



7 Principles to Fully Engage Your Customers – Part 2

There I was...excited to dine in a popular steakhouse with my wife. After all, this night was to celebrate her final day of coursework in her professional degree program. Although we eat out regularly, we especially were looking forward to dining on this night.

The food was good, waiter was good, service was good...in general, no problems. Afterwards, I told my wife that we won't be going back to that restaurant anytime soon. Why? Because "good" was not my expectation. If I wanted a "good" experience, I would've taken my wife somewhere else with "good" prices. In business, your price point says a lot about the promise you make to your current and future customers. In this case, the high prices (which I don't mind paying) suggests an exceptional, not "good" experience. As a customer, I am expecting the business to create a total service experience...which happens to be Principle #4 from the 7 Principles to Fully Engage Your Customers. If you'll recall, I've already discussed Principles 1 – 3 in a previous article, and this article will focus on principles 4 – 7.

As a reminder, here they are:

- Principle 1: Be eager to serve
- Principle 2: Be welcoming
- Principle 3: Create an inclusive atmosphere
- Principle 4: Create a total experience
- Principle 5: Turn customers into ambassadors
- Principle 6: Offer a gracious goodbye
- Principle 7: Earn your customers' confidence...reap the rewards

Principle #4: Create a total experience

Creating a total experience begins with having the right people in the right roles. It means that the greeter must be the person with the most welcoming personality on the team and have the biggest smile. It also means that every person the customer comes in contact with should not only like

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other people, but they should be happy and excited to be of service. That may sound trivial, but I've been in many businesses where the front line employee's demeanor is sending the message of "leave me alone...I don't want you here".

Perhaps the biggest thing to remember about creating the total experience is that the experience is comprised of many touchpoints. Touchpoints may vary from answering the phone, to escorting a customer down the hallway; the point is that the overall experience is built on individual touchpoints. At the end of my service experience with your business, if you ask "Overall, how was your stay with us?", I will be responding to the overall experience.

Principle #5: Turn customers into ambassadors

Turning customers into ambassadors is about fostering loyalty. Successful businesses don't measure their success by the amount of new customers they get, they measure success by the amount of business they receive from their existing customers. This is sometimes referred to as organic growth. You want your business to be the first choice when existing and potential customers want to purchase a particular product or service. It doesn't matter if your business is selling rooms, food & beverage, ad space or even hospital beds. Your customers need to know that you look forward to serving them again in the future.

Principle #6: Offer a gracious goodbye

Offering a gracious goodbye is an extremely important principle, yet it can be very easy to bypass. Some service providers feel that after they have given the customer what they paid for, then service is done. Not so. Everything has a beginning and an end. Service is no exception. The purpose of the gracious goodbye is to thank the customer for their patronage. The customer did not have to patronize your business. Every customer should be reassured that their decision to spend their money with you was greatly appreciated. In fact, one best practice is to inquire if there is anything else you can do for your customer. And this is after you have provided the customer with what they came to purchase in the first place; no matter how small the request. After serving my coffee, ask "is there anything else I can do for you?" or some variation of it. The point is that your customers should feel like your job's main purpose is to not just meet, but exceed their expectations.

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Principle #7: Earn your customers' confidence...reap the rewards

The rewards here are not just repeat business and referrals. Rewards are knowing that you have made a positive impact on someone's day. You should be confident that the service that you and your team provided made a difference in how that customer views your industry. You are not just doing a job, you are representing your team, your company, and your industry. Like any relationship, earning your customer's confidence is about building trust, and trust is built on doing what you say you will do every time. When I pick up the phone, browse your website, or visit your facilities, I should feel confident that the service will be one of two ways: Just as good as the last time I visited or better than the last time I visited. That is how trust is built.

So commit to fully engaging every customer you have. Feel free to download and use our complementary 7 Principles Worksheets. Use your team huddles and department meetings to engage your team in a meaningful dialogue about the importance of engagement. As customers become more savvy shoppers, simply competing based on fancy equipment or "bells and whistles" won't suffice. Today's customers want to feel like you value and appreciate their patronage, or they will simply go somewhere else.

Let 2008 be the year where exceptional service is not just a buzzword or flavor of the month. Commit to not settling for "good" or acceptable service delivery from your team (and yourself). Only exceptional service will do. Fully engaging your customers requires dedication, commitment, and action. Follow the 7 principles, and your customers will always follow you.

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