

CRESITA LLC

NEWSLETTER

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Customer Service

This is a familiar topic to many readers but it's so essential for success in business at least it is to me. The question I have is why do we need reality television shows that focus on poor customer service? Customer service is indeed difficult and may not be for everyone particularly in those roles that deal directly with the public. I would say that customer service extends not only to the paying customers but to internal partners as well and successful organizations regularly take stock of their internal and external customers and think about how they can provide great customer service to both groups. A good exercise is simply asking your team to list both their internal and external customers. Comparing everyone's answers may be eye opening for both the customer service staff but management and ownership as well. How can you fix a problem if you cannot identify it? While there are not really right or wrong answers, the customer service lists should be close. If the lists do not match, then the team has a starting point to have a solid discussion about who their customers are. The way I have facilitated this discussion starts with having each person explain why they listed an individual or a group. If lists do not match, the explanation as to why the individual or group was listed should be informative. The answers provide some insight as to how people prioritize their communication. How individuals or groups are titled may also uncover some inherent biases that we all may hold.

To me there are two important tenets of good customer service, and they are "fairness" and "respect."

Fairness really boils down to good communication. Was all of the information available to the customer? I recall one organization that I worked with where we published all of the information about the service we were providing. This is not easy work, the document required multiple reviews by people over many months because I have found that what may make sense to one person does not always make sense to another. In addition, part of the application process for the service required a written signature that attests that the individual had read and understood the rules of engagement. If someone chose not to sign,

they really had two options: 1) they could choose not to engage in the service or 2) they could seek answers to questions that they might have. Consulting with your attorney is a good idea as there may be variations in what constitutes fairness and disclosure in your jurisdiction. That group often referenced the fact that individuals said that they had both read and understood the rules prior to using the service. I know that in many instances the group considered the person's issue, even if they were not obligated to do so.

This discussion also brings to mind a very popular story in the media these days... Do we really communicate what is for sale or not? I have been in plenty of stores where there is a sign posted when an item is not for sale stating this item is in fact, not for sale. This approach certainly takes time and effort however it may eliminate confusion and disagreements. Let's face it there really are no winners in a "he said, she said" argument.

Further, if you have worked in a public facing customer service environment, we all know that the customer is not always right. However, all customers deserve to be treated fairly and with respect.

Respect in my mind involves assuming that all potential customers are just that, potential customers. My observation is that customers of all types just want to be seen and heard, so don't prejudge someone based on any pre-determined criteria. This is where referencing things such as a written eligibility criteria for a service can be helpful. If a business is not willing to see and hear a customer, there is someone on social media who is. Further, it is helpful to have a clear path for individuals to appeal any adverse decision, whatever that may be and however they may perceive it. If you opt for an online form for people to appeal decisions, please make sure it is visible.

So many issues can be solved with clear and consistent communication. We should all invest time in our businesses to make sure that we are communicating in a clear and consistent manner with all customers be they internal or external and share those expectations with staff.

Management and ownership need to be introspective and ask themselves if the customer service expectations are clearly communicated to all parties.

Neither customer service nor managing a business is easy and Cresita is here to help if you wish to have assistance. I cannot promise that we can solve every problem, but I do feel we can get you on the right track. If you believe that the staff at Cresita can be of assistance you can contact us through our web page at <https://cresitallc.com>.

Let's hope that all of our collective efforts can do away with the need for reality television shows that are built around poor customer service.

