

Shiny happy customers

 By Jessica Taylor

29 Jul 2015

Key to customer experience management is understanding the customer as an individual, but first you have to know your customer service staff, not as the call centre, but as internal and external customers. And then learning how to make them happy and, ultimately, your other customers too...



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This was the underlying message of a panel discussion on *Putting people first and communicating with your workforce: lessons learnt from the inside*, on day two of the CEM Africa Summit, featuring: Luke Harwood, GM Quality Assurance and Products at Medscheme; Sam Sabbagh, Head of Customer Service at Yuppiechef; and Tebogo Molapisane, CEO of BPesa.

Customer experience management is about the customer as an individual, and the same principle applies to your staff, said Harwood, who refers to this as an outside-in approach. Molapisane agreed: "It's become about empowering the people on the front line." The way you engage with your staff and, in turn, the way they engage with the brand, will ultimately result in the way they engage with your customers.

Sabbagh said Yuppiechef employees partake in a culture survey every two to three months, as well as an open forum. Everyone is included and nothing is off the table, be it about any communal matter or personal growth. Involving your employees in these kinds of conversations is a great way to foster a sense of purpose in them.

The science of happiness

Harwood proposed time out of the office, saying it leads to creativity and team morale. Sabbagh said that's all good and well, but with a small customer service team, this is a major challenge: "When customer service isn't there, who's going to answer the phones?" But she said Yuppiechef does make much of its employees' birthdays and the like. Molapisane warned not to use busyness as an excuse for staff engagement in this regard.

Perhaps the science is really in the selection process. Sabbagh makes a good point: "Customer service can't be a stepping stone for everybody, it's a career." So management needs to make customer service an exciting job opportunity. Molapisane said that you must make sure to leverage what you do to attract the 'right' people into the industry - and that is highly empathetic individuals who are eager to solve your customers' problems, but are also empowered to do so.

Yuppiechef has what it calls a 'customer delight budget', which they see as a marketing expense. Its most loyal customers are the ones who have had bad experiences that have been turned around. You can have the fanciest systems in world, but if customer care doesn't care, you've lost the game. "We need to empower them, keep them happy, because they're the ones that are going to keep our customers happy."

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