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July 13, 2010

***World Class Service 101:
Know the difference between meeting and exceeding expectations***

On a recent trip to an upscale hotel, I had dinner with the restaurant manager. He explained to me that one of the restaurant’s main goals was for guests to rate the restaurant a “5”, as measured by their guest satisfaction survey. The survey asks guests a series of questions, and each question has a corresponding scale that follows: (1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=indifferent, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied). The manager told me about all the initiatives he recently implemented to get the **5** rating from guests.

There was a new coffee cup storage system he just implemented that will ensure that cups are always available for service. Then, there was the cycle-time initiative that tracks the length of elapsed time from the guest’s food order being taken to the minute the first course is brought to the table. I told him that those initiatives sound good, but none of them would help the restaurant get **5**’s. He looked confused. I explained that when I order coffee or tea, I **EXPECT** the beverage to be served on time. When I place my dinner order, I **EXPECT** the food to be served in a reasonable amount of time (unless I am proactively told otherwise, as in, a well-done steak or a soufflé).

The “4” represents **satisfaction**, which basically means that the restaurant did what the guests expected it to do. The staff was friendly...food came on time...everything tasted good...no roaches scurrying around, etc. I went on to explain that to get a **5** from a guest, first you must understand what the **5** represents. He really started to listen then. I explained that to get a **5** you must not only meet, but exceed expectations. ***You can’t just put processes and standards in place to avoid messing up. The guest does not expect you to mess up.*** Instead, actually exceeding expectations and impressing the guest is what leads to a **5**.

Here is a table that illustrates my experience at dinner with the restaurant manager. The “satisfied” column is what really occurred and the “very satisfied” column is what would have made the experience a **5**:

Satisfied (meet expectations)	Very Satisfied (exceed expectations)
Server approached the table and said “Welcome to XYZ restaurant!”	Use my name in the introduction and welcome me back, if appropriate (note: the host/hostess would have already gotten my name and inquired if I dined there before)
Server asked if I’m ready to order, then takes my order.	Inquire about my taste preferences and make menu recommendations using descriptive words and phrases to make my mouth drool. (note: a

	server in a Fredericksburg, TX restaurant described a beet salad appetizer to me, and I subsequently ordered it and loved it! That was the first time I actually finished eating beets)
Asked what drink I wanted, and took my drink order	Same as above
Asked about dessert	Same as above
Asked about tea/coffee, and I ordered tea	Same as above, and offer to steep my bag for me.
Said goodbye, thanks for coming	Offer to call the valet to have my car ready or offer to call a taxi.

On a recent trip to Portland, Oregon I visited my client’s corporate office for three consecutive days of meetings. Before day 1, the office’s administrative assistant emailed me directions to the office from my hotel, along with a link to Google Maps. On day 2 it was raining...a lot. So at the end of that day’s meetings, I went to the bathroom and when I returned to the meeting room to get my briefcase, there was an umbrella next to it. The administrative assistant anticipated my needs. In fact, I didn’t even think of using an umbrella until she left it for me. She provided me with something I didn’t even know I wanted! On day 3, still more rain in Portland, so she brought in a tray of coffee, tea, and hot chocolate to the meeting room. If I was asked about the service experience, do you think that I would rate her service a **5**? You better believe it.

Basically, to get a **5**, you must intentionally do things to get a **5**. You can’t just meet expectations and expect customers to rate you as though you exceeded their expectations. The two don’t go together. So, I recommended that the restaurant manager do the following:

1. Work with his team to make a list of all the major service touchpoints during a typical dining experience (see table 1).
2. Clearly articulate what is “meeting expectations” (**4**) vs. “exceeding expectations” (**5**).
3. Each day, pick one touchpoint to focus on. By “focus on” I mean:
 - a. Discuss during the pre-shift meetings
 - b. Conduct role-plays
 - c. Look for opportunities to recognize staff for exceeding expectations for that day’s touchpoint
 - d. Encourage staff to recognize each other for exceeding expectation for that day’s touchpoint (I always tell my clients that there is nothing as potent as peer-to-peer recognition).
 - e. Every week, challenge staff to come up with more innovative ways to exceed expectations. (Make it fun! Come up with a contest to see who has the most original ideas, etc).

To sum it up, to get your team to exceed expectations, you must continuously focus on exceeding expectations. Nothing else will do. Before long, your team’s **minimum** expectations of themselves will be to consistently **exceed** the expectations of their customers.

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