



JUST CUSTOMER SERVICE NO LONGER...

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“A customer service representative supports customers by providing helpful information, answering questions, and responding to complaints. They're the front line of support for clients and customers and they help ensure that customers are satisfied with products, services, and features.”

CHANGES EVERYTHING

A few years back, I was at a GM car dealer in Atlanta to purchase two new vehicles- a truck and a car. I was expecting the full attention and service from the salespeople on the sales floor, thinking, after all, how many customers come in every day to buy two vehicles at the same time...

It was a complete disappointment. I remember leaving the dealership in dismay without looking at any of the vehicles.

The dealer called us afterwards a few times asking for another chance...

With the benefit of the doubt, we decided to give them the chance...we made an appointment and revisited the dealer. We looked for the sales manager who had promised to take care of us personally. When he was called, he came to the waiting area, although we had an appointment at a specific time, what he said was, “I won't be able to talk to you right now. You need to wait”. Just like that...no apologies...no “I am sorry but...”

That was the end of that dealer for me...In the meantime, one of my colleagues at work had told me that if I really needed a good service and a great new car, I needed to visit the Saturn dealership which was only a couple of miles away. I thought Saturn was also GM- so what would be any different? My colleague assured me that this one was different. And so we went....

It was the best purchasing experience I have ever had.

I loved my car...I loved the service...everything was perfect. I was not alone... Actually late in 1990's, there was a big group of Saturn lovers emerging in the US.

I wish the story ended well... But it did not... Saturn closed its business some years later... According to the analysts, it had to do with the GM administration that although the Saturn project was a big change in doing business for GM, its management still continued with the same traditional ways that actually had pushed a lot of people into buying Japanese cars in the past.

In other words, GM's traditional administrative culture was not in compliance with what Saturn offered as value.

When I thought about this incident, I came to realize that it was not just the service that appealed to me but it was the whole experience of meeting the salesperson, testing the car, after purchase ceremony and then came the actual driving of the car for years...They would check on me monthly to see if I was still enjoying the car and would ask for feedback and suggestions...What really had impressed me was the whole experience in doing business with the Saturn dealer! They were years ahead of GM!

In today's extremely competitive environment, customer service, by itself, no longer exists. Whether it is B2C or B2B, the customer is creating the perception of the seller based on the total experience of the purchase. In B2C, this is more difficult because how retailers handle the customer's purchase of your product is beyond their control. However, in B2B that is not the case!

In B2B, two businesses exchange transactions with each other. Both sides want to make money with profit and both sides have their own customers to keep happy.

The whole transaction, all the way from business development to the final sales is 100% under our control. We can define the customer experience to assure it is well understood within all the departments of the company- especially the ones that touch the customer at one point throughout the journey.

Maybe that is why B2B business is more complicated. There are too many players, too many dependents and too many different expectations.

In B2B, nobody just buys anything for the sake of it.

There is always another customer (our customers' customers) at the other end.

This is one of the crucial reasons businesses have to be proactive. Businesses have to build the knowledge to be able to let the customer see the future benefits.

Businesses need to act like consulting partners where mutual benefit is gained.

In re-defining the customer experience and applying it to the implementation by various departments that touch the customer journey, the company itself has to reinvent itself with a different mind-set. Taking a traditional approach where “we have done it before and we will continue doing it the same way” is no longer viable.

What is this mind-set?

Accepting the change willingly and with an open mind is a great starting point followed by knowledge accumulation- not just about the products but about the market, the trends, the value proposals to assure B2B customers see not only the product value but also see the value of doing business with the company.

The customer experience involves the total activity from the beginning to the end.



Gülderen Somar

Research! Analyze! Share!

Always communicate in customers' language!

The communication should not be about how great we are but it should be about how greatly we benefit our customers!

This approach is one of the most important activities in today's very competitive environment to avoid the “commodity trap” which leads to price competition - a dead-end street.

It is possible to have a sustainable business and avoid the "Saturn's", the Kodak's fate...