

James Walker Group is a dynamic global manufacturing organisation that supplies a vast range of products and services to virtually every sector of industry. State-of-the-art skills in materials technology are central to the Group's success with the main business areas encompassing High Performance fluid sealing products and Railway products and services. James Walker Group comprises a worldwide family of companies with 11 production, engineering, distribution and customer support sites in the UK, and a further 40 spread across Continental Europe, Australia, New Zealand, SE Asia, South Africa and the USA.

James Walker Group has been working with The Leadership Factor for over three years talking to customers around the world. With a consistent focus on improving customer satisfaction 'In Customers' Shoes' is an exercise used inside the business to highlight the importance of the customer experience.

In Customers' Shoes

This training exercise that was successfully implemented by James Walker is all about getting employees to see the customer experience through the customers' eyes.

They need to appreciate how suppliers and customers often view things in different ways. As a supplier you are likely to be thinking about your business in terms of products, processes and systems ('the lens of the organisation'). However, your customer will be thinking about the results or benefits they are hoping to receive ('the lens of the customer'). With targets and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) increasingly playing key roles in the daily work ritual it can be easy to lose sight of what really matters to customers, and how the way they are treated and the service they receive can have a massive effect on how they feel and consequently whether they stay, repurchase and recommend you.

In Customers' Shoes is an exercise that reminds staff exactly how it feels to be at the receiving end of good, bad or indifferent customer service and then relates this back to their everyday role. A key component of the exercise is staff sharing real experiences. Following this they discuss what they have learned and work together to formulate plans for improving their own customers' experience. The exercise will work well with groups of any size although 9-12 participants (giving 3 teams of 3-4 people for the tasks) is ideal. A full day should be allowed to do it justice.

According to John Bowers, Product Stream Manager at James Walker,



the concept of In Customers' Shoes is to create values for the team that they can live and work with. We know as customers what is good service but when the roles are turned & we're the supplier, do we deliver the same values we would expect as a customer?

Introduction

For this training exercise you need a facilitator, flip charts, post-it notes, pre-prepared task lists (see right) plus projector and PowerPoint slides for the Customer Journey. The facilitator will start by asking staff to consider:

We all know what good customer service is when we are not at work – how can we apply these standards at work?



Setting tasks

Split staff into teams. Each team will be asked to complete three tasks (see right). The tasks can be varied depending on whether staff are able to leave the building/have access to nearby shops. Prepare an envelope for each team. Each envelope will contain three tasks and a £10 note. Ahead of the task you will need to approach the restaurant/hotel owner to enlist their help. Ask them to provide a different experience/attitude for each team, e.g. extremely helpful, 'it's not my job' and extremely unhelpful.

Alternative approach

If staff are unable to leave the building or there is no access to nearby shops, you may opt for a telephone/role play approach. Again, you may need to enlist outside help from another organisation. It is possible that one of your suppliers or customers (e.g. business travel, stationery providers etc.) might be willing to help. This could be particularly useful for a B2B focussed exercise.

De-brief

Once the teams have returned, group their experiences into 3 levels of customer service and record on flip chart. Spend time discussing experiences and feelings.

POOR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Newsagent Hotel Chemist	Florist	Hotel Pet shop Butcher

Follow this up with key learning points from the exercise. For example, customers do not always remember 'good' service, often only poor and excellent service is memorable.

Customer Journey (Optional)

At this stage, you will find it useful to talk staff through 'customer journey' and 'moments of truth' theory and then, together, create the journey of your own customers. The journey can be as detailed as required. The illustration right is a general example only showing a few steps. At

Team 1

Task 1

9.10am – Go to *Chosen Hotel* and ask for *Primed Contact*

Your task here is to reserve the restaurant for a large family gathering you are having in November. Your key requirements are:

Date – Saturday 14th November

45-50 guests

Wheelchair access may be required for one of the group

Task 2

Go to a butcher of your choice and make a purchase of 'your best sausages', spending no more than £5.

You will later be explaining to the group why these sausages were sold to you as the 'best'.

Task 3

Buy a jar of Nescafe coffee

Team 2

Task 1

Buy a postcard up to the value of £1 – it needs to show local scenery

Task 2

Hotel exercise as Team 1

Task 3

Go to a florist (not a supermarket) of your choice and with the remaining money buy some flowers. They must meet the following criteria – bright, not strongly scented, more than one type of flower.

Team 3

Task 1

Buy a packet of Ibuprofen up to the value of £3

Task 2

Go to a pet shop and purchase a remedy for your dog that is suffering from overheating. You need to find out how to administer the remedy.

Task 3

Hotel exercise as Team 1.

Example tasks:

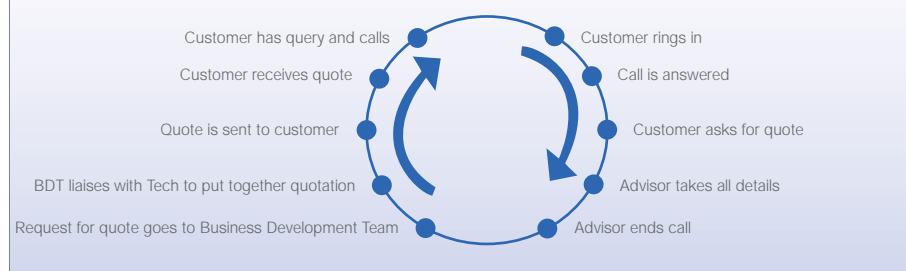
- (1) Make a telephone call to a Chosen Travel Agent to book your holiday of a lifetime. You have an unlimited budget but still expect to get value for money from the agent.
- (2) Make a telephone call to your Printer. Enquire about printing headed paper. You need 24 boxes, printed and delivered in 48 hours to two different addresses. You need a written quotation.

the other end of the scale Walt Disney identified 1200 'moments of truth' in their customer journey.

Prepare a flipchart with two columns headed Givens and Differentiators, or Moments of Misery (Tragics) and Moments of Magic (Magics). As staff iden-

tify 'moments of truth' for your customers, write each one on a Post-It note. There may be up to 20 Post-It notes. Ask the group to go through the Post-It notes and place them under the relevant Tragics or Magics heading. There is no right or wrong but staff must discuss the reasons for their positioning.

Jan Carlzon (former President of Scandinavian Airlines) defined a moment of truth: "Anytime a customer comes into contact with any aspect of a business, however remote, is an opportunity to form an impression." Every business, by its actions, determines whether a moment of truth is a positive (moment of magic) or negative experience (moment of misery) for the customer. Each step in the journey below is a moment of truth.





Moving forward

You now need to use all this to develop real plans to improve customer service. Explore in detail the strengths and weaknesses of your interactions with customers at each stage of the customer journey, or for each PFI (priority for improvement) identified by your customer satisfaction survey. Discuss the current customer experience and what the ideal experience would be like. Then consider what action needs to be taken within the business to ensure that customers' experience is always the ideal. This can be approached by the group as a whole or conducted as a team/department activity. The discussion needs to focus on specific actions that can be taken to address the issues that have been identified. For example:

	Positive	Negative	What action?
Customer asks for quote	Staff are friendly	Staff don't have enough understanding to ask the right questions (so quote can be wrong) Staff can't tell customer when they will receive final quote (as they don't know)	Improve staff training (product knowledge). Involve BDT and Tech Dept. Advisors to work more closely with BDT to understand how long quote takes. Or consider direct line to BDT team for customers who are asking for a quote Online quotation facility?

Values

Finally the group must decide on the values that fit into their own work before preparing feedback for Managers on company-wide service values and how they can be promoted within the business.

Values developed by the Custom Mouldings Team at James Walker were:

- To be **polite, friendly** and treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.
- To **listen** and pay attention.
- Take **ownership** until the problem has been resolved.
- Work as a **team**.
- Keep internal and external customers **informed**.
- Delight** the customer by going the extra mile.

According to Product Stream Manager, John Bowers:



Since the values are represented in the words of the team, you get real buy-in into improving the levels of Customer Satisfaction. This methodology allows the team the opportunity to challenge each other if they believe that one of their colleagues is not promoting the chosen values.



Rachel Allen
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Client Manager

Rachel is Client Manager at The Leadership Factor and co-author of 'Customer Satisfaction: the customer experience through the customer's eyes'. As well as James Walker, she works with organisations such as the Forensic Science Service, the YHA, Littlewoods Shop Direct and Northern Gas Networks. Her wine of choice is a Chablis Grand Cru and if you want to send her a case you can organise it via

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Heather is Customer Satisfaction Facilitator at James Walker and Co Ltd. Amongst many other things she is responsible for using the PFIs generated by the company's customer satisfaction surveys to improve the customer experience. Heather's favourite wine is South African First Cape: Limited Release Merlot 2007. Nothing vague about that one! She can be contacted at

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