John Tschohl CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer Service Leaders Must Master Speed

mong the many tools and tactics a company can use to improve the customer experience, speed is the most overlooked. That's unfortunate because a major factor in creating a positive customer experience is speed.

There are three major obstacles to improving the customer experience through speed:

- 1. Employee mindset. If an employee has four days to do a task, they will take four days to do the task. In fact, they won't get started until the fourth day! And then they will usually not finish the task because they need help from another employee who called in sick or is otherwise unavailable.
- 2. Company policies. Many companies have policies that slow down tasks that could be completed quickly and easily. They might require two or three sets of eyes and signatures for approval before a task could be completed when one set of eyes is really enough. Companies must eliminate policies and procedures that add to the cost and time of a task. That's because every time another set of hands touches a document, the company spends money. When you buy an Apple product in their stores you will see speed.
- 3. Disregard for the customer experience. In today's world, customers want it now. They won't wait in a doctor's office for an hour. They won't stand in long lines. If they can't get something quickly, they will go to another provider. Companies that understand the need

for speed can actually profit greatly. Southwest Airlines' planes have a 20minute turnaround. Because of this speed, they need fewer planes, which saves them billions of dollars. As a result, they have been profitable for 40 years, while competitors in their industry have posted huge losses.

In the early days of computing, Dell became a major player when they convinced customers they could create and ship a fully customized computer in just four hours.

In today's competitive world, if you snooze, you loose. Customers want everything faster. Employees must understand that competition demands that employees work quickly. Every customer wants speed. They want everything faster. Employees need to understand everything is urgent. Every extra minute they can save will translate to the bottom line.

Look at your company policies. When the order comes in, do you ship the same day? When a loan application comes in, does it get processed in one day or in seven days? You better believe there is another company out there who can do that job that fast. And they will get the business and you will lose the business.

Every employee needs to figure out where they improve speed without foregoing quality. You can never compromise quality.

Management also must be open to employees' suggestions. After all, they do the work every day. They know what actions can be taken to make any process faster and more efficient. Listen to them.

They will feel appreciated and will be motivated to do a better job. Individuals who master speed have the ability to move up in the organization. Be on the lookout for employees who master speed. CEOs, for the most part, are driven by speed.

If you want to differentiate your company in the marketplace, then you need to show how you can dramatically deliver service and products faster than your competitors.

Fortunately, companies can create a new mindset that helps win the war on speed:

- Create a culture for the need for speed. If the employees realize the importance for speed, they will get the job done faster.
- Customer service is a skill. It can be taught. And it should be taught every four months with new and interesting materials to keep employees fresh and engaged.
- Modify policies that are speed traps. The lack of speed can cost a company a lot of money.

Speed is customer service at its best—a powerful competitive advantage. RO

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