

Stop telling customers that you care

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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One of the most important things a company can do these days, is to resist the temptation to put one of those silly corporate mission statements or customer care plaques on the wall of their reception area.

Cute little saying like: "Make Your First Impression Last," and "We Care for Our Customers," which, ironically, are usually strategically misplaced behind inefficient receptionists with whom one has to get within a hair's breadth of physical abuse in order to get some attention.

They are also found in companies where the powers that be have given up the unequal battle of trying to instil a modicum of service ethic into the ranks and, as some sort of last-gasp motivational fling, plastered the walls with what can best be described as commercial contaminants with the hope that they will infect visitors to the point where their brains will be dulled into believing that every man jack member of staff would rather die than not care for customers or make rattling good first impressions.

And, incredibly enough, trying to perpetuate these totally transparent principles is becoming more and more a part of business strategy despite the fact that consumers are becoming less and less tolerant of words and more and more and more and more insistent on action.

Now that's not to say that all those hackneyed phrases don't have merit. Indeed they have immeasurable merit. But only if those who claim to embrace them have opened their minds sufficiently to really absorb the ethos. A process that does not automatically happen as a result of a once-in-a-blue-moon pep talk from the head honcho and a wall full of corporate graffiti.

Today's consumers, customers and clients have largely progressed well beyond that stage of development which is based on the notion of one human being genuinely believing that another is superior simply because the former is trying to flog something to the latter.

That heart-rending sales pitch of the slick and shmarmy salesman of the past just isn't cracking it any more. Modern consumers don't need super sales talk to convince them to buy something they don't really need or something that is going to bring them instant wealth or, for that matter, something they could really use. Nowadays consumers get into all sorts of trouble all by themselves.

But, when they do have to indulge in any form of customer/supplier intercourse they tend to become more and more outspoken: "Don't feed me that nonsense about me being king and you caring for me. You don't care for me, you frankly don't give a hoot about me, so cut the smooth talk and just give me quality and service."

Not to mention: "and a very, very fast quick fix if things go wrong."

It is sad that concepts like: "The Customer is King" and "We Care" and "You are important to us" have been done to death. Because they are all extremely valid concepts. Concepts that work. Sound business strategy.

It's just that consumers simply don't believe them anymore. Not only that, but those who should be practicing these principles, don't believe them anymore.

And the reason is because most companies have seen all these things as quick fixes.

Fixes that have been introduced into the corporate structure with massive fanfare, with managers "taking ownership" right left and centre, with CEOs committing themselves to the cause; rah, rah, rah, wave the flag, the customer is king, let's hear it for service and all that!

And a few weeks later another great plan lies discarded among heaps of failed towards excellence projects, half-hearted total quality management programmes and a host of other great ideas that for brief moments flew high, wide and handsome only to crash hopelessly in a sea of apathy because they were not incessantly driven from the top.

Customer service, upon which all companies will survive or flounder in the future, is not something one can teach.

Days, weeks and even months of browbeating lectures, threats and rewards cannot inculcate into anyone the real meaning, the real benefits of service.

It is only by experiencing and suffering fairly seriously from lack of service that one can possibly understand what it is all about. And once that understanding is there, accountability and ownership need to be applied to make sure it stays there.

But how does one know whether someone is genuinely service orientated or just simply going through the motions?

I have a simple system. It is all in the eyes. Next time a cabin attendant in an aircraft or a shop assistant in a chain store or a motor car salesman or bank manager says, "How can I help you?" - look them in the eyes. The eyes, after all, have always had it all.

Dead eyes are a dead giveaway. And the best you can do is just to walk away.

All businesses need to concentrate on customer service to survive, let alone prosper. But it is vital that the example is set by the boss and that every single person in the company, from the lowliest office cleaner to the highest-paid employee all become obsessed with delivering genuine service. That they treat each customer, client and supplier as well as each other as though they were favourite brothers or sisters.

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