



We exist to serve others so they may better serve the world.

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World-Class Service...in a car dealership?

When we think of world-class service, images of luxury hotels and country clubs usually fill our minds. What about car dealerships? I know what you must be thinking..."surely he means a Bentley dealership or some other top-line car". Not so...I am referring to a basic car dealership that sells and services medium-priced vehicles, like what you'd find in most neighborhoods. In this case, the car dealership is five minutes from where I live, and they never cease to amaze me with how professional and service-centric they are.

This month's service management tip is "any leader in any industry can develop a team of service professionals". That's right...it doesn't matter if it's a grocery store, a mall retail outlet, or in this case, a neighborhood car dealership. To no one's surprise, the dealership's General Manager (GM) is the leader I am referencing here. A few Saturdays

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ago, I took my car in to get its quarterly service, and since they were pretty full that day, the service associate empowered himself to offer me a rental car for the day while my car was being worked on. I was then escorted over to the sales side of the operation, where I was offered a seat. While waiting for the sales agent to start the paperwork for the complimentary rental, I witnessed something very powerful. The GM summoned for the entire team to gather around for their morning "huddle". In this huddle, the GM thanked his team for their ongoing commitment to service excellence and cited specific examples of team members going out of their way to create memorable experiences. He then explained the importance of "connecting" with each customer and making them feel welcomed, appreciated, and cared for. This was followed by asking if everyone had their nametags. After noticing that about four team members did not have it, he promptly asked them to leave and get them (message: your service standards are non-negotiable). He then spent the next five or so minutes conducting role-plays with each team member on providing a warm welcome.

At the end of the huddle (which didn't last more than 10 minutes), everyone was excited to engage each other and the customers. Most importantly, the mantra of service excellence was driven as hard as it could be from the top leader. When I asked one of the team members if the huddle is done everyday, she replied, "absolutely". Not surprisingly, this dealership's walls were adorned with numerous awards for service.



From my perspective, here are a few elements that stood out in the service experience, and how much they likely cost the dealership to deliver:

- Using my name = \$0.00
- Handshake = \$0.00
- Team member giving me their personal phone extension, looking me in the eye and saying "please call me if you need anything else" = \$0.00
- Saying "wait here while I bring your car around" = \$0.00
- Remembering me and proactively asking about past car issues to verify that they are no longer a hindrance = \$0.00



You get the picture, most service standards that create world-class service don't cost a thing. The only price is the senior leader committing to him/herself to hold service excellence as the ultimate reflection of organizational success. In good times and bad...in

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slow times and busy times...expectations must be clear and accountability has to be solid. If the climate is set by the leader, the workplace engagement and service delivery become much more engaging and fulfilling for all involved.

My challenge to you is to commit to being the service benchmark in your industry. There is absolutely no reason why that can not be attained. With the right commitment, whatever gets focused on eventually improves. Let 2007 be the year where you focus on selecting service-centric employees, orienting them the right way, let them know what's expected of them, and provide ample feedback along the way (please don't wait until the annual appraisal to do so). Involve those closest to the action in developing/revising your service standards and be sure to reward excellent performance...remember, the best way to replicate excellent performance is to focus on excellent performance.

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