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Developing a distinct and differentiated customer experience delivered through employees to define the brand

Have you really thought about what your customers experience when they interact with front-line employees and how they subsequently feel about your organisation? Many organisations focus on their product, services or processes when they think about customer experience and the interaction with employees is left to chance. Just as many of the numerous awards John Lewis win cite the quality of the experience delivered through their employees as they recognise the quality of their products and services. It's a potential major point of differentiation in a crowded marketplace and one that many organisations fail to capitalise upon.

Leadership and customer service Many organisations try to train their employees to deliver great customer service. However, the effect of these training programmes is often diluted a few days or weeks after the course has been delivered. The key to delivering a differentiated and sustainable customer experience is through leadership and coaching towards a defined, clearly articulated and measured aim.

Organisational development to enhance customer service Many organisations seem to focus on process to the point that frontline employees are always busy with tasks that take their efforts away from giving a memorable level of service. Similarly, the managers of those organisations find themselves focusing on managing those tasks rather than leading and coaching their teams to deliver memorable customer service. An external focus rather than an internal focus can deliver remarkable results.

Defining and shaping organisational culture What did your organisation set out to be for its customers at its inception? Usually, in a start-up business, high quality personal customer service is a given or the business will fail. However, as organisations grow they often lose touch with their roots and process and cost management start to dominate the agenda. Culture and behaviour within an organisation can't be trained, but they can be shaped through an overt consciousness of what the organisation aims to achieve.

Selling through service and relationships So many organisations take a short term view to sales - maximise the sale today and don't think about tomorrow. However, taking a longer term view of a customer and focusing on their individual needs rather than the immediate needs of the organisation can, over time, build a degree of trust and loyalty that will transcend any level of economic uncertainty.

Managing customer complaints to enhance reputation We've all heard the figures that a satisfied customer tells x number of people whereas a dissatisfied customer tells x+++ number of people. However, many dissatisfied

customers who experience a swift positive outcome are likely to become the strongest advocates of an organisation while providing some free consultancy as to how that organisation can become more customer focused.

Fun at work to improve commercial success and productivity Fun at work is often seen as frivolous and rarely finds itself on the strategic agenda. However, when appropriate, it can create an environment that reduces employee turnover and improves productivity. When employees are really happy at work it has a very positive effect on the quality of customer service too which in turn enhances turnover and profits.

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