

When Employees Don't Want to Play

By T. Scott Gross

We were all set to work with our client and his team on the concept of Positively Outrageous Service. It was to be a big deal, the kind of razzle-dazzle introduction that would have the whole place buzzing with ideas for delivering Positively Outrageous Service and dreaming great dreams about innovative marketing events.

I made the big mistake of suggesting that, before I would arrive, the employees should be surveyed to see if they had a few good ideas for making customers say, Wow! At least, it seemed like a good idea.

When my client asked the employees for ideas for wowing the customer, the response was a bit less than overwhelming. It turned out that the employees felt that simple, expected actions as smiling and offering the customer a friendly greeting should be enough to pass as Positively Outrageous Service.

Sorry, folks, but our surveys show that consistently good service is no longer enough to earn a place in the hearts of your customers. Today, consistently good service doesn't win any prizes. In fact, consistently good service is the minimum ticket to get into the game.

When we randomly surveyed 600 Americans and asked how the service at full service retailers compared with that of the big box discounters, we were shocked. Sixty-two percent of our survey group said that full service retailers provide service that is either very good or excellent. That's not bad unless you look at the score for the big box discounters. They managed to con 64 percent of consumers into

rating their service as either very good or excellent.

What does that mean? It means that the horror stories you've heard about service at the big box discount stores are only part of the picture. Your friends have been telling you the bad things just to make you feel better. Well, those same friends told us an entirely different story. What you want to know is what to do about it.

First, employees are not psychic. What seems elementary, obvious, or plain old common sense isn't when it comes to serving customers, at least not to employees. This means that if you really expect good service, even Positively Outrageous Service, you've got to tell your employees what it is.

Second, (and get this because it's important), you can't decree great service. You have to demonstrate it and reward it. Demonstrating great service is nothing more than simple leadership. Take everything you've heard about learning theory and forget it except for this: People learn by doing. The things that people are likely to do are things that they see in their environment and can imitate. That makes you, the boss and their leader, the only true training program. Whatever you do, the team will imitate.

If you run to the office when the floor gets busy, why should you be surprised when employees retreat to the stockroom rather than deal with a bunch of messy customers? On the other hand, if you make it a habit to seek out customers and go the extra mile to serve them well, guess what will

happen darned-near automatically?

A friend of mine, a bank president, decided to move his desk into the open area immediately inside the bank's front door so that if you are in the bank, you are in his office. Got any idea how the employees in this bank treat customers? Would you consider moving your office onto the sales floor? Would you do it? Go ahead. I dare you!

Beyond a great example there must be real training, the kind of how-to training that provides employees with concrete suggestions for dealing with customers and specific techniques for selling and providing service. If your employees could figure this out for themselves, you'd be working for them!

Finally, there has to be a reward system designed to reinforce great customer service. For many employees, the fact that they are able to help someone solve a problem is sufficient reward. It's too bad that in the real world, this won't be true for every employee. Most humans can't avoid evaluating their efforts in terms of what's in it for them.

In the old days, if you did a good job, you got to keep it. These aren't the good, old days. Today, suggesting that good work earns you the right to stay doesn't cut it. This is especially true for the better employees, who can get self-satisfaction and monetary compensation to go along with it someplace else.

It's too easy to say, "You can't get good help any more." You *can* get good help. You can find honest, dependable, motivated employees. Once you find the raw talent, it's up to you to turn that

talent into superstars with
examples, training, and rewards.

Simple? Yes.

Easy? No.

But then, if it were easy,
everybody would be in the
business!