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Empower Employees to Deliver Great Customer Experiences

by Lynn Hunsaker

Customer experience is the result of combined efforts from a vast array of people, from top management to front-line employees, to channel partners. When management creates and reinforces techniques to inspire outside-in thinking and behaviors, employees are likely to "live" the brand promise -- this is called internal branding.



At Publix super markets in the southeastern US, its 140,000 employees are called associates and own company stock. Many employees site their ownership of the company as part of the reason for its success. Founder George Jenkins said "If you want people to respect you and your company, you must show respect for them. We all have one thing in common – a servant's heart." Jenkins believes that people have a natural desire to help, and if given the resources to do so will provide extraordinary service.



At Cabela's, a sporting goods retailer, vice chairman James Cabela spends a few hours each day reading customer comments, and hand-delivering the ones he wants resolved. All front-line workers can borrow any product for up to 2 months as long as they write a product review on the company intranet site; this helps employees empathize with product issues customers might have.



At EMC, *everyone* is encouraged to think of customers, and be responsible for resolving customer issues. EMC altered its compensation structure, tying a quarterly bonus to a 10% increase in system availability from quarter to quarter. It's the % of time that the systems are working properly for customers. EMC judges everyone on this one to spur anyone in the customer-service chain to address problems as soon as they happen. Since almost every employee has a role in keeping systems available, it made sense to measure that metric as part of its Total Customer Experience (TCE) program. The first few quarters, the company met its goals. The fourth saw only a 9.7 percent increase, which EMC didn't round up, meaning that nobody got paid. From that moment onward, the few people who weren't taking TCE seriously started doing so. EMC found that a culture shift toward one of customer loyalty had bottom-line impact and long-term customers.



At Dell, a campaign was launched to communicate its vision of a customer-centric culture. The message was: "Be the reason customers choose Dell. Be the reason customers come back to Dell." Senior vice president of customer service Dick Hunter said: "Employees are really intelligent people who understand the inner workings of our company. I met with many tech people in one-on-one and roundtable meetings, and I asked them, 'You know what you do

very well. If you were in my shoes, what would you do to fix this situation and triage our customer experience?’ And you know, I got a laundry list of things to do. I asked my staff to list all the inconsistent and essentially dumb things we do. I then created a personal folder in my Outlook with the title, ‘Dumb Things’. I categorized this list into 3-4 major areas that needed work. Instead of doing a bazillion surveys, we simply listen to the verbatim comments from the [post-contact] customer satisfaction surveys, and this has led staff and program changes that otherwise we wouldn’t have captured by other methods.”



Altera hired empathy coaches to help its people see things from their customers’ point of view. Empathy can be fostered via 360-degree reviews, personality tests, and organizing teams around diverse temperaments so they can help predict customer needs.

People can do great things if management sets them up for success!

- Like Publix, let employees feel your deep respect.
- Like Cabela's, help employees empathize with customers.
- Like EMC, incentivize teams to make big strides in satisfaction drivers.
- Like Dell, eliminate dumb things by listening more intently.
- Like Altera, improve employees' self-awareness, for better customer service.

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