



Customer Management Conference



The Love Zone, Discretionary Effort, Upside Down Structures, Brain reserves and Funky Business were all talked about during the 5 Star Customer Management Conference held at the EICC in November last year.

Behind all this terminology however lay a more practical message that was often not explicitly made by the speakers but non-the less was repeatedly alluded to during the day. And what was this key message? The fundamental fact that all businesses rely on people, their employees, to actually deliver customer



service. Being able to manage the actions and attitudes of employees is a crucial element of successful business.

The retail environment is possibly one of the most obvious industries where a company's reliance on its employees is greatest. It is no surprise therefore that two of the best (yet different) examples of how a business can manage its employees came from this sector.

Empowerment

Part of Timpson's success is that they start right at the beginning to employ the best people in the first place. They are clear in identifying the sort of attributes a store manager should have and are extremely focused in ensuring only people with these skills are ever employed.

Empowerment is then the key to success; structures have been put in place to enable the shop manager to run a store as if it was their own business. Authority is given to the manger to immediately sort out problems through making up to £500 is available to settle a complaint. Published price lists are a guide only - next time you need your shoes repaired

or a key cut, haggle - the store manager can even do the inconceivable and give things away!

By way of keeping a commercial focus managers also benefit directly in a profit related bonus scheme. This scheme however is not paid out annually or quarterly but every week! This frequency of payment continually reinforces the fact that there is a direct and immediate link between performance and reward.

Ensuring you employ the right people, empowering them to provide customer satisfaction and giving authority to those on the ground has paid real dividends for Timpsons. It has played a significant part in quadrupling turnover during the last 10 years, a result many of us would be envious of.

Build behaviour into how we do business

While Richer Sounds do many of the positive techniques just described, Derek Williams focused on another technique organisations can use to ensure employees deliver high levels of customer satisfaction. During a visit to Richer Sounds Derek found that quality and customer service are proceduralised into behaviour.

Every single working day starts the same, a simple paper checklist containing all the minimum standards the store should have right before opening is ticked off by the manager. Key messages

are continually reinforced in a practical way through posters, placed away from customer contact, but in unavoidable view of employees. Using these techniques behaviour is not eroded by apathy but is continually reinforced and maintained.

There is nothing particularly new in either of these approaches, both empowerment and employee procedures were also advocated by Pete Snowdon from Yorkshire Building Society as part of their customer fairness scheme. There is a trend in business however to constantly invent new ways of working in an attempt be at the cutting edge of management thinking.

The real point of this piece is that successful businesses keep focused on basics, and one of these basics is that customer satisfaction starts at home with employees. Employ the right people then give them a chance through providing the support, skills, rewards and the authority to make decisions, so they can deliver for you.

You can have all the Funky Business you like but until you get the basics right you'll never reach the Love Zone. **S**



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