

The “No Excuses” List

By T. Scott Gross

Now that you have heard the truth there are no excuses for delivering service that stinks. There is...

- *No excuse* not to know your customer personally and professionally.

You must get to know your customers personally and understand what is important to them as human beings, understand and respect their culture and the cultural influences they bring to the transaction. And you must know your customers professionally and understand what problems they are trying to solve and the context in which they must solve them.

Thinking Point:

What should you know about your customers and how could you gather and use that information?

Thinking Point:

How could you assure your customers that their personal information will be kept private?

And what could you do to encourage them to tell you more?

- *No excuse* for making the customer wait.

Learn to work on customer time and have a presence on the Internet 24/7. And when you must make the customer wait, make the wait interesting, informative, and worth it.

Thinking Point:

How are you making your customers wait and how could you make waiting more of an experience and less hassle?

- *No excuse* to say no to a customer—and no excuse not to charge for saying yes.

Delegate the authority to turn down a customer’s request to the highest level and then, never use it! Provide service level options that are flexible and tailored to

the needs of the customer rather than the system.

Thinking Point:

What service level options could you provide?

- *No excuse* not to cooperate with your competition.

Make serving the customer more important than the sale, and don’t be embarrassed to make money doing it!

Thinking Point:

How could you make money cooperating with your competition?

- *No excuse* not to personalize and customize just in time.

It’s no surprise that “I want it my way” is a hot trend in an age of “I want it now.” The chains that are nibbling away at Mickey D are those that build burgers according to the customer’s plan. But burgers aren’t the only product that you can have your way. Hop on the Internet and watch your new automobile as it is custom-built at the factory. And while you are clicking away you can order blue jeans and fragrances, candy and furniture made just the way you want them delivered to your door.

As reported in the December 23, 2002 issue of *Time*, “In the age of TiVo and iPod, consumers increasingly expect to custom-tailor their lives, and retailers are eager to comply.”

Thinking Point:

How could you personalize your customer service and customize products?

- *No excuse* not to hire and train customer-focused Service Naturals.

Good people have to work somewhere, so there is no reason why they can’t work for you!

Thinking Point:

Have you identified what a Service Natural might look like in your business? Are you profiling to insure that your hiring is on target? Are you committed to hiring slowly and firing fast?

- *No excuse* to treat all customers equally.

Know who are your most profitable customers. Tailor your service offer based on the numbers and be prepared to fire customers who aren’t profitable. Focus on maintaining the loyalty of your best customers. Customers don’t want to be treated equally. They want to be treated individually and, while they love choice, they don’t love having to choose. (And that is another reason there is no excuse not to know your customer!)

Thinking Point:

If you knew who were your most profitable customers what would you do differently?

- *No excuse* not to exercise your “MicroBrand.”

In the future, brands will become more important but not in the way we see them today in the mass markets. Mass marketing is losing steam. In the future, local brands that we call MicroBrands, will matter most. We first noticed the trend while walking down the street in Estes Park, Colorado. It was one of those throwaway days when the highest and best use of an hour is to do absolutely nothing, and that’s exactly what we were doing when we noticed the sign. Not the big yellow sign that announced yet another Subway sandwich shop. Nope, we were arrested by the dingy yellow banner that had been draped beneath its plastic cousin, “Now open under old management.”

Someone understood that the brand of the old manager was stronger than the brand of the last manager and stronger still than the otherwise powerful and international brand of Subway. It seemed to say, "Come in...to see me!"

MicroBrands are little brands that sit on top of bigger brands and are often more powerful than the big brands that sit on. And a MicroBrand is any brand intended to dominate a micro market, which can be as small as a one-on-one relationship. In the near future marketing will become more targeted; targeted against markets too small to be efficiently won other than through relationships. And relationships are at the heart of customer service.

Thinking Point:

What MicroBrands are at work in your organization?

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