



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

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7 Principles to Fully Engage Your Customers

When I wrote EngageMe last year, it was a declaration of how customers would like to be served. This was regardless if they happened to be in a hospital, hotel, spa, bank, law office, travel agency, or a taxi. The declaration was clear. If you take care of your customers, value their patronage, and provide them with memorable service, then they will return to give you more business. Simple enough. In my quest to help organizations become more service-centric, I've outlined 7 Principles, which are the key learning points from EngageMe...the voice of your customer. 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

In the spirit of providing additional insight into these principles, let's review each one.

Principle 1: Be eager to serve

Being eager to serve your customer is more about perception than anything else. When the customer walks into your business, is the staff just mulling around or do they appear to be ready to serve? The same applies for service provided over the phone. Does the phone ring 10 times before it gets answered or is there a standard for it to be answered within three rings? This

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principle is about being prompt in every sense of the word. The customer should not have to wait...ever. If they do, it is your responsibility to apologize for the delay. At the very least, when waiting is inevitable, be sure to acknowledge those customers who are waiting even if it's not their turn. A simple gesture like a smile or eye contact should suffice. The acknowledgement sends the message that "I see you, and look forward to serving you as soon as possible". Simply put, you and your staff's actions should state, "I am at your service".

Principle 2: Be welcoming

Many companies and service professionals rightfully note that this is the first step of service. No matter what anyone says, true service does not begin without a warm welcome or greeting. I've visited too many places where a blank stare from the waiter, flight attendant or bank teller is supposed to be the worthy substitute for a greeting. The purpose of Principle 2 is to let your customers know that not only are you ready to be of service, but that you are happy they chose your business instead of your competitor's. After receiving your welcome, the customers should

instantly feel they made the right choice to patronize your business. They should be excited after the initial greeting because you want them to believe that the rest of the service experience will be one hundred times better than the welcome. This is also a great time to get your customer's name so you can better personalize the service experience. Be careful not too overuse the name as it may begin to sound planned rather than genuine. It can just as easily become a customer dissatisfier if used too many times in one service interaction.

Principle 3: Create an inclusive atmosphere

Creating an inclusive atmosphere means involving all parties. In this case, being inclusive is about the service provider creating a relationship that transcends the static nature of a one-way experience in favor of dynamic two-way experience. It is the difference between taking my food order and inquiring about my favorite types of food so the server can suggest the right dishes. It is the difference between selling me a house, and getting to know me and my preferences so you can find the "right" house. It is the difference between the nurse doing basic rounds to check my vitals, and engaging me in light conversation because he/she genuinely cares about my well-being. To be inclusive means to involve the customer in the service they are receiving. The customer is more than just the recipient of the service, they can be an important part of how the service is delivered. Challenge yourself and your team to find out your customers' preferences, then act on them, and share them. It does little good to find out that Mr. Smith likes to be called Mr. S if only one employee knows it. To Mr. Smith, every employee is not only representing the business, but they ARE the business. As such, every employee should not only know what it takes to specifically make Mr. Smith happy, but they should also act on those preferences consistently.

Challenge yourself...to find out your customers' preferences, then act on them, and share them.

Principles 4 through 7 will be covered next month (May 2008). In the meantime, download the complimentary EngageMe worksheets and begin using them with your team. As I travel to various destinations for business and pleasure, I see evidence of businesses that realize the importance of providing great service. They know that competition is always on the prowl to lure away their customers.

I also see many businesses that still don't realize the importance of taking care of their customers and engaging them with exceptional service. These businesses wonder why their sales are sagging and can't seem to attract or keep customers. It is clear that customers expect value when spending their hard-earned money. In fact, the more they spend, the more they expect. So make sure that your service is characterized by being eager to serve, being welcoming and creating an inclusive atmosphere. Service excellence requires effort and with the right mix of dedication, perseverance, and hard work, engaged customers are sure to follow.

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