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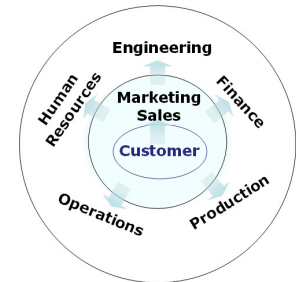
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Growing a Customer Care Culture by Hiring Right

by Lynn Hunsaker

When customer experience requirements guide the hiring process, a company is practicing outside-in thinking. In fact, most companies that are consistently listed as top customer service providers have very deliberate methods for choosing the right people who will properly represent the company's brand promise.

At Southwest Airlines, a culture committee was established to make sure their vision and values are not compromised as the company grows and as it adjusts to economic forces. Vice president of marketing and sales, David Ridley explained: "We are a customer service business that just happens to fly airplanes. Our leaders have a genuine love for people," he said. "We don't want you in leadership if you don't. If it's all about you we don't want you -- there are no BS [Big Shot] leaders at Southwest. We tell our leaders that of all the decisions they will make, the most important ones will be hiring decisions. We tell them to make it tough to become part of the team," because the traits Southwest looks for are inherent in personalities and cannot be achieved through training." He characterizes ideal employees as warrior spirits with a servant's heart and a fun-loving attitude: "People who are other-oriented, not self-important, who put others first -- these are the people who will deliver service like Southwest Airlines. We take our customers and our competition seriously -- not ourselves."



At Nordstrom, new-hires are selected on their capabilities to anticipate and meet people's needs; management emphasizes smooth leadership transitions and provides employees with absolute clarity about the market being served and the unique selling proposition that brings in customers; employees are given responsibility for their own area of the business, and encouraged to approach their work area with an entrepreneurial spirit, to try new ways of selling and new approaches to customer service all with the goal of doing right by the customer. Mistakes become opportunities to learn rather than efforts to hide, and the single rule of "Use good judgment in all situations" gives employees a tremendous sense that they are trusted to do right all the time.



At Ritz-Carlton, culture is managed very seriously. A key concept is "You get the problem, you own it", which results in more prompt and efficient resolution of customer needs. Vice president of Leadership, Diana Oreck, explains: "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen. And the entire company culture is based around this: If we are treated with respect and dignity and there is pride and joy in the workplace, the automatic human reaction is that we will turn around and make magic for the customers. We want to make sure that you the employee

feel special. Our intent is to select for life. We engage in our culture each and every day.” At the beginning of each shift, all employees attend a mandatory 15-minute meeting to review one of the company’s 20 Basics of Customer Service.

Trust is the foundation of an enduring customer-centric culture, and trust is developed through respect for individuals’ inherent worth; trust is demonstrated by empowering individuals to do the right thing – giving them the skills, resources, authority and accountability to be make it easier and nicer for customers to get and use solutions.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.