

Turning ducks into eagles

By  Aki Kalliatakis

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There are only two kinds of people - ducks and eagles. Ducks act like victims, and just go around saying 'Quack! Quack! Quack!' Eagles take the initiative and soar above the crowd.



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We all know that the best customer service has little to do with systems, processes, loyalty programmes and similar unless you first get your staff on board. The biggest challenge facing you is how you get every person in your company both able and willing to take care of customers. The job of all managers is to turn ordinary people into customer champions - in spite of the fact that dealing with customers is often very hard.

So how can you build your people's skills and capability to deal with customers effectively? The good news is that it's not difficult if you want to put in some effort. The even better news is that there are literally millions of resources that you can use to help you.

It's definitely not enough to send your people on a training course every once in a while in an attempt to evangelise customer care. It's got to be a constant process, reminding them regularly of why it is so important, and what they need to do to be customer champions. Over and above the normal training courses and motivational talks, here are some additional ideas.

- **Talk about customer service constantly:** Like the waves crashing on a beach, you have to create "waves of awareness" that constantly wash over every employee with the message of customer care. If the waves ever stop, then everything goes dry. Every employee should have at least a daily reminder of the importance of customers, so that he or she cannot escape the message. Use meetings, all written communications, posters, gifts, coaching and performance management as an excuse to bring up the subject.
- **Tell lots of stories of legendary service:** Stories help people to visualise what you are trying to convey. Tell stories about present and past employees, or about legendary customer service that you have experienced elsewhere. Also tell stories or show videos about inspirational things that touch people's hearts.
- **Have "fireside chats:"** These are informal discussions where you pose questions to your team and provoke them to think about customer care. This may include some brainstorming to generate their ideas for creating customer loyalty. There are hundreds of possibilities about specific themes, but a good start is to ask them how we can make the lives

of our customers easier or better, and to identify barriers we create to make them frustrated.

- **Show your commitment and be a role model:** YOU are the service champion in their eyes. What you say is observed carefully, and you may not even realise the power which you have to influence them. Sometimes a slight pause, or a small careless statement can really screw things up - and it is that much harder to recover from that. Your own customer commitment must be unquestionable, or the process will die.
- **Special projects and assignments:** Individual delegates and teams can undertake various customer care improvement projects and report back on progress. This is particularly powerful when incentives and prizes are given in awards ceremonies, or when some other form of recognition occurs. A variation of this is to allow individuals and/or teams themselves to make presentations to executives on particular themes around customer care.
- **Go out and look at other organisations that you admire** in order to see things differently. For example, take your team out to lunch at your favourite fast food joint, or to an exciting venue that is famous for its customer care, and then ask them what we can learn from that business. In fact, go the whole way and take a day out to do a "Legendary Service Bus Tour," similar to the tourist tours - but visiting great businesses instead. (You can spoil them with a classy lunch at a beautiful venue, allow them to be pampered in some way, include some small gifts in a bag as mementoes, and have a photo album or video that they can share with others.) At the end of the day the debriefing includes feedback on what your business can learn.
- **Treasure hunt:** Plan for and arrange a treasure hunt, where "clues" relate to all aspects of customer care. You can make it simple or cryptic, involve individuals or teams, and run it in an hour or over a longer time.
- **Customer service olympics:** Initiate a contest with many events in which people and teams compete. The events are customer orientated, such as the fastest person to handle XYZ activity, the politest and most courteous person with Mr Grumpy Customer, the team that best cooperates to solve a particular customer problem, the person that best displays an ability to use our computer system.
- The "Best Designed Contest": Here people design activities or things which create awareness of customer issues. This could include examples like "best slogan for our campaign," "best designed poster," "best customer service quote," "best lesson learned from another company," "best customer service story - ever," and so on.
- **Book and video summaries:** You buy the books, or give them access to other resources, they read them, and then summarise and present the ten most important lessons to the rest of the team.

If you show people that you don't care, they will return the favour. If you show them that you **do** care about them, they will reciprocate.

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