

### WEEK ONE: SHOW OUR COMMITMENT JULY 18, 2011 SERVICE PRINCIPLES NEWSLETTER

This week our focus is on the Service Principle “Show Our Commitment”

We are all members of a team and we need to make sure that we are all working together towards the common goal of providing excellent customer service.



<b>1. I Proudly Represent MLS</b>  <b>I am an ambassador for the MLS by actively:</b>  -Displaying a positive attitude  -Talking enthusiastically about my Library System and its services  -Contributing to an inviting environment	<b>2. I Show Respect for Others</b>  <b>I treat everyone with respect by:</b>  -Being sincere & Kind  -Being considerate of individual differences  -Acknowledging contributions  -Practice acceptance of everyone	<b>3. I Practice Teamwork</b>  <b>I am a team player working with my MLS teams to achieve:</b>  -An inviting, innovative link to the world  -The goals of our Strategic Plan  -Customer satisfaction  -Personal accountability	<b>4. I Practice Safe Work Habits</b>  <b>I show I care about my own and others' safety by:</b>  -Working safely  -Responding appropriately in an emergency  -Reporting any unsafe condition	<b>5. I Show Respect for the Library and Community</b>  <b>I...</b>  -Use resources wisely  -Practice preventive maintenance  -Report problems and/or defects immediately  -am aware of resources for diverse cultural interests
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### DISCUSSION STARTERS:

#### Defining Teamwork

Teamwork is not about getting along well together, though that is part of working as a Team. There is a quotation adapted from Henry Ford that really pinpoints teamwork –

*Coming together is a beginning.*

*Working together is progress.*

*Achieving together is success.*

Take some time to discuss a challenge your department is facing. What can the team do to reach a positive solution?

## *Something to think about. . .*

### **R-E-S-P-E-C-T . . . Aretha Knew What She Was Talking About**

By Nektaria Hamister

Everybody jabbbers about their excellent customer service. Think, however, of all the bad experiences you have had during the past few months. They are probably too many to count. Serving customers with courtesy and dedication is not a difficult concept. So why do so few people seem to get it? It's a lack of respect—for themselves, their companies, and their customers. This lack of respect leads to laziness, poor language, an inability to see customer problems as opportunities, and a pointless concern with being right.

**Laziness.** We all know what it's like to be served by someone who sees customers as an annoying interruption to a coffee break or an unwanted illustration of the fact that they do not really know how to do their jobs. Lazy people and lazy organizations go through the motions of work, but actually spend more time and energy complaining about it than doing it. They do not understand that they would be much happier if they took pride in their work and made an effort to be productive. They lack respect for themselves.

**Poor language.** When was the last time you brought a legitimate complaint or issue to the attention of a customer service person, only to be told that your issue was not very important? Here's an example of one that occurred to me. A pet sitter that had cared for my dog while I was away for the weekend refused to return my key, even though she had been paid in full. I called up the people who had referred her. They started to worry, suspected something un-kosher, and advised me to change the locks as soon as possible.

I went straight to my apartment complex office. There was one staff member present (let's call her Paula) was with a new customer. I told her that I had an urgent issue; she told me to come back later. I excused myself to the new customer and explained my predicament. The first thing that Paula said was that my problem was not a "maintenance emergency."

Aside: Paula loves this phrase. She used it when my shower plug (in a one-shower apartment) broke in the shut position during 110 degree weather, leaving me with an impossible bathing situation. That was on a Wednesday. She thought that classifying my problem as a "non-maintenance emergency" was justification not to fix it until Monday.

Back to the present situation: I started getting angry when I heard Paula's answer, but I knew by then that she simply did not know how to speak. I told her that the problem was serious (and the new customer agreed). I asked when it would be fixed. Tomorrow morning, she replied. That was all I wanted in the first place! Paula, however, did not say this from the beginning because did not respect me as a customer. Speaking properly, however, is not only about respect for the customer. It is also proportionate to one's self-respect.

**Inability to View Customer Problems as Opportunities.** At The Hamister Group, we have seen that magic can happen when we respond positively and respectfully to customer needs, especially emotional needs. Let's continue with the Paula example. Since a person exhibiting suspicious behavior had the key to my apartment, you can guess that I was rather emotional. All Paula needed to do was eliminate that awful phrase "this is not a maintenance emergency" from her repertoire and replace it with. "Oh, that's terrible! The maintenance man has already left for today. If I can take care of it by tomorrow morning, would that be ok?" She would have become my hero *and* have made a positive impression on the new customer. This is about respecting your customer's position and yourself as a problem-solver and service hero.

**Pointless Concern with Being Right.** The customer is not always right. In fact, we all know that

the customer is often wrong. But he is still the customer. And, as Mark Hamister says, you won't have to worry about who is wrong and who is right if you don't have any customers.

My high school and college employer, a garden shop in Williamsville, NY, gave me a wonderful lesson in this philosophy: one day an older man came to the shop and complained that a plant we sold him had died. This plant was in its original container, which had a size and shape that we did not use. I politely told him that he had made a mistake: the plant had come from somewhere else. The customer became furious and insisted that he had bought it from us. I took the plant to one of the owners and explained the situation. He said told

me to replace it and not to mention again that the man had not bought his plant from us. "Why?," I asked. It was from another store. "It doesn't matter where he bought it. If he believes that he bought it here and we don't replace it, he'll tell people about his bad experience." This is about respect for your company and your paycheck—which you won't have if your company turns away all of its customers.

There are times when being right are important. We must be right when dealing with laws, brand standards, company liability, etc. Most customer concerns, however, are not related to such issues.

**RESPECT.** Respect yourself, your customer, your company, and your paycheck. Show that you care at every opportunity. This will make you refreshingly different from bad customer service representatives.

Stop worrying about getting your way because you are right: even if you are right, you can still lose. All customers, right or wrong, can take their business elsewhere.

Show respect when you speak. Word your responses to customers carefully when facing difficult situations. A good answer to a complaint about the way you do things would be: "That's a very good suggestion." Validate your customers' emotions, even though it is best not to validate an unjust complaint: "I understand how you must feel."

Ask positive questions that lead to issue resolution: "What can I do to resolve this for you?" "What works for you?" "What do you think would be a reasonable period of time to get this resolved?" Most people will not give absurd answers. They will appreciate your attention and may even become your most loyal customers . . . all because you showed them, yourself, and your company a small amount of respect.

And when you have a difficult a customer in front of you, just pretend he's Aretha (although you might want to replace "kisses" with "services"):



## DISCUSSION STARTERS:

### Accountability is the key to exemplary customer service

In their book, *Accountability: Freedom and Responsibility without Control*, authors Rob Lebow and Randy Spitzer take us on a journey of discovery as they look at a new way to manage our organizations and ourselves. Their fictional character, Kip (Stan Kiplinger) says this: "Accountability is the issue! If you can't find a way to get people to be accountable, you're going to find it hard to make anything else work, let alone your business."

How true it is. At the risk of oversimplification, I have recently been pondering the issue of accountability, and how the lack of it seems to be at the heart of so many of our societal woes. In fact, some time ago, I read an interesting study that had been done in a California prison. When inmates were asked why they were in prison, there were many replies, such as:

I had a lousy attorney  
My get away car broke down  
My girlfriend ratted on me

Only a small minority (less than 10%) said they were in prison because they committed a crime!

So what is accountability? It is owning the consequences of our own decisions and actions. As customer service providers, it is the ability to account for our actions, and the willingness to demonstrate an attitude of caring toward our customers. It is the desire to respond to a request for help, or information in a timely manner. It is follow-up, pure and simple. It is a privilege to serve those with whom we interact, whether they are internal or external customers.

Accountability is not: Smoke and mirrors, empty promises, lame excuses, or the blame game.

Perhaps you've heard the story of the late quality guru, W. Edwards Deming, as he was meeting with a group of managers several years ago. One of the managers was lamenting about all of the "dead wood" he had in his organization. Deming looked at him, and calmly said, "Did you hire 'em that way, or did you kill 'em?" That is an interesting question.

Very few people start a new job not wanting to do their very best. But somewhere along the way, they often become cynical, disinterested, or simply complacent. When that happens, service suffers.

So how do we create a culture where people are accountable, and where exemplary customer service is the norm, not the exception?

## DISCUSSION STARTERS:

### Are you a real customer service professional?

1. Knowledge: Real professionals understand what other people want and need, what their own products and services can provide, where and how to get assistance, what's changing in their own organization and in the world of those they serve.

How good is your product, process and service knowledge? What can you do to improve?

2. Skills: Real professionals are proficient and skilful. They know how to do the right thing at the right time and in the right way. How good are your hard skills (technical competence) and soft skills (getting things done with people)? What new techniques will you study to improve?

3. Attitude: Real professionals are more than technically bright. Their enthusiasm is motivating and infectious. Customers feel assured by their confidence. Colleagues are touched by their compassion. How powerful is your attitude?

4. Effort: Real professionals have a strong will and ambition to succeed. They may be humble, but they are not shy about striving for spectacular performance. These winners go the extra mile and help others along the way. They push themselves and drive their teams to greater achievement. And customers reinforce their effort with well-earned praise. How strong is your effort? Want to increase it? Then set big, bold goals and high, stretching targets.

5. Relationships: The greatest professionals help other people move into the future. They make suggestions to solve your immediate problem and then give guidance to take you further. They anticipate your questions and prepare answers in advance. They think about your success and give advice that's packed with value. Want to strengthen your relationships with others? Learn to listen more closely for real concerns. Make offers without being asked. Network with others in your company, your industry, your town. Lend a hand whenever you can and be willing to receive one.