuable, important, and so worthwhile that the vision inspires, motivates, and guides employees in daily decision processes to do whatever it takes to satisfy customers. In service-driven organizations, the importance of the customer and the impact of delivering a quality product or service are explicit in corporate philosophy statements.
- 2) **Strong leadership:** Exemplary organizations have visionary leaders, usually the company's founders, who teach, model and reinforce core values so strongly, frequently, and with such passion that the values continue to survive even after the death of the founding leader(s). The reliance on management to exemplify and embody the company's commitment to serving customers is a critical factor of success for service leaders.

According to **Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts** chairman, Isadore Sharp, "It's important that the manager set the correct example for employees and frequently communicate to this staff. You must try to ensure that the reality in the working environment matches the rhetoric, i.e., it's no good to show your staff all sorts of audiovisuals about how to be courteous and then have management giving the wrong example."

- 3) **Extensive employee selection and training processes:** Service leaders are resolute in seeking the most qualified people as employees within their organization. Referring to them as the best of the best, top guns, specialists, and cream of the cream, the lengths that these employers will go to in order to find just the right person for the job is testimony to their belief in the importance of employee selection.

EXAMPLE

FedEx's motto of "People, Service, and Profits" emphasizes the priority placed on people within the organization, with a premium on

hiring. They select new employees on the basis of profiles carefully developed from successful performers in each particular position.

To fill a vacancy within an **American Express Travel Related Services** customer service position, applicants are limited to those employees who are already employed in other customer service positions within the company. According to American Express, only the "cream of the cream" should be representing the company in direct contact with the customers.

Once hired, employee training becomes a critical first step in all exemplary service organizations. Contrary to the low service providers, who view training as an unnecessary expense, exemplary service organizations view training as an investment and critical component of organizational success. Service leaders also provide extensive orientation programs for new hires.

DID YOU KNOW?

Among the 100 best companies to work for in the U.S.:

- 53 offer on-site university program
- 91 have tuition reimbursement programs, with 24 companies offering more than \$4000 in reimbursement dollars per employee, per year

From *Fortune*, January 10, 2000, "The 100 Best Companies to Work for"

4) Customer Relationships Built on Trust: Exemplary organizations are built on a foundation of ethical and moral values that contribute to life inside as well as outside the organization. These values are consistently demonstrated in daily relationships with employees, customers, and the community in which they reside. Service leaders have learned that by listening and responding to customer input, relationships turn into valuable partnerships with benefits for all.

Internal relationships are critical, too. Service leaders trust in their employees' abilities to make decisions leading to exceptional service experiences and often rely upon their input for the implementation of service improvements and their expertise in resolving customer service problems.

EXAMPLE

A memorable moment of employee empowerment was the FedEx operator who received a middle-of-the-night call for an airlift request of special rescue equipment to Texas. Drillers used this equipment to remove Jessica McClure from the well she had become trapped in. When the CEO, James Barksdale, was asked how management was able to garner forces that quickly in response, he informed reporters that no management authorization had been required and that the operator had simply responded in the affirmative and got the ball rolling. Incredulous reporters persisted with questions to which Barksdale responded, "Look, my job is to see to it that we hire, train, and pay people to make that kind of decision right there on the frontline. If that person calls me at home in the middle of the night to okay doing something that important, I've failed as a manager."

5) Reward and Recognition of Employees

Service leaders take great steps to ensure that their appreciation of employee deeds is well known and rewarded. Exemplary organizations reward their employees' stellar service performances with a variety of reward structure and systems.

EXAMPLE

- FedEx awards an average of 18 Golden Falcon pins each year for dramatic achievements on and off the job. Bravo Zulu is an instant feedback for employees who have gone the extra mile in internal activities. Each year, managers hand out hundreds of cash awards of \$100 or distribute gift certificates for a dinner out on the town.

6) Investment in Their Communities

Exemplary service organizations substantially invest in their communities and are seen as contributing partners to the well being of those outside their corporate walls. They are often major contributors to national non-profit, charitable organizations as well as local sponsors of community non-profit associations and special events.

EXAMPLE

In 1974, McDonald's partnered with Fred Hill of the NFL football team the Philadelphia Eagles to create the Ronald McDonald House which offers the families of critically ill children a home-away-from-home while the patients undergo treatment for their serious conditions.

7) Operational excellence: The consistent demonstration of exceptional customer service provided by employees at all levels throughout the organization is a differentiating feature of service leader organizations. The hallmark of exemplary service organizations is the **seamless** performance in creating exceptional service experiences in each and every customer interaction. This seamless performance is often the result of innovative technology and an obsessive attention to details.

EXAMPLE

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts uses an extensive customer profile system. Upon a customer's first visit, notes are detailed regarding customer's requests such as an extra pillow. Notes are compiled into the customer's profile and saved to a database which is accessible by all locations. Upon the customer's next visit to any Four Seasons hotel or resort, the guest will already have the extra pillow in the room upon arrival - without a special request.

SUMMARY: Make a commitment to implement the strategies outlined for success. With knowledge, we gain courage to improve; with wisdom, we apply the knowledge gained and experience success – for ourselves as well as our customers.