Customers Don’t Care About Customer Service

I get a lot of work done over a cup of coffee!! In one of these productive sessions last week, a small business CEO expressed a frustration of how to keep up with good customer service and then she asked “do they really care?” My answer. No.

OK, I do need to explain. The subtitle to this column should be “...at least, not the way you think they do”. I got a good reminder of this fact when I read a blog several weeks ago by Micah Solomon, who writes regularly on customer service, customer experience and customer trends.

Micah contributed a great business operational truth. He said “Customers don’t care about customer service. At least, not exactly. What they care about is something a little different: They care about the feelings, the results, the impressions, the memories that come from being well served, poorly served, or that beige area in the middle.”

Do you catch the reality here? This is a distinction that’s worth wrapping your mind around. When you undertake a customer service initiative its odds of success are related closely to your understanding of this principle.

Solomon suggested that a successful customer service effort or initiative shouldn’t rely solely on goals like “Provide world-class customer service while becoming unfailingly customer-centric companywide.” (Have you seen these? 😅)

Instead it also depends on goals like: “Make our customers feel better.” Or, (I love this) he shares “If that sounds too unpoetic to you, how about borrowing this beautiful aspiration of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company: “To serve even the unexpressed needs and wishes of our guests.”

My take away from this is that the difference here is that you’re now “keeping your eye on the why.” And the “why” in question is the goal of adding value for customers, value that can run the gamut from hard-nosed results (“I got my invoices within 30 minutes of requesting them”) to idiosyncratically tender feelings (“I really felt cared for by that agent”).

Solomon closed his blog with “If you keep your eye on the why, you’ll avoid the trap that so many organizations fall into, the trap of incorrectly framing this issue, of thinking that their customer actually gives a hootenanny about their company’s org chart, its staffing levels, its internal code of conduct. Which, of course, they don’t.”
I suggest that you may think about monitoring your customer’s experience with your company. Why? Because customer experience is more important than ever. Businesses that aren't focused on delivering on the promise of good customer service are seeing their customers leave in droves.

In fact, 66% consumers will switch companies if they have a bad experience, according to a report by Accenture. Because today's consumers are so fickle and because they have access to a variety of options, your business's customer experience needs to be on point—always!

I have a perfect example. Because I like to have coffee, one of my favorite places in my city is the two franchise restaurants that feature “pie” among a whole menu of options. There is one toward the south end one toward the north end. I no longer will go to the one on the north side. Why? Because the last three times I went there (yes, I gave them two more chances), I left feeling frustrated, disappointed and mad because it took 45 minutes to get my coffee, another 20 minutes to get what I had ordered (and when it came it was wrong). I won’t go back. The unfortunate thing is that this poor manager thinks that the reason the people aren’t coming back is because there is some road construction. He didn’t listen to what customers were experiencing. He didn’t see that his waitress was wearing an apron with a logo from her last job. He didn’t understand why people were leaving with a frown.

So how do you know whether your customers' experiences are positive? Some businesses conduct annual or semi-annual customer satisfaction surveys to take the pulse of their business and its performance. Yet, considering how quickly information flows nowadays, the data from those surveys is often stale by the time it has been collected and analyzed. Which isn't to say you should stop conducting customer satisfaction surveys, but they shouldn't be the only arrow in your customer experience quiver. In my next column, I will have some suggestions about monitoring your customer experience.

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