

How to influence customer experience through people

Avoid the all too common mistake of placing priority on technical capability over culture alignment



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by Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo

It's hardly difficult to find examples of organisations who have failed spectacularly in building customer relationships based on trust and respect.

The long-awaited report detailing the findings of the Royal Commission into misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry provides endless examples of what happens when people lose site of the customer and behave poorly.

In pursuit of profits and personal gain, people across the industry have behaved in ways that are abhorrent to most decent minded people. As Commissioner Hayne commented: “very often, the conduct has broken the law. And if it has not broken the law, the conduct has fallen short of the kind of behaviour the community not only expects of financial services entities, but is also entitled to expect of them.”

Ensuring your customers rights are respected and upheld is the just the first step toward building the depth of customer loyalty needed to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

According to the 2017 Gartner Customer Experience in Marketing Survey 81% of organisations expect by 2019 to be competing mostly or completely on the basis of customer experience.

While it’s common for organisations to aspire to be the best in their industry, many struggle to deliver on the standard of customer experience needed to turn that vision into reality. At the heart of the issue is typically staff engagement.

As research by Temkin Group found, customer experience leaders have “1.5 times as many engaged employees as do customer experience laggards.” Temkin report that “*companies with stronger financial performances and better customer experience have employees who are considerably more engaged than their peers.*”

Reflect for a moment on what it's like to do business with your organisation. Do your customers experience a level of service that earns their trust and inspires them to keep coming back?

Do their experiences motivate them to recommend your services to other people. Now reflect on the members of your team and the influence their attitudes and behaviours have on the loyalty your customers typically feel.

Driving customer experience through people starts with being clear about what is expected and needed. Ensure every member of your team understands the behaviours needed to create the quality of customer experience you want.

Build a clear view of what customer service excellence means to your organisation and how your team are expected to act in order to deliver on those outcomes.

Hire well. Get it right from the start by taking a disciplined and uncompromising approach when it comes to selecting the right people for your team. Avoid the all too common mistake of placing priority on technical capability over culture alignment. Explore the values of each person you consider and take steps to validate the likelihood of them behaving in ways that build strong customer and colleague relationships.

Be targeted in your efforts to optimise customer experience. Build understanding of the touch points between your customers and business, and the opportunities people have to make a positive difference. Create awareness of not only who your customers are, but also why they come to you and the expectations they hold.

Tap into what your customers are thinking and feeling. Listening to the voice of your customer is fundamental to your efforts to continuously improve and ultimately achieve excellence. Ask for feedback at every opportunity and establish formal processes to regularly tap into the insights of your customers. Have the courage to see the shortcomings your customers are telling you about and work with your team take steps to address them.

Removing roadblocks to service excellence when you need to takes first being aware of how the people on your team think and behave. Proactively monitoring the approaches taken and standards of service delivered is essential to any leader's ability to recognise when corrective action needs to be taken.

Hold yourself and other people accountable. All too often leaders set behavioral expectations that they themselves struggle to live up to. Leading by example is every leader's number one priority. Earning and keeping the loyalty of your customers demands that you take clear and decisive action to address performance and behavioral issues that arise.